

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Duane Bentley Peck & Carole E. Bentley**

Interview Date: 11/16/2013

Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: Fulshear United Methodist Church, Fulshear, Texas 11 Pages



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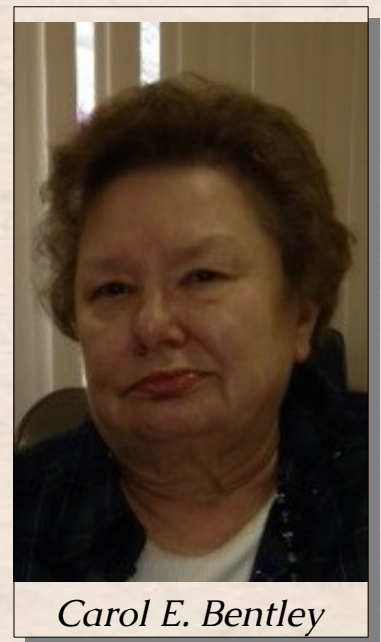
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Duane Bentley Peck



Carol E. Bentley

Transcript

TERRELL: Please tell me your whole name.

PECK: Duane Bentley Peck. I was born in Houston, TX, on November 24, 1943.

TERRELL: What brought your family to this area of Fort Bend County?

PECK: I guess you might say they were pioneers. They came here with the Old Three Hundred. We are related to Randolph Foster, who was a scout for Stephen F. Austin.

TERRELL: What were your father's parents names and what kind of work did they do?

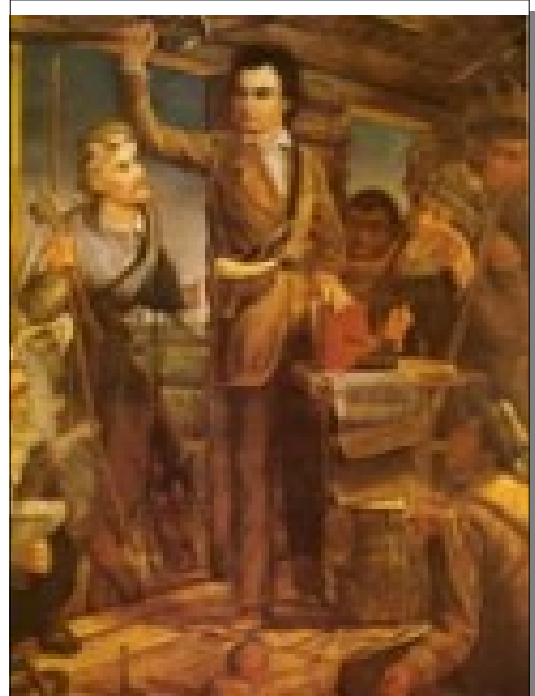
PECK: Minnie Briscoe Bentley and Charles Bentley. My grandmother was a stay-at-home mother, and my grandfather worked for the railroad.

TERRELL: What about your parents? Did they live in the Fulshear area?

PECK: Yes. We've all lived here all our lives. My dad was a farmer and rancher, and a Justice of the Peace for 30-something years. My mother was a stay-at-home mother.

TERRELL: What were their names?

PECK: Carl Briscoe Bentley and Stella Kennelly Bentley. We lived in a town with one grocery store, which was called Briscoe, Harris and Huggins. We had somewhat of a partnership in that with some of our relatives. They bought everything they needed. When they had to do other shopping, they would go to Houston. I loved hearing my dad tell stories about when they would hitch up the horses to the wagons and make a whole two-day trip into Houston.



Henry McArdle's 1875 painting, "The Settlement of Austin's Colony" depicts Randolph Foster standing behind Stephen Austin.



*Duane's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Briscoe Bentley
--courtesy LCISD/Bentley*

The whole family would go. Mother would shop during the day for what they needed. It had to be a two-day trip because they couldn't get back before dark. The women and children would sleep in the wagon, and the men and boys would sleep underneath the wagon. Then they would come back home the next day. In later years, they rode the train.

TERRELL: So you didn't have to have a vegetable garden.

PECK: That's right. Other people who had a garden shared with their neighbors. It was a very small town. So even if you didn't have your own garden, you had fresh vegetables from your neighbors.

TERRELL: What about quilting and sewing?

PECK: I did not do that, nor did my mother. My grandmother did – my mother's mother. She was originally from Needville. She and my grandfather moved out here at the end of their lives. They owned a grocery store here, down on the corner where the candy shop is right now, at the corner of Main and First Street. My grandfather was a butcher, so he had a nice butcher shop and a few groceries. Mr. Ed Dozier became interested in buying the store, and he did. That's where Dozier's Grocery Store and BBQ place was originally. He outgrew that because it was a very small place.

