

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Charles Vincent Court, Jr.-2016**

Interview Date: 07/06/2016

Interviewer: Bill Duggan

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: FBC Precinct 2 Commissioner Prestage's office,  
Missouri City, Texas

9 Pages



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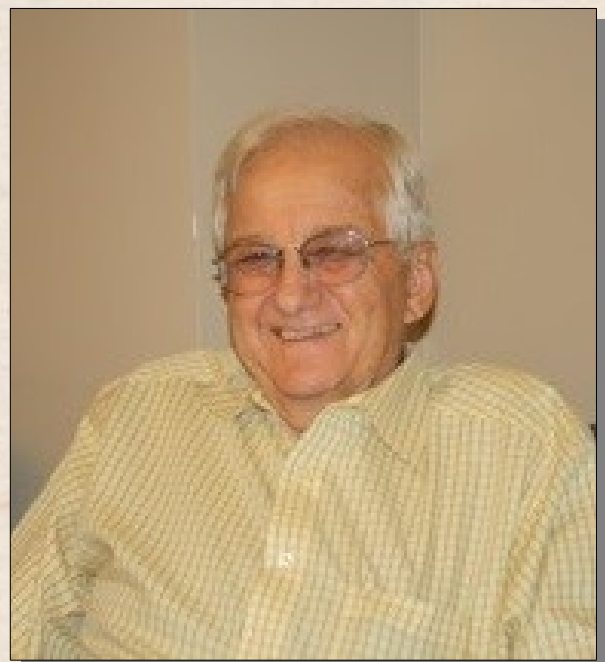
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*Transcript*

DUGGAN: Will you begin by your telling us your name and date of birth?

COURT: Charles V. Court, Jr. I was born June 23, 1934.

DUGGAN: How long has your family lived in Fort Bend County?

COURT: My father came here in 1919, and he opened a general store along with his brother and brother-in-law. He did that until 1945, when he opened a hardware store in Stafford, which is still running. The owners were my father, then my brother and I, and now my son owns it.

My father was a merchant and ran the general store. He was a butcher, and he ran the grocery store. At one time he had a pool hall. He also had cattle, and he drove the school bus for the school. That's what it took to make a living for four children. We lost our oldest sister when she was thirteen years old. He took it very hard, naturally. He worked hard and raised a good family.

DUGGAN: What about your mother?

COURT: My mom was a housewife. She took care of the family, and she was there for my father. My dad used to go to Houston to pick up supplies for the general store which included groceries. My mom was the daughter of the man who owned the grocery supply store, and he met her there. They got married on November 12, 1923.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Charles Court, Jr.'s earlier interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=41633>

DUGGAN: Today we are talking about the Missouri City school system. When did you attend the Missouri City schools?

COURT: I went there from 1st through 12th grade. When I first started school there, in 1940, they only had 11 grades. In 1941, they put in the 12th grade. Those of us who were in the 1st grade, with good passing scores, went from 1st to 3rd grade. What they did was mix 2nd grade and 3rd grade work and brought us along for several years until we got caught up. I think that took until what you call middle school. We called it elementary in those days. In the 6th grade, they kept me back because I was so young. I started when I was 6 years old and skipped a grade, so I would have gotten out at age 16. They decided it would be better to hold me back.

Math was the only class I had a problem with. It turned out that when I graduated from high school, that was my best subject! I dwelt on trying to get that straightened out, and I knew I was going to go into retail. I knew that math was going to be critical for me.

DUGGAN: Do you remember your first day of school?

COURT: I got on the bus and went to school, probably with a few tears in my eyes, leaving home for the first time. I knew some of the kids because Stafford was real small, so I felt relatively comfortable after a day or two.

DUGGAN: Did you ride the school bus?

COURT: Yes, I did, both ways. When the weather was extremely bad, my dad was driving the school bus, and he would come by the house and pick us up for school. (laughing) He would let us stay at home so we weren't standing out in the rain. He would come by and toot the horn, and we'd go get on the bus.

DUGGAN: How was the school laid out? Were all 12 grades together?

