

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **James Warren Roberts – 2012 & 2013**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Comments: Mr. Roberts gave two interviews, one on December 21, 2012 in Needville, Texas. The other on November 16, 2013 taken in Fulshear, Texas.

22 Pages



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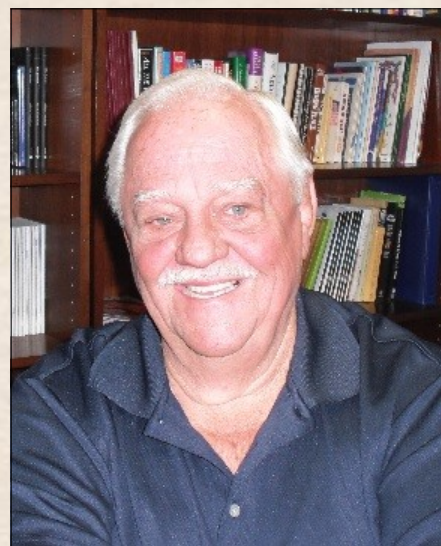
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Transcript

GOODSILL: What brought you or your family to Fort Bend County?

ROBERTS: It was job-related. I was teaching at Waco. At that time, teachers got a lot of money. When my wife, Martha Elaine Shipp Roberts, and I both were teaching, we each made \$4,000 a year!

But back in those days, if you thought you were pregnant, you had to quit teaching. We started our family about three years after we were married in 1960, in Waco. I thought we couldn't make it on half a salary. We were doing very well on \$8,000 a year. I had served on the state textbook committee, which you could do only once in your lifetime in the state of Texas. It was comprised of 15 people, seven or eight from the teaching field and the rest were administrators in education. A publishing company offered me a job. I also thought about going into the pharmaceutical business because of having doctors in the family. (laughs) But I couldn't have learned those LONG words! Education was always my love.

GOODSILL: What did you teach?

ROBERTS: I taught high school history, 9th grade and up.

GOODSILL: This was your first 'real' job – not a summer job?

ROBERTS: Back in those days, it was legal to work under-age. You could mow grass when you were 9 or 10. My first job when I was 14 years old was with the school system. In Waco, we did all the maintenance for the buildings – we didn't hire it out. I started to work with the maintenance department during the summer, and I was paid very well at that time. But I had to work hard. It wasn't an easy job. I was a football player at Waco High, and we went to State all three years that I played. I bought my first car when I was 14.

But going back to the publishing company, they started me at \$10,000 or \$12,000, with all expenses paid and a new car. They worked with the school districts all over the state and with the Texas Education Agency, concerning the publishing of new textbooks. My job was to try to get our textbooks adopted by the state. They adopted five series of books for the school districts to select the books they felt would meet the needs better than some of the others. I was fortunate enough after my second year to get a very hefty state adoption in science for 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th grades. My bonus check was \$40,000, I think.

In my third year working for the publishing company, I was recognized as the top salesman in the company. I made a copy of the check, and put it on the back of the plaque they had given me. That was a BIG deal – from \$4,000 to a nice salary and a bonus! The bonus was in excess of expenses, salary, car and insurance.

Back then, and probably still today, the publishing company did a lot of entertaining. You would take superintendents, administrators and curriculum people to dinners to get to know them. I went to Florida and rented the whole top of the Dorell Beach or the Flamingo Hotel and entertained. I think my expenses for the 1st and 2nd years ran about \$150,000 a year. That was a LOT of money back in 1963-64.

GOODSILL: You were still living in Waco at that time?

ROBERTS: Yes. The publishing company decided they needed me in a larger city, so they moved me to Houston. I bought a home right off Memorial Drive. After being from a small city, having an antique car hobby, and moving into such a rich area, we decided that wasn't the place for us. There were other reasons for that as well. Children at that time were starting to run the family, and we were trying to bring our kids up with 'Yes, sir' and 'Yes, ma'am' and so forth. So, we started looking outside of Houston. My wife found the old Hunter Harris place.

GOODSILL: Tell me about it.

ROBERTS: It is where Billie Wendt was born. It was her family home. The history of the home goes back to Churchill Fulshear. John Huggins was the trainer who trained his horses and won the Kentucky Derby.

