

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Doretha Brown**

Interview Date: 01/21/2012

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Location: Grace Community Center

12 Pages



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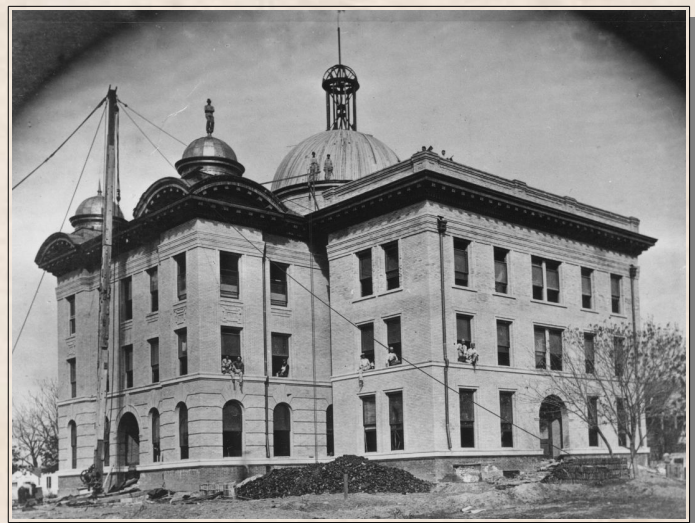
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Transcript

GOODSILL: Let's start with your full name.

BROWN: Doretha Brown

GOODSILL: Where you were born.

BROWN: The property where Renee Lamb lives in Foster, Texas.

GOODSILL: When were you born?

BROWN: December 29, 1931.

GOODSILL: Were you born in a hospital, in a home, or in a doctor's office?

BROWN: Home. At that time there was nobody but midwives.

GOODSILL: How many children in your family?

BROWN: There was just two of us at home, but I had some other brothers and sisters out there by my daddy—just two my brother and I—they call him Perk, his name is Clemetee Perkins.

GOODSILL: That's a great name.

BROWN: That's my brother.

GOODSILL: Is he older?

BROWN: I'm the oldest. I am eighty.

GOODSILL: You're the oldest. YOU'RE EIGHTY!

BROWN: Yes ma'am. I turned eighty on the 29th of December 2011.

GOODSILL: You don't look eighty—that's for sure. How did your family get to Fort Bend County.

BROWN: We were here in Fort Bend County. I was born here, so that is all I know. Did you know the Rosenbush family? Okay, that's Renee Lamb's family. I was born on their property in the area where she lives. Years later, when my grandmother's stepmother passed away, she left the property where Perky is now, so we moved there.

GOODSILL: Where is that?

BROWN: Just up the hill going towards Fulshear.

GOODSILL: So that is where you live now?

BROWN: No, I live in Rosenberg.

GOODSILL: You live in Rosenberg, but you still have that property?

BROWN: NO, I don't want no parts of the country. I had to work too hard.

GOODSILL: What was your life like as a young woman?

BROWN: When I was very young, my grandfather went blind. We were farming and guess who was the plow hand – I was! Planting cotton, corn, cutting wood...

GOODSILL: How old were you?

BROWN: Very young, about fourteen. I think I did it for three years.

GOODSILL: Then what happened?

BROWN: Then my grandmother and them started getting those old folk pension checks. No longer did I have to do that. I planted gardens and things, but not the farming with the mules.

GOODSILL: So you didn't have to work so hard.

BROWN: I didn't have to do farming any more.

GOODSILL: Was anyone farming the land at that time?

BROWN: Nobody but me. My grandmother was very stout. She couldn't work in the field. The only thing she could do was bring our meal to us in the field. My grandfather went totally blind. He is the one that should have been doing it, but he couldn't see, so I had to do it. My brother Perk was too little. When I'd go in the woods, I carried him one time with me. All my family called me baby sister. They'd say, "Baby sister you hear that noise? It is getting closer. What is it?" I'd say, "You are going to stay at the house, I can't be murdered with you." (laughs)

GOODSILL: He was so nervous that he couldn't relax?