COURT: It was all on the same piece of land, which is where the gym is. There was one big building on the left-hand side that looked like it was two-story, but it wasn't. It was just tall. In there were the first 5 grades. Then there was another, like a wing or breezeway to get to where the middle school and high school were. They were both in the same building. The gym was at the far right. The far left was the primary school (the first 5 grades) and in the middle, the building that is still there, is where all the other classes were, the science lab and things like that.

DUGGAN: In what month did school start?

COURT: School started in September. You had to be six before school started in order to start 1st grade. I think there was a cut-off day of mid-August, and if you weren't six at that time, you had to wait until the next year to start.

DUGGAN: I understand from other conversations that the school was not air conditioned. Those first few weeks were pretty hot, I bet.

COURT: Yes, they were. I don't think it mattered that much to the kids, but it probably mattered a lot to the teachers. Kids could handle the heat. They were used to being outside. I didn't think the heat had a real bearing on anything.

DUGGAN: What about in the winter time? Was it pretty cold?

COURT: No, it wasn't too cold. We'd wear a jacket. I think we had some heat source.

DUGGAN: Did the school have a cafeteria?

COURT: As I remember, as you approach the gymnasium and go up the steps, you come into a small area, like a lobby. On the left-hand side of that, there were three women that I remember. They were the kitchen crew, and that's where they cooked the food. We ate in that little area there. You had to eat in shifts. The school wasn't that big. My graduating class had 26 people, so it wasn't huge. As the school grew, they built a cafeteria behind the middle school (we called it the elementary). There are two wings on the back of that school that go to the outside. From the main entrance, if you turn left, you'll go down a little ways, and there will be a hallway to the right. If you turned right, there would be a hallway to the left. So, it made a U. Out the back of the left wing, was a portable building, and that's where the cafeteria was. They had an awning over the top of it, built from the roof. It went straight down and had posts supporting it. That's where we stood in line to get into the cafeteria. That's when they stopped serving meals in the gym area. I don't remember what year that was.

DUGGAN: Do you remember your classmates or friends names?

COURT: Yes, I do. I feel like all 25 of my classmates were my friends. I wouldn't want anything to ever be published that said 'so-and-so' was my friend, and the other one wasn't. A lot of my friends are no longer here. More than half of my class has passed away, and one just recently.

DUGGAN: What about teachers? Do you remember any of them?

COURT: Yes, I wrote down some of their names so I wouldn't forget any of them. First of all, Leon Scarcella, the mayor's father, was the band director. The band hall was in the basement of the gym, so it was underneath the stage floor. T. V. Abercrombie was the shop teacher; Lawrence Elkins was a coach; Francis King was our history teacher; Inez Prater was a teacher; Fount Wade was the football and basketball coach.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Lawrence Newton Elkins interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=41919> and Lee Elkins LeGrand's interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=42511>. Lee was Coach Elkins sister and Lawrence was his son.

Minelma Tyng taught typing. She taught me how to type, and that really has enhanced my life. It got me a good job in the Army. It keeps me very impressed with the computers today because I can type well. Nannette Robinson was the 1st grade teacher. She probably taught everybody I knew. I think she started teaching in the late 1920s or early 1930s, and when I graduated from high school, she was still teaching first grade.

I remember we had a school reunion that encompassed the day the school started until that year. I don't remember the year it was. I happened to be the emcee at that event. It was held at the VFW Hall in Stafford. After some announcements, I asked the crowd for all of those who were taught 1st grade by Nannette Robinson to stand. Over 75% of the people in that room stood up. Some people married people who were not from here, and some people came to Missouri City after 1st grade. Mrs. Scarcella, Leon's wife, taught second grade. There was a principal named Mrs. Yates. Mr. Telge taught math, and he and I never did get along. He wanted me to take trigonometry and I wanted to take general math because I knew I needed to keep pumping my math skills, and trigonometry was not going to help me with numbers. I was stubborn, and he wouldn't let me take the general math class, so I wouldn't take his course either. I was as hard headed as he was.