NOTE: See Billie Wendt's multiple interviews on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30614>, <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30616>, and <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30618>

He built the home on that property back in the 1800s. About 1920, that house burned. The Harris' had bought that home prior to its burning. The story goes that during the fire, Mrs. Bill was taking things out and burying them out in the yard. Of course, all the streets were dirt or gravel back then. We found rings, pottery, etc. Later on I found a beautiful ruby ring, and I offered to give it back, but the family didn't want it. So, my wife gave it to a little neighbor girl who fell in love with it, and I guess she has it to this day.

The house was rebuilt in 1922, and they moved back into it. Hunter Harris owned quite a bit of property. Weston Lakes was part of his property and property around Fulshear, including Carey Crutcher's ranch, which is now Lou Waters'. He had 1,200 acres and a beautiful home. Several movies were made in it. He lost it, and Lou Waters helped him out, giving him several million dollars, and ended up giving him more. That was part of the history of Fulshear, one of the old homes and family [Harris] well-respected in Fort Bend County.

GOODSILL: Tell me the location of the house.

ROBERTS: It's on 2nd and Wilson Street. At the time, there were only about five streets IN Fulshear. It's in what is now downtown Fulshear, on the corner. We lived there for about 42 years.

GOODSILL: So that was a successful move for you, from Memorial Drive to here?

ROBERTS: It was a great place to raise our family.

GOODSILL: So you moved down here, and then what happened with your career.

ROBERTS: After about 20 years with the publishing company, I had a friend who continuously tried to go in with a young man in Fort Bend County, who needed help in his business. At that time, I thought I would start restoring cars and making a living at that. Then I was offered to set up, work, and do the appraisal for Fort Bend County. I did that for about a year. To do appraising, you have to be out in the field, appraising homes. I had my certification – got it back when I was in Waco, appraising and evaluating homes, and had my real estate license as well. These were things I did because I just wanted to. So, I ended up going into business with this gentleman. I ended up buying four different companies that he represented but didn't have time to work. They were not making much money. In fact, after the second month of work, my check was \$26.00. It cost me probably \$600 to make \$26.00, traveling and so forth!

In a few years, all those companies became number one in the country. It's not that I'm a great salesman. I just like people. This was in the industrial hose line. My secretary (and wife), Martha, answered the phone when I was out traveling because I covered five states. She and I did very well financially. Put three kids through college with a new car and a credit card. One was at Baylor, one at A & M and one at Sam Houston. I still have that company. I don't work in it anymore. I've had three heart attacks, and one was a major one. I lost a good portion of my heart, and that was almost 17 years ago.

Today, the three sons work at and run the company. They are hard workers. I expected my kids to be honest and to tell the truth. We believe in God and in being Christians. I brought them up that way. Our kids never did smoke. They all had hardship licenses to drive cars because we lived out in the country. We didn't have school buses to pick up and bring kids home who were involved in athletics and so forth. The deal was, you don't get a ticket and you don't have a wreck. If you do, you lose the privilege of driving a car. None of my kids ever got a ticket, and they never had a wreck. That was very fortunate because I didn't have to back up my statement!

But today, the business is 140,000 square feet, which is about a block and a half in size. We represent about fifteen different hose companies. We manufacture over 300 different types of hose. For example, when you drive by a filling station and you see the big tanker unloading gas, the hose they use for that is something that we designed and patented. We changed it from the old heavy, bulky rubber hose that the guy could barely use, to a very light, flexible hose that can be handled with one hand. It took about four years to convince people that just because it's light doesn't mean it's not good. It outlasts the others 2 to 1.

I left another company where I was a top salesman. The owner of the company's wife was one of the heirs to General Motors. She gave him a million dollars a year to play around with. He came back to the company I was working with and was tearing it up. I don't know if he had mental problems or what. I don't lie to people, and I don't want people to lie to me. This gentleman did. So, I left that company and went with a friend into the same line of work. There were four of us who started that company. It's called Hose Master. Today it is number one in the entire world. The four of us have over 700 employees. At the time we started it, the size of the building was 100 feet by 150 feet. Today the size of the building, from one end to the other lacks 27 feet of being one mile long, in Cleveland, Ohio.

GOODSILL: But you work from here?

ROBERTS: I stock everything here. That's why I have such a large facility. My building is huge. It's in Houston, off Interstate 45 and Telephone Road. We have 16 loading docks.