TERRELL: What was the name of that store?

PECK: Kennelly's Grocery. For a time, there was Walker and Meier (I think it was called that) in the early times. The Walkers were a very prominent family out here. Gilbert Meier married Faffy Walker. I'm not sure, but I think her given name was Frances. Everybody called her Faffy. She was a schoolteacher for a while. They had that store for years and years. Then my grandpa came out and opened his store so there were two, I guess! I don't remember when Walker and Meier closed – I was really little.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Gilbert Helmuth "Herc" Meier's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=48688>. He Gilbert and Frances Meier were his parents.

TERRELL: When you were young, did you have playmates or was it mainly cousins?

PECK: It was mainly my brother. ALL the kids in town played together, no matter how young or old you were because that's all we had to do. We didn't have a choice of playing just with our age group. But that was good for us. We'd let the little kids play and they had fun, and we had fun.

TERRELL: Where did you live?

PECK: I lived on the corner of First and Wilson. Our property goes to the main road as well, but our house was situated back, so our house was closer to Wilson. We owned nine of the twelve lots in that block. We had 200 acres down Bowser Road, and maybe 100 acres across the street on Bowser. We owned land where Bella Vista is now, and Foster. We owned the lot where the Sweet Tooth is now.

I think mom and daddy owned a small lot up on Front Street, as you come in on FM 1093, which would be about where the cleaners or the parking lot is now. I wish we still had some of the property!

TERRELL: How many children did your grandparents have?

PECK: My father had 2 siblings: Dolphine, who was the oldest, and Duane, the youngest whom I'm named after. They called Duane 'Pancho'. Dolphine and Poncho were killed in a car wreck when they were grown, in the fog at night, on Christmas Eve. His father died of polio when my dad was only eight years old. When my dad was fifteen, his mother remarried Phillip Owen Gibson. So, he was the only grandpa that I knew.

TERRELL: What about your maternal grandparents?

PECK: They had six daughters. My grandmother was raised around Snake Creek in Needville. They (John Kennelly and Inez Snedecor) lived in Houston most of their married life. When they were older, they moved out here and built a house right next to my mom and dad's and had their grocery store.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Tarver Gayle Snedecor's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45472>. Inez Snedecor was Tarver's sister.

TERRELL: What about the other daughters?

PECK: They were in various places. The oldest was Lone Kennelly Newman, next was Sally Kennelly Jones. My mother was the third child. The fourth was Ella Mae Kennelly Kersten. The next two sisters are the only ones still living, Fay Kennelly Pugh, and Judy Kennelly Hudeck.

TERRELL: Describe a typical day when you were a child, prior to your going to school.

PECK: Before I went to school, I pretty much had to stay where my mother could see me. We had a lot of property on our block, and as long as she could see me, I could play in the yard and do all sorts of things. As I got older, she would see me in the morning, and yell at me to come home for lunch. You could yell and be heard all over town. “Duane, come home.”

If she wasn't sure where I was during the day, she would call me again and I would go running home. She'd say, “Oh, I just wanted to know where you were.” I thought that was SO silly and wondered why she'd have me run all the way home just so she'd know where I was.

We rode our bikes ALL the time. We rode horses with my family a lot, but not so much with other kids. We worked the cows. The streets then were gravel. I can remember looking at my feet, we always went barefoot, and my feet and my legs were always dirty. You'd ride bikes on that gravel, and your toes would be bloody on the ends from your toes dragging! You'd fall down, have a wreck, and get dirt and gravel all over you.

If you were in front of Mrs. Walker's house – we called her Aunt Floss or Mama Floss – or Mrs. Huggins' house – no matter whose house you were in front of, if they saw you fall, they would yell for you to come in and they would clean you up and say, “Oh, here, I made some popcorn balls. Have some of these.” It was great! It was very idyllic.

TERRELL: Did you go to church?

PECK: Yes, I went to this church, Fulshear Methodist Church.

TERRELL: When did they move the original building?

PECK: In the 1970s.

BENTLEY: “In the '90s.

PECK: I got married in the old church. That was 1974 or so.

TERRELL: Were finances a concern in your family or did you always seem to have enough?



United Methodist Church of Fulshear

PECK: We had enough. My dad had cattle, and we had a pecan season, usually every other year. It wasn't much of a concern. It seems like you didn't need as much.

TERRELL: Do you remember a moment that you realized that because of the color of your skin, the rules would be different?

PECK: No.

TERRELL: Did you play with black children?

PECK: Oh, yes.

TERRELL: But they went to a different school?