There were lots of other teachers, but I didn't come in contact with them.

DUGGAN: What about principals?

COURT: The principal was E. A. Jones, and the first superintendent was Louis Rodgers. For many years, he had a secretary named Rose Scanlin who is still living in this area. Rodgers swung a great paddle. He kept everybody in line, and we respected him. You did not do things out of line because that board was there. If you got a whipping from him, you went out in the hall. You came out of his office, went 25 steps, and were in the middle of the hall that went both ways and then out the side. He would make you stand in the middle of the hall, grab your ankles, and he would hit you with a paddle. You could be sitting in the room, and when you heard him hit somebody, you felt it yourself! He didn't have to do it but once or twice a year! They knew he meant business. That's what is wrong with the schools today. They took the paddle away from the superintendent and the principal.

DUGGAN: What do you remember about the academics?

COURT: The academics were good, I thought. If you were there to learn, you could learn. If you were there just to pass the time of day, you could get by. I wasn't the best student, but I did well.

I still have lunch with one of my friends who was valedictorian, Davis Tucker. I think Margie Plant was the salutatorian. The academics were there for you – not like they are now – but you could prepare for college or get a good job. I was happy with my education.

DUGGAN: Were dances and other entertainment held in the gym?

COURT: Yes. I don't recall any dances other than the Christmas dance and the proms being held there. But remember, there were 26 in my class, and there were maybe 50 in the freshman class. The school was growing a lot. My sister graduated in 1949, I believe, and in '49 is when they switched from 6-man to 11-man football. I didn't play football, but I did play basketball all four years in the gym. I wasn't the best player, but I got to play a lot, and I was coached by Lawrence Elkins. E. A. Jones also did some coaching. We had an A-team with 8 regulars. My first couple of years, I played on the B-team, but there were so few people involved. When the A-team played, they would keep a couple of us from the B-squad to stay on and play in the next game. We had some good teams in those years, and went to the play-offs. We would get to play because we would be so far ahead. The coach was kind and tried to keep the score down and would let some of us younger ones play. When I was a junior and senior, I played on the A-team.

DUGGAN: You said the graduation ceremony was there.

COURT: The graduation was done in the gym, and the prom was done in the gym. Halloween carnivals were in the gym, and that was done by the juniors, to raise money for their senior trip. The school allowed us to use a bus and one of their bus drivers. We went all the way to Carlsbad, New Mexico, to see Carlsbad Caverns. I don't think all 26 of us went. The money we raised was shared equally with the kids as far as cost. Then, we would have to come up with whatever other money it took to fund the trip. We probably raised 75% of what it cost to go on that trip.

DUGGAN: Was your graduation ceremony like they are now, with the parents all sitting in the stands? What was that ceremony like?



*Charles Court, Jr., middle, with his parents, Beulah and Charles Court, Sr., at his high school graduation in 1952.*

COURT: No, there were chairs on the floor, and the ceremony was on the stage. You walked across the stage to get your diploma. I don't remember there being a limit to how many friends could come because I don't think that was a problem. And if it was, the overflow could sit in the stands.

DUGGAN: You said you played basketball. Were you in the band?

COURT: I was in the band for a short period of time. I used to work after school for my dad. One day he needed me to come work, and Mr. Scarcella wasn't happy with that. He came down to the store and jumped all over me about not being there.

My trombone was in the office and I brought it out to him and said, "You can take this with you. I'm not coming back." It wasn't that important to me, and I wasn't really that interested in music. The band was small and they were soliciting people to play. But my feeling was that I needed to help my father.

DUGGAN: What do you remember about the gym itself, the floor, the air flow, etc.?

COURT: We had the elevated seats, and behind those seats was about a 5-foot walkway. They had jalousie-type windows that fold in half. The gym was open for us to play in, even during the summer months. Mr. O. R. White was the custodian of the school, and he lived across the street from the school. There was a bus barn back there as well. They had about five buses when I was young. He was on the grounds almost all the time. The football field was right there, too. Mr. Scanlin was one of the bus drivers. They had regular bus drivers and part time guys when they needed them.