GOODSILL: Sounds like it has been a very interesting line of work for you.

ROBERTS: It is, because you've got to know what hose will do. A lot of people think a hose is something that's got a hole in one end and hole in the other and something goes through it, like a water hose. But that's not true. Various highly corrosive chemicals can eat up a piece of rubber hose in seconds and create a hazard. It could even kill someone. When people call and say they need a piece of hose. I always ask, "What is the product? What are you going to be using it for?" Years ago, people would say it's none of your business. And I would say, "Well, it IS because I have a concern about safety. I'm not going to represent something to you that would be hazardous, so I need to know. And if you can't tell me, I won't sell to you." Today that's changed a lot. People back in those days didn't care. All they cared about was the money. I don't work both sides of the street, like most reps. I work for the company I represent. I work hard for the distributor that I'm selling to. I don't take business away from him. I can go out and get an order for \$100,000 and take it and make \$40,000 on it, but I turn around and give it to him. Most reps don't do that.

GOODSILL: Can we talk a little bit about your knowledge of Fulshear?

ROBERTS: When I moved to Fulshear, in 1969, from the Memorial area in Houston, Martha found this old house that had been abandoned. Various people had rented it while they were having a home built in Fulshear, and then it was vacant and hobos lived in it. They built fires to keep warm and had holes in the floors. It was pretty ratty. Here we were moving out of a beautiful home in Memorial into this house that needed a lot of work. I think Martha thought I could rebuild the house in a week. The first two rooms that I DID rebuild were a bedroom upstairs for Ron, and Martha's kitchen. Her kitchen has 52 cabinets in it with 10-foot ceilings, and she has them ALL full.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A hobo is a migrant worker or homeless vagrant, especially one who is impoverished. The term originated in the Western—probably Northwestern—United States around 1890. Unlike a "tramp", who works only when forced to, and a "bum", who does not work at all, a "hobo" is a traveling worker. *--courtesy Wikipedia*

One of the neighbors was Ed Helwig. At one time, Ed was County Commissioner, and then was re-elected. Everybody said Fulshear's a town that doesn't like new people coming in. I guess I was lucky because we were adopted by almost every old person – the Doziers, the Helwigs, the Huggins, and the Meyers – in Fulshear. Ed asked me if I'd serve and do the Democratic elections for the city. He got me involved every time they had a fundraiser for the Methodist church, and we don't attend the Methodist church! We go to church in Rosenberg and have for forty-some years.

So, I was involved in anything and everything. Ed asked me later on to set up the appraisal district, which hadn't been active in Fort Bend County for some time. We didn't have a Central Appraisal District (CAD) then. So, there were houses that had been built many, many years ago that had never been on the tax roll. I did a lot of these little things for the county and the area.

GOODSILL: This is one of the joys of living in a small town. You can get involved in a meaningful way.

ROBERTS: Oh, yeah. Back then we had Precinct 4 – it's now Precinct 3 – right there in Fulshear. We didn't have the fancy buildings that we have today for the commissioners. It was just the barn, tin-built, with the office building. Ed would come by at least once or twice a week. We built the first swimming pool in Fulshear at my house.

When Martha used to go back into Memorial to play bridge, from Fulshear to Highway 6, there was one place that had a telephone, the Brown Barn, a beer joint. After dark, you would not see a single car on that road. Maybe at 2:00 AM, a farmer coming back would stop if you had car trouble. They always stopped back in those days if somebody needed help.

Downtown Fulshear had tried to incorporate twice before. There were some people in Fulshear who did not want to be incorporated and wanted to leave it as it was. Even though people had different names, they were related in many ways. They didn't want to hurt their friends and didn't want to have a fight. When one would come and say, "We'll take you to court and sue you if you try to incorporate." They would just say, "Okay" and let it go. A few of the old town folks came to me and asked if I would try to get Fulshear incorporated.

GOODSILL: Tell me some of the advantages of being incorporated, as you go along in your story.

ROBERTS: Okay. I will, because it's important. I told them I would do that IF the first person who threatened us with a lawsuit would say, "Talk to Mr. Roberts." So, they kind of stayed out of it. I'll name names in this case; Ed Helwig, the County Commissioner; Ed Dozier, Dozier's BBQ; Gilbert Meyers. One who opposed was Ed Huggins' father. They lived up on the hill as you come into Fulshear. The house is still there, a big, red-brick house.