PECK: Yes. I didn't play with them on a daily basis, but when I saw them or was around them, we were friendly and played. I guess you wouldn't call them my playmates. We had a real good group of kids. Joe Dozier was a little younger than me, my brother Bubba Dozier, Cathy Grady, Susan and Doug Wade, Mimi Dozier, Suzanne Helwig, and Bitsy and her brother Phillip, who lived in another city, but came every summer and visited, we had a great time.

TERRELL: You helped work the cows?

PECK: Yes. Maybe 75 head.

TERRELL: Did you butcher the cattle yourselves or take it in?

PECK: We took it in. My grandfather didn't butcher our cows.

TERRELL: Where did you go to school and for how long?

PECK: I went to first grade at Robert E. Lee in the Lamar Consolidated School District. There was only one bus that came out this far, and they started in Fulshear so it was very, very early. We stopped at every little house on the way in, so it took forever to get to school. In the afternoon, we were the last to get off, so we got home very late. My mother decided that was not good, so they transferred my brother and I to Katy and paid tuition for us to go there. My parents had to take us and pick us up every day. I went to Katy for 2nd grade through 12th grade. It was probably 15-16 miles to Lee, and to Katy it was only 10 miles.

TERRELL: Did you go to college?

PECK: Yes. The first two years I went to Wharton County Junior College in Wharton. I lived there. Then my husband, who was a football player and had a scholarship, and I transferred to Texas A & I in Kingsville, which is now Texas A & M in Kingsville. We both graduated from Texas A & I.

TERRELL: Did you work after graduation from college?

PECK: I retired as a teacher, after 32 years teaching. I taught two years in East Bernard – that was my first job. Then eight years in Richmond at Deaf Smith Elementary. My last 22 years were at Huggins Elementary here in Fulshear.

I taught all the elementary grades, but mostly 2nd grade. At one time or another, I taught kindergarten through 6th grade! I like the little ones.

TERRELL: What organizations have you been a part of?

PECK: I am a member of mostly educational clubs. I was divorced and had three children, so I didn't have a lot of time for clubs. Now my friend, Joe Dozier, put me on the Cemetery Board, so now I'm a member of that.

TERRELL: What are your children's names?

PECK: Amanda Leigh Peck Borrel, Melinda Jo Peck Gardiner, and Alfred Lee 'Tad' Peck, Jr. And I have ten grandchildren.

TERRELL: What are the major changes you've seen in the Fulshear area during your lifetime?

PECK: Do you have an hour? (laughs) The roads, of course, the traffic is tremendous. I've started having to back into my own driveway because my driveway exits onto FM-359, and you can't back out without waiting forever! I still have to wait a lot of times even if I'm headed in the right direction. The businesses. My son loves to say, "Gee, mom, when I was a teenager, I had to drive halfway to Rosenberg to get a pizza company to meet me on the corner where Foster High School is now. Now you can just walk to the pizza place."

TERRELL: Do you remember when they paved FM-359?

PECK: I remember them paving the streets in the city. We were SO happy with that because we could ride our bikes faster. I guess by then, I wasn't riding my bike so much. It was a lot less dusty and a lot fewer bloody toes (chuckles).

TERRELL: Do you have a favorite or most vivid memory?

PECK: Just being with my family, working cows and that sort of thing. It was a joy to do that – a lot of fun.

TERRELL: Would you say life is better now than it once was?

PECK: Easier. You don't have to wash on the scrub board any more, but I never did do that anyway. Yes, I think things are a lot easier. But I don't like all the changes. I go to a restaurant here in town or to church, and I don't know everybody. I'm used to knowing every single person. I don't like that part of it. But change is what has to happen.

TERRELL: Did any of the men in your family have military experience?

PECK: My dad was in World War II and received two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star for bravery in the Philippines. There was a LOT of fighting. We were lucky that he came home. He showed us a big picture of his company with about 200 men, and only about 50 came back.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sergeant Bentley's bravery and medals were earned during the Battle for Okinawa.

My mother was pretty much the boss, and that's probably the only thing he ever did that she told him not to do. My brother and I were already born, and my dad was the sole surviving son who ran the farm that my great grandmother had – it's the one we have now.

She raised cotton and they had tenant farmers and cattle. So that was a deferment as well. My mother sure did not want him to go. He said he had to go. He felt like he had to do something, so he got a job welding, to help the war effort. Then they started getting the ladies to come and work. He said they were better welders than the men were, so he decided he had to quit and go to war. My mother was holding him by the coattails and saying, "Don't go!" and he said, "Got to." So, he did.



Staff Sergeant Carl Briscoe Bentley earned two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star for injuries and heroism during World War II.