BROWN: I kept on doing what I was doing, but he would nerve me up. you know? [laughing] But anyway, I did that for three years. Then that year they got their old folks pension checks. The property, you know for cotton and corn and stuff, we sold the cotton. We would make money, but not a lot because there it wasn't a lot of money.

Then I went up with my grandmother one day to the Rosenbush's store. I saw Mrs. Halley, Mr. Walter's wife. I didn't know she was mean like she was. She came in, and you know I am just a kid. I walked up to the meat counter. My grandmother was getting the meat, and I touched the counter. Oh Lord, she hollered at me, "Take your hand off of there!" I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't know I couldn't touch nothing." My grandmother didn't say anything to her. She just said, "Move back Baby Sister, she don't want you touching nothing." The lady went on back around the counter and sat. Momma got her groceries and we left. I told my grandmother, "I'm not going back to the store with you ever again." And I didn't!

GOODSILL: Tell me some of the names of your people, your mother and father, grandparents.

BROWN: My mother's name was Lula Watkins, but at that time I didn't know where she was. My grandparents raised me. Susie Watkins and Isaiah Watkins raised me.

GOODSILL: Did he go by the nickname of Zeke?

BROWN: Yes, and my uncle, too.

GOODSILL: What was your uncle's name?

BROWN: His name was Isaiah, also.

GOODSILL: But he went by Zeke as well?

BROWN: They called him Zeke. That was my uncle. He is the one that named me Doretha.

GOODSILL: What's the history of Doretha?

BROWN: I don't know. That's all I know that he named me Doretha. Everybody tried to find out where he got the name from, but he would tell nobody nothing.

GOODSILL: [laughs] You have already told us a couple of stories that you know about the Foster Community from way back. Any other stories come to mind from growing up in this area?

BROWN: I went to the school where we have the meetings at now.

GOODSILL: Tell us about that. Start with the name of the school.

BROWN: Jones Creek School, I went to school there. I am trying to remember the first grade that I did there. At first, it was at my church school out across there by where Spring Green Church is. I don't remember really what grade I was in when I went there. I went to Spring Green first, which is out there by our church on Settegast Road. You know when you turn off of 90, you turn right, we always called it Settegast Road.

A lot of mornings, well see where Junior's home is, you know where Junior Harris home is? Oh, well, I wish you knew. It is right on the corner there. I knew where his whole family lives. His daddy hung himself in the barn. I don't know why, but he found him like that.

Perk and I lived up the hill, after my grandparents moved, at the house that her daddy had left with her stepmother. But she never bothered or nothing about that house. Say if you get sick and you die then let me know if you want me to have it, and she did. When she got sick, she sent somebody down to my grandmother and told her when I die you are going in the house. That is why we moved off the Rosenbush farm. I was a farmhand there. My grandfather was blind; he couldn't do nothing. I planted everything.

GOODSILL: Well, I'm thinking about the years. You said you were about 12? So that was about 1943?

I heard Jeb Stewart say you were a real good cook — pecan pie? Was your grandmother a good cook?

BROWN: Oh, she could cook, but when I got to where I could cook, I ran over.

GOODSILL: You ran over, you mean you took over all the cooking?

BROWN: I cooked. [laughs] I cooked 23 years out at Texas Instruments.

GOODSILL: You did!

BROWN: Yes ma'am.

BROWN: The manager that I had over me, he was sorry. Oh, Lord, I hated for him to be sorry. He wouldn't do NOTHING to help you! I was cashier, too.

GOODSILL: Was this at the employee cafeteria at Texas Instruments?

BROWN: Yes, ma'am. I had a VERY good boss at one time. He was good. I talk to him and his wife right now. They live up in Massachusetts. I call them and they call me. Then he writes me a letter about what they did all year. He is kind of sick right now, but he's okay. I talked to them during the holidays.