The first thing I did was call Mr. Huggins and asked if I could come and see him. I went up to his home. He was sitting in their living room-den area, in a big old leather chair, with a little stand beside it, with a six-shooter on it. Every time I would say something that kind of ruffled his feathers, he'd reach over there and pat that gun. (laughter)

I told him the reason we needed to incorporate was that I did a test on the majority of the water wells in the old town of Fulshear, and every one of them came back 'not fit for human consumption'. I had children. I had my well tested and my well came back 'not fit for human consumption'. So, I had it treated. Again, with my wife's family being doctors, it was imperative that we watch what the children were taking and drinking. So that was one reason. After a rain, my kids would play out in the ditches because we didn't have sidewalks in town. They would come back, take their clothes off and put them in to be washed. The next day, before you washed there, there was this gosh-awful smell. It was sewage. All the houses in Fulshear were on septic tanks that didn't meet any requirements of today. Most of the sewers ran right out into the ditches. I was fortunate that the Harrison's owned my property. So, my septic system (which is not in use today) was in my neighbor's yard because they owned that property at one time. The drain line from my septic system ran a block down into the lower area of Huggins' property, which runs into what we call Fulshear Lake. So, it contaminates everything else. The water and sewage were causes for health concerns for children and adults. So those were the two main reasons for incorporation.

Mr. Huggins said, "You know, Jamie, I realize that some day we need to incorporate. I just feel like it's too soon." I said, "Mr. Huggins, the little town of Clodine, down FM1093 from Fulshear, said the same thing. The ranchers did not want to incorporate because they felt like someone would come in and tax their property. So, they didn't incorporate. Clodine today is what? It has a name but it's the City of Houston. Houston annexed that property because they hadn't incorporated. The mayor of Houston is a friend of mine. Their plan is to take property all the way to the Brazos River. He intends to do that while he is in office. Do you want Fulshear to become like Clodine?" And he said, "Never! We don't want to have anything to do with Houston." He didn't pack a gun then! (laughing)

He walked me to the door and he said, "You know, they tried to incorporate this city before. You're the first person who has ever come to me and talked to me about my feelings on it. I ain't really for it, but I'll tell you what I won't do. I won't fight you on it." And he didn't. The Huggins' did not get involved in it at all.

So, I went door-to-door and talked to the people. I showed them the results from the Health Department and the doctors. There were cases of young children who had hepatitis. I said, "What do you want to do?" They asked, "Are we going to have taxes?" I said, "Eventually. But not now. Once the city grows, they probably will have, but you're going to have taxes anyway. We can pay for things together that we can't pay for individually." The election was held in 1976 and it carried, with 87% or 89% in favor of incorporation.

It took quite a number of months to get everything legally done, and we incorporated only the original Fulshear town site, which was 2 square miles. Churchill Fulshear came in after Stephen F. Austin – he was a friend of Austin's. The president of Mexico granted Churchill Fulshear two and one-half leagues. A league is about 2 square miles, so quite a bit of property. Somewhere I have those papers signed by the president of Mexico, Guadalupe Victoria, and Stephen F. Austin and Churchill Fulshear in 1824. The City of Fulshear is actually older than Houston.

So, going back to the period of time when we were trying to incorporate, we were going to have our first meeting at the old Methodist church, which was a little square box building then. We had some of the opposition meet us on the front steps, and they told us we couldn't come in. The reason they gave was that we might allow some 'undesirables' [meaning black people] to come into the church building. They weren't undesirables. They were some of my best friends and always have been, such as Viola Randle, Emily Banks, and people like that. We turned around and met in the old tin barn, which was the Fire Department. It was damp and cold that day, and there was water on the floor because the building leaked. We used that building, and I have pictures of me being sworn in as mayor in 1977. We had an election for 5 councilmen and a Marshall because after incorporation, we needed the structure to run the city. We had an election for 5 councilmen and a marshal.

The first things we worked on were water and sewage. I attended the Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC) which was set up to help cities with grants. I was told that throughout Texas, there were thousands of cities that had applied for grants and they were prioritized. First, were the cities who had applied four or five years before we did – it took a long time to work your way up the list to receive the money. I said, "What can we do to get moved up?" They said, "Well, you've got to show that you've got a desperate need." I said, "Well, we have a desperate need, the health and well-being of our people." They said, "Oh, everybody says that. On their application, that's what they put down."