As for the layout of the gym, when you first go in, up the steps, that front area was the cafeteria at one time. Then you went up about 3 more steps to go to another level, which was the gym floor. There were three doors to the gym, and they stayed closed when we were playing because otherwise the basketball would come out into that area. There was the stage at one end, and we had a basketball goal in front of the stage. It was cranked up and out of the way when we had performances on the stage.

DUGGAN: So that's where the band performed?

COURT: Yes, they had concerts there and that's where graduation ceremonies and our high school plays took place. We referred to it as the senior play, because the seniors put on a play every year. Then you have the visitor and home team stands for seating on each side.

When you first walk into the gym playing floor, if you take a left, you go toward the high school. If you go down those steps, that basement on that side was the girls dressing room with the exception of the very first room, which was the journalism room, where we did the school newspaper. I worked on the school newspaper and that was part of what we did.

Then, on the boys' side, there was a vacant room in the same position as the journalism room on the girls' side. It was kind of a visitors' dressing room, in a way. After that, there was a gang shower – we showered in a group. There was no privacy whatsoever. Then our dressing room was in the middle, and then you had the equipment room and the coach's office. I can still remember the smell. (laughter) I don't know about the girls' dressing room, but I understand they had private shower stalls.

DUGGAN: Was your wife a student there, too?

COURT: No, my wife graduated from Incarnate Word in Houston. Her father was a representative of a shoe company. He would go to one city, open up a store, stay there about three years, and get it running. They would then transfer him to another city. She lived in Memphis, in Paducah, Cincinnati, and Dallas twice. I met her in Houston in 1958, during Christmas week. There was a party, and I met her there. We married in November of the same year. Didn't know her a year! We've been together 56 years. I'm a long-term guy! 56 years being married, 61 years in the hardware business, and 82 years in the church.

DUGGAN: What memories do you have of the consolidation of the Missouri City school into Fort Bend ISD?

COURT: Stafford and Sugar Land is what I remember. I'm not real clear on this, but when Stafford and Missouri City came together, it became Fort Bend Independent. That was in 1959, Dulles High School. My baby sister, who is 73, was in the first year of Dulles High School. I asked her to refresh my memory on this because I graduated in 1952. Now Stafford is not part of that system any more. I remember a bit more about that because I was here, and that was part of what we were doing at that time.

I remember Sugar Land being our greatest rival in sports. Kenneth Hall – you might remember that name. I play poker with his brother-in-law to this day. Bobby Williams was the star from Missouri City. That was a battle every year, personal grudges and high school boys fighting. It was truly a rivalry. I think Kenneth Hall is still in the record books.



EDITOR'S NOTE: See Kenneth Hall's interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=40325>

Kenneth Hall was an open field runner. But he was 200 pounds and fast. If he got around past that end, he was gone. He made many long touchdowns. Bobby Williams was like a snake. He could go through the center of that line and come out. You'd think everybody was on the ground, and here he would come, still going. Bobby died about five years ago. He played for Rice and became a professional scout for the Miami Dolphins. I think he worked for more than one team.

I used to see him at the store; not often because he wasn't in town that much. He married Carolyn McCord who was a good friend of mine in high school. I remember one of the guys from Sugar Land, Pillar Miller.

Most of the kids were involved in sports, band and pep squad, things like that. The school was our source of learning and entertainment. Naturally, being small, we knew almost everyone. Our senior trip to Carlsbad Caverns took about ten days.

One other thing I want to talk about was Rice University. For some reason, their gymnasium was not available, and they played some of their college basketball games in our gym. Our gym had the largest playing court allowed in the state. There was a minimum and a maximum size of court. Sugar Land had the minimum, and we had the maximum. When Sugar Land would come to play us, their tongues would be hanging out by the end of the ball game. We would hardly break a sweat playing in their gym (laughing).

DUGGAN: I didn't realize they came in different sizes.

COURT: Oh, yes. I don't know when that changed. I'm sure that now all gyms are the same. But it didn't used to be the case.

Interview ends