BROWN: But the other man made me mad and that's the reason I quit. There was an elderly man that was the dishwasher. I didn't know the man was riding a bicycle from Sugar Land to Stafford. I was coming in early that morning, and I saw that man on that bicycle. I said that looks like the dishwasher. Sure enough when he got there, I asked him, "You live in Sugar Land somewhere?" "Yes ma'am, I live with my sister." But he was a slow guy. I said, "You know what, this afternoon when you get ready to go home, I am going to put your bicycle in my car, I'm going to take you home, and I am going to bring you every morning." He said, "Oh, yes, ma'am, I'll let my sister know that." He was living with a sister. Sure enough, that's what I did.

We got to work at the same time every morning. I waited for him to get through cleaning the kitchen and would help him get through and come on home. I couldn't see him riding a bicycle every day in the rain and cold! I told his sister I am going to take your brother and bring him back home. She said she appreciated it. Then he got sick. I hated, oh, I hated when that man got sick. His sister was so worried about him dying, but he did. I hated it, but guess who cleaned the kitchen up every day? Sure did. I cleaned it EVERY DAY hoping that he would come back. But she called down at the job and told my boss that he had passed.

GOODSILL: That's a nice story about how you helped him.

BROWN: Then I told the manager there, "Get you somebody to work in the dish room because I am through." And I meant that. He was a sorry manager. He didn't want to do nothing but play on the computer and didn't know what the hell he was doing. You hear me! If one of the managers would have walked in and asked him what was he doing, he couldn't have told him. The other girl that was making our payroll checks out and I quit the same day. [laughs] He got fired.

GOODSILL: I guess he did.

BROWN: I belong to the club down there now, and I saw one of the managers that I was working under. He came one day there, and I haven't seen him since. When he saw me he said, "Doretha, you're here!" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Good to see you." He was one of my managers. But he hasn't been back since. I would like to see him again. He came, made a speech, and he left. I hope some of the other times he would come back, but I haven't seen him. I have a good time when we go to the meetings.

GOODSILL: Let's go back a little bit because you were going to tell some stories about growing up in the school. The Jones Creek School?

BROWN: Yeah, but I wasn't there at first. I was at another school, Spring Green, right there by my church. Junior Hardy would see us walking, and he would go to school in Rosenberg. He would pick us up and take us to school and then come on back to Rosenberg. He did that because we were walking. That's about five miles. It was a good ways.

GOODSILL: So what age were you when you started at Jones Creek?

BROWN: At Jones Creek, let's see I don't really know, but when I started at Jones Creek they had Cold Springs School.

GOODSILL: Was is after twelve? Was it after you had been working in the fields?

BROWN: Yeah, I was working in the field because I started early. I think I was twelve years old when I started in the field. When I had to work I didn't go to school. I couldn't go.

GOODSILL: So by the time you got to Jones Creek what was it like?

BROWN: It was good! It was always good.

GOODSILL: How many children were there?

BROWN: It wasn't a lot of us, but you know it was enough for the teachers.

GOODSILL: Was it a mixed group or was it black children?

BROWN: All black children. It wasn't any mixed schools then. Yeah, all black children.

GOODSILL: Good teachers?

BROWN: Oh, good teachers, yeah. One teacher came way from upstate somewhere, but she couldn't stay down here. The climate made her sick. She had to leave. They got another one.

GOODSILL: Black teachers as well.

BROWN: They were black. Yeah, she was a real nice teacher, I liked her so much.

GOODSILL: There was one teacher for all the children?

BROWN: Oh, yes, ma'am. It wasn't a lot of us.

GOODSILL: The teacher taught you everything. Were you good in school?

BROWN: Oh, yeah, I was doing my best.

GOODSILL: How long did you stay in school?

BROWN: I went through Barrett Bat School. I'm trying to think, it was either the seventh or eighth grade, and then I moved to Spring Green. But I don't know what happened at that school, but I was a girl, you know, I couldn't be asking questions why.

GOODSILL: The girls had to know their place?