So, they were going to have a hearing within a couple of months, where you could apply to be heard by the State. So, I took pictures of the conditions of the water, sewage, drainage, and the way the septic system worked. I got pictures of everything I could. I got all the documents from the doctors and cases where people were sick because of the water. Plus, at that time, over 80% of our community was minority, primarily black. We had hardly any Hispanics at that time.

I had the huge pictures, showing all these things, plus copies of all the letters I had blown-up, as well as regular sized copies that I could present to each person on the committee. I had resigned as Mayor by this time. I was also president of the school board for Lamar Consolidated and the chairman of the Fort Bend County Libraries (19 years). I was working to get the library built. I was on the road every night, away from my family. I thought I had everything going the right way with the city, so I turned it over to the mayor pro-tem, Ed Dozier. Ed was fishing in Alaska. He came home and I said, "Mayor!" He said, "What did you say?" I told him I resigned, but I was his assistant. I told him I would be at his side if he needed me. He had a few choice words for me, and Ed didn't really say much. He's a very quiet man. But he didn't really have a choice. So, he took over.

We did the presentation to the State, and I think we did an excellent job because we received a grant of over \$300,000. We started our septic system. A lot of people asked why we didn't start with water first since you needed to have water to move the sewage. The cause of the health problems, since we had treated all the wells, was the sewage. As long as we had our wells operating, we had the water. So, we built the treatment facility for the sewage.

Later, when I was president of the school board, we got Huggins School built. Huggins School started on my front porch. Ed Huggins came by. He never would come in the house. He wasn't like Ed Helwig who comes on the back porch and puts his feet up, sits around the pool and has a cold drink. He drew out this long area of land and he said, "If you'll get a school built, I'll give you this land. It's 23 acres." And I said, "Okay." Then he said, "But I don't want it named after me." Huggins school was NOT named after Ed Huggins. It was named after his family. Now I DID name the street that we built in front of it, Huggins Drive, after Ed Huggins. So that's how Huggins School came about.

The next thing was the water. When I was president of the school board, I told the city and Mayor Frances Smart to come before the school board and request the water well that the school district had built. They had three acres behind Huggins School with a water well and their own septic system in front.

The schools are really not in the business of water and sewage. They are in the business of education. I told Mayor Smart that all she had to do was submit a request in writing, from the city's attorney, David Freshman, that the City would use this facility only for the City and provide water and sewage for the school district, for Huggins School. The reason it had to be done this way is that in 1948, I believe, the law was set to prevent school districts throughout the South (who were selling a school for a dollar) so that school became a private school that minorities could not attend.

Finally, the Board said, "Well, just forget it. We're not going to fool with her." I said, "Look, she's one person. The children we educate and the people who live there are more important than she is. I'll have David Freshman (who I had appointed as City Attorney when I was Mayor) draw up the papers." We turned the water and sewer plant over to the city and that's how we got water in the city of Fulshear. We still have that well today. I requested on this transfer, with the school buying property in Fulshear, that we would provide water to the high school, junior high, 6th grade concept, and to the bus facility, as it progresses and is built.

I worked with the attorneys even when I wasn't mayor anymore, to get all that done. The new mayor was fighting the school system about building a private road that went to nowhere, that really was NOT on the school property they bought. Even if it was, it was illegal. When I was president of the Board, Rosenberg tried to get us to blacktop and maintain Lamar Drive in Rosenberg, and we wouldn't do it. The only way that we could do that legally is for there to be a bond issue. If you put it in a bond issue and the voters approve it, then you could build a road. So, after \$300,000 of lawyers on our side, we got the Attorney General of the state of Texas to rule on it. The Attorney General said that school districts are not obligated to cities. Cities cannot tell school districts what to do. So that died.

Going back to Fulshear... A home rule city is a city over 5,000 in population. In land area, Fulshear is the largest city in the state of Texas. Under a home rule city, we're the largest city in Fort Bend County. We're almost larger than Sugar Land, Rosenberg and Richmond combined. We run from the First Community coming out of Katy, Firethorne. That was Don McMillans number one ranch. That's Fulshear. And all the Sugar Land property to the Brazos River, outside of Rosenberg is Fulshear. Winner Foster, Colonial West, all those little subdivisions are in Fulshear. One of these days, Fulshear will be the largest city in Fort Bend County, not only in size but in population.