TERRELL: A brave man. Did you work on the Foster High School?

PECK: No, but my brother and sister-in-law did. She can tell you a lot about that.

TERRELL: Let's talk a little bit with Carol Bentley. How are you related to Duane?

BENTLEY: I'm her sister-in-law. I married Duane's brother, Lee John Bentley, Sr. I was born in Sealy Hospital, in Austin County, January 27, 1943. I lived in Pattison, Waller County, all my life, until I married. My father's parents were Matilda and Theodore Ehlert. My mother's mother was Burdine Wright Ehlert.

TERRELL: When were you married?

BENTLEY: February 17, 1962, in Pattison Methodist Church. We moved to Houston after we were married. We also lived in Harlingen, and in Brookshire for a while, before we moved back to Fulshear in 1964.

My husband was a tractor salesman in Houston and in Rosenberg. We owned our own tractor business here in Fulshear, from 1977 through some of the 1980s. Then he went into the environmental business and retired from that. He tested underground storage tanks for leakage.

Our children are Lee John Bentley, Jr., Janet Bentley Montgomery, and Elizabeth Bentley Massie. Lee lives here in Fulshear, Beth lives in San Antonio and Janet lives in Bellville. When we moved here Fulshear was a nice, quiet, sleepy little town. If I looked out and saw somebody going to the post office, I knew exactly who it was.

One of the memories my husband always talked about was where Ray's is now, and the bank, over on FM 359. There was a big sand pile in the road. He and his buddies would get out there and play marbles. If a car came down the road, they went around the children. They didn't disturb their game!

TERRELL: Where did you go to school?

BENTLEY: I went to Pattison. I was the first class to graduate from Royal High School. There were seven in my graduating class. I didn't go to college.

TERRELL: Tell me about Foster High School.

BENTLEY: We decided that to get our names on the record, we needed to get busy and name the school after our relative who brought everybody to Texas. So, my husband, Rene' Lamb, and JoAnn Sturrock all got together and wrote a booklet about it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Judy René Lamb's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=48966>

They presented it to the school board and they named the school after them. Dr. Ives, at the time, said, "I don't know why y'all didn't do this years ago." We never thought about it. The school is close to where the original town of Foster was, so it was the likely place.

PECK: There weren't that many schools then. Now they are building one school after the other. At the time there were only two high schools, Lamar and Terry. So that's another reason.

TERRELL: Do you have some funny stories you would like to share? It doesn't have to be 'your' story. It could be one a relative has passed down.

PECK: Let me give you this brief history. My great-great-grandmother was Lucretia Foster Wade. She was one of three people who built the old, original church here. She had my great-grandmother, who was Lucretia Amanda Briscoe.



John and Randolph Foster High School in Richmond, Texas, opened in 2001.-- Wikipedia

It was some of their relatives, I'm not sure who, but I think it was my great-great grandmother's son who liked to go off and drink at times. So, he was riding his horse back from Brookshire. Now this was all before I was born. I just heard my dad telling stories about this. At that time, the road to Brookshire was that last road that goes by the cemetery. Now there's a crook in the highway, but it went straight to Brookshire then. It was very late, and he was riding his horse home.

As he was coming back that way, he got up by the cemetery; something BIG and white flew up in front of him. He pulled his six-shooter out, and shot it dead. He rode on home, real fast, and woke everybody up, saying, "I killed a ghost, I killed a ghost!"

They said, “No, you didn't. You're just drunk!” He said, “NO, I did. I promise you.” So, the next morning, they went down there and looked. There was a great big white goose dead in the road, but he was convinced it was a ghost. (laughter)

TERRELL: Why was it flying at night?

PECK: I guess the horse walked up on it. Maybe it was sleeping. It just flew up! I wish my dad was here. He had lots of good stories. My happiest memories were riding horses and working cows with my family. I was pretty young, but I had my own horse. When we were driving the cows from point A to point B, my dad would say, “Where's Duane?” He'd have to leave the herd, ride out and look for me, and I'd be somewhere plaiting flowers in my horse's mane. (laughing) He'd say, “Girl, quit doing that!” All my life I wanted to be a trick rider in the rodeo, so I'd do all kinds of tricks on my horses – jump off the back and get back on, ride half saddle and try to stand up on the saddle, and nearly kill myself. But thank goodness, I did not become a trick rider. But I tried. Those were my happiest memories.

When as I got older and had my own children, my parents built a pool. My mother wanted everybody to be around her. We loved doing that because she was a wonderful, wonderful cook. The kids loved it. They were raised with the swimming pool in our back yard. It was a great life.

TERRELL: This concludes the interview and I really appreciate it.

Interview ends