BROWN: We just had to do just what the teacher said and nothing else. At that time, we didn't have lunch at school. We had to take our own lunch to school. After that first teacher got sick and left, her name was Artie May. She married a guy named Nathaniel Ball, but it didn't last. She left. She separated from him. She didn't stay long. I'm trying to think of the last teacher I had, but I can't think of her name. She was real nice.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you did for recreation, fun, and relaxation. Was there any time for that?

BROWN: I didn't like to play ball, and I didn't like to do anything outside.

GOODSILL: You had enough time outside.

BROWN: I worked outside. It was still working outside. [laughs]

GOODSILL: Did you like to read, or did you like to play games?

BROWN: My studying was fine! There wasn't no game playing.

GOODSILL: Life was pretty serious?

BROWN: It was.

GOODSILL: So then what happened, did you grow up and get married?

BROWN: No. I didn't get married until a MANY year away.

GOODSILL: Did you have children?

BROWN: I have three children.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us their names?

BROWN: My oldest child is Sandra Guyton. She married a guy and they have three kids, three boys. Those are my grandsons. Anything they think they want, they are going to call me, grandma (laughs). Grandma, that's what everybody calls me. My eyes are running water. My youngest grandson he's, I can't think how old baby boy is, but both of them have good jobs. The older one got him a job where he works. They go to work together and they make good money. But the oldest grandson lives out of state. He's got three children, three girls.

GOODSILL: Tell us about your other children, their names.

BROWN: My other daughter's name is Mattie Marie.

GOODSILL: And your third child?

BROWN: My boy, he has one son.

GOODSILL: What's your son's name?

BROWN: Henry Lee Spates. They all were Spates. My husband, Henry Spates, and I were married 23 years. My son is named after him. He had everything to work with, and he had other guys working with him. You know what I'm saying?

All the tractors and the trucks and things were in the back. If he needed anything when he was in Houston, he would just call and tell me to bring it to him, and I'd take it to him, tractor, truck, whatever! I could drive them all. But what was real funny was when somebody would look up in a car and see I was a woman (laughs). They'd go, I guess this woman can't drive. But I could drive just as good as anyone else. (laughs) I had a lot of fun that way.

GOODSILL: Well, let me see. When you look back, what major changes have you seen in this area in your lifetime?

BROWN: Oh, a whole lot. Like all these houses and things on the side of the road. It wasn't none of this.

GOODSILL: What was it before?

BROWN: Just open property. They'd start to building, I would walk to church, past that store there, go down that road. If they were having some kind of church there, all of us children from up the hill there would walk all the way down here to go to church. If there was a quartet singing we were going! Then we would go back home at night because nobody would bother us then. We had no problems.

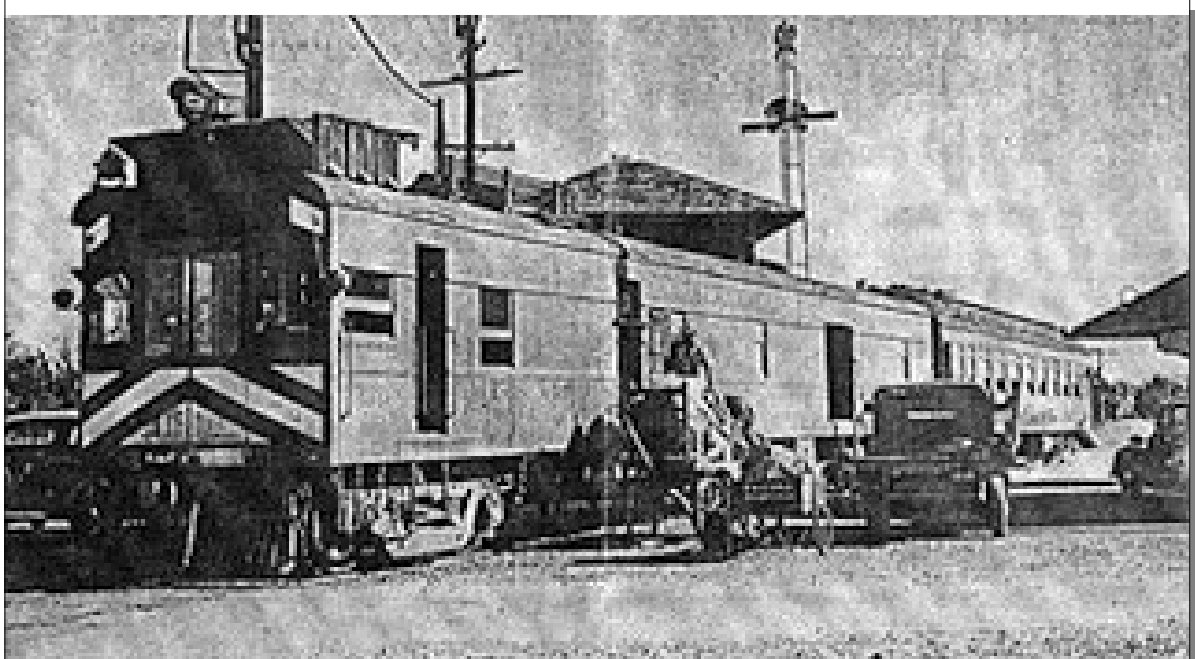
GOODSILL: You had a sense of safety?