GOODSILL: What is the population now?

ROBERTS: From the census, we're right under 1,200. Actually, that's not true, with all the new people moving in. Now that's in the city limits. The ETJ (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) is probably about 8,000. All that land that was taken in, like the Foster property, the Harrison ranch, etc., I did that in 1982.

GOODSILL: You said it was 2 square miles when you first incorporated. How did it go from 2 square miles to the largest?

ROBERTS: Once you are incorporated, if you so desire, you can take in 10% per year, accumulated up to two years up to 20%, and then it reverts back to 10% if you don't take any property in. That's how Houston expands.

GOODSILL: Why did the city fathers of Fulshear decide they wanted to expand so much?

ROBERTS: They didn't. I did it. I could see Fulshear being what it's going to be. Have you been out to Fulshear lately? Cross Creek? We have a new development, right under 4,000 acres by Trendmaker, one of the number one developers in the country, called Cross Creek. We have multimillion dollar homes in there. Most all of the property is on water. That property used to be flat land, for rice. But the land really wasn't rich enough for growing rice very well, and it wasn't good for cattle.

The lady who owned that was Irene Stern. Her family was Jewish, and they were forced out of Germany in 1939. Each of them was allowed to take \$25 worth of goods with them. Her dad owned a ball-bearing factory, which Hitler needed badly for the war. Her family had a ship, called *Stella*, which means 'evening star' in German. She loved that ship. They swallowed diamonds, etc to bring over what they could. They did allow Jews then to leave instead of going into camps. She landed in New York and got a sewing job in a sweatshop, down in a basement with no windows. She met Leonard Stern, and they later got married. They saved all their money. The U. S. government went after them later for having a monopoly on seeds, dog collars, animal hospitals and all those things for pets and animals. She was written up as one of the ten richest women in the world.

She would come driving up in my driveway and when she'd drive out, her car would go through the yard. She had a ranch outside of Brookshire as well, which was her home when she came down from New York. She lived in Manhattan. They owned the Dakota, where John Lennon was killed. You take an elevator up to her floor, and to the right was her apartment, with a full-time maid. The other room to the left was Betty Bacall's, Humphrey Bogart's wife. I knew her as Betty.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lauren Bacall was born Betty Joan Perske on September 16, 1924, in New York City. She was the daughter of Natalie Weinstein-Bacal, a Romanian Jewish immigrant, and William Perske, who was born in New Jersey, to Polish Jewish parents. Her family was middle-class, with her father working as a salesman and her mother as a secretary. They divorced when she was five. When she was a school girl, Lauren originally wanted to be a dancer, but later, she became enthralled with acting, so she switched gears to head into that field. She had studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York after high school, which enabled her to get her feet wet in some off-Broadway productions. --Courtesy IMDB.com

GOODSILL: Did you ever go to New York and visit Mrs. Stern in the Dakota apartment building?

ROBERTS: Yes, by request. I was going to take her property into the ETJ. She has two children, a boy and a girl. I got all the permissions and got everything done legally. She came over to the house, and my attorney, David Freshman, was going over this with her. She was sitting on my couch. She got up, took this thing, and said, "Here," as she threw it across the room at me. I said, "What's wrong? I think we did everything you asked?" She said, "No, you didn't!" I said, "What did we not do?" She said, "If I can't be part of the city, I don't want to be anything in the city. I don't want to be in the ETJ, I want to be in the city limits." So, I had to get her kids to okay that. It was 3,200 acres at that time that we took into the city limits. That's one way it started growing from the two square miles.

Bois d'Arc came to us requesting to be taken in to the city. It was in the city, but not part of the two square miles that was incorporated. So, we took that in. The attorney that I hired was Paul Pry, out of Dallas. Lankford Engineering was our engineering company. They did all that stuff almost for free. We ended up paying Paul \$1,000. Everything that we took in had to be contiguous. Two different engineering firms, to make sure it was legal, surveyed some of the property in Fulshear. Originally it might say: On Irene's property, you would go down FM 1463 to a certain fence line, and you turn left and go west until you come to the tree with the wagon wheel leaning up against it.