BROWN: Right, right, and we'd turn right there by Schutches store. That's the name of the store, Schutches. I haven't seen the guy lately. He's usually at bingo or out there cooking. I say, "You know you can't cook" (laughs). We used to tease each other. He was older than me, but he was friendly. Their daddy and their mother died.

GOODSILL: If you are eighty, you've seen changes in the number of cars. You've seen changes in telephone and technology, water and electricity.

BROWN: Everything, everything, everything. Well, after I left my grandmother and them, after they started getting their pension, I started to go into Houston, going to beauty school. One day I went to my grandmother's. My brother and I were out in the garden digging up sweet potatoes. When we were digging sweet potatoes, my brother couldn't do nothing, he couldn't pack a sweet potato much bigger than that (laughs). I had to carry them and put them where we put them.

Then I saw somebody walking down the highway. My mother had come home. I hadn't seen my mother in so many years. She had gotten off that train up there by Fulshear, called the Dinky. I stood up and I saw that lady walking. I went to the porch and I asked my grandmother, "You see that somebody walking; is that our momma?" She says, "Yeah that's her, go meet her." So, we went to meet her. She had her shoes in her hand and NOTHING ELSE, walking barefooted.



Shown is a train similar to the Dinky Train that ran between Houston and Victoria. The Dinky Train was a local freight train that ran on the S&P track along Highway 90A and included one or two passenger cars. It made 4 regular stops at the Sugar Land depot and flag stops. One was at noontime for a train that made flag stops west of Rosenberg.

-- photo courtesy of the <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com>

Now the train she got off of, it was way up in the evening when it let her off. Cows were on both sides of the fence, inside, but she wasn't going to walk with those cows there (chuckles). She sat out on the side of the road and waited 'til they went home and she walked on because it was a 3-hour walk from where the train let her off. She got there. She was tired. I asked her, "Aren't your feet sore?" She said, "They hurt but they are not sore." She went in the house with my grandmother and grandfather. We still did our work.

GOODSILL: What was it like when you greeted her? Was it friendly, happy?

BROWN: Oh, yeah, I was glad to see her. I hadn't seen her because my grandparents raised us. I hadn't seen her since I was little bitty.

GOODSILL: How long did she stay?

BROWN: I think she stayed two days. She went into Houston and got with her sister, and they decided to build a house in Rosenberg.

GOODSILL: Did you ever end up being close to your mother?

BROWN: Oh, yeah. I stayed with her for a little while after she built the home. In fact, the home is mine now. It's mine; I got it rented to one of my cousins.

GOODSILL: You are a very independent woman.

BROWN: Yes, ma'am. I stay busy all the time!

GOODSILL: I wanted to mention that. In the early years you lived on FM 723 on the Rosenbush property.

BROWN: That's right, I did. Right in there where Renee lived, but it was closer up this way. She lived a little farther back

GOODSILL: Thank you for your interview.

Interview ends