Well, there was none of that left. So, surveying was not really easy! Everything we took in was done by request of the landowner. They wanted to be part of Fulshear, not any place else. Going toward Interstate 10 is the Jordan Ranch and all that.

When Mr. Jordan, Chester, was alive we'd fly his little plane. He never had a license. I had a license, but he didn't. He'd been flying for 40 years. I took all the property in, and it's still there. It's all rice fields and geese today.

The last thing that I did before I resigned as Mayor took me 3-1/2 years. This included the land that would have all been in Fulshear, going to Interstate 10, taking us across Petersen Viaduct, onto the north side of Interstate 10. This is in the Katy area (not IN Katy) where the West Houston Airport is today. The lady that owned the land finally agreed to come in, and I DID go after her. I wanted that because of the gateway coming in to Fulshear in the future. One of the things I helped design before I gave up being mayor this last time was called the Fulshear Parkway. It runs from SH 36, the property of the mayor of Richmond, Moore, all the way across the Harrison's and so forth, the Fosters, and Walter Fondren, who built Rice. He started Humble Oil Company all the way to Interstate 10. It ended up being a beautiful, four-lane highway with trees, lakes and so forth.

I met with Joe B. Allen, who is one of the most powerful attorneys, who kind of walked on water and got things done in Austin that no one else could get done. He's a wonderful gentleman, one of the most honest that I've worked with in a large law firm. We still exchange gifts and cards with each other. I told him I wanted a letter from the ten landowners from outside of Rosenberg at Spur 10 to Interstate 10 on the north side, stating that they would give the right-of-way. I asked for 300 feet for the right-of way, but I got 250 feet. I really only expected to get 100 feet, because TX 99 (Grand Parkway) has only 100 feet. I sent a letter to the city, from each of the landowners, giving that property for that right-of-way. Then I wanted Metro to come out with the rail eventually; fast rail to a certain point and then light rail the rest of the way into Houston. At that time, Mr. Williams was CEO of Metro, but not today. I wanted the extension of the Westpark Tollway to come out and extend or to stop right east of the entrance to Cross Creek Ranch. I didn't want them to turn toward Interstate 10 because that would bypass Fulshear and kill the downtown area. I don't know what they are going to do today, because the things that I was in favor of, Frances Smart was against, so she has control of some of the people

GOODSILL: You sound like you have a vision for what you would like to have happen in Fulshear. What is your vision for how things might be in 50 years?

ROBERTS: I want Fulshear to be a neat place to live and raise a family, like it was when I moved there. I don't want it to be a home rule city, like I don't like the color of your house or the brick that you are using. I think it should be a neat and organized place. I don't want it to be a tin barn city.

I tried to get the council to approve – I brought specialty people in from brick companies, developers and people who have worked with major cities – to give input on what the future of Fulshear should be. I even had Joe B. Allen come out with his people. I had one member of the planning committee attend and one member of city council attend. Never could get them to do anything. I don't want Fulshear to be 'cliff dwellers – by that I mean apartment houses. I wrote in the Trendmaker contract, I'd allow them to be in the back section and to be owned by Trendmaker, and they could not be sold unless the entire development was sold. I want to see good people living here who want to make a home, and not just a place to live.

GOODSILL: Do you feel like you've done the things that needed to be done for that vision to come to pass?

ROBERTS: I've done the best I could. I may not be the sharpest pencil in the box, but I have vision. I know people who can get things done, and in many cases, for a fraction of the cost. You can challenge people. Maybe sometimes, I'm too pushy, but I don't think I've ever done anything for Jamie Roberts. I think I've done it for people that I don't even know.

GOODSILL: That is a good place for us to end today. Thank you.

First interview ends

FLECK: Today is November 16, 2013. I am interviewing Mr. Jamie Roberts at the First United Methodist Church of Fulshear, in Fulshear Texas. Will you tell me your whole name please?

ROBERTS: Legal name is James Warren Roberts.

FLECK: When were you born?

ROBERTS: September 19, 1934. Same day as my mother.

FLECK: Do you know the names of your father's parents?

ROBERTS: My father's mother was full-blooded Cherokee Indian. His father, Leonard Wallace, was Pawnee Indian. I called him Grand Dad Roberts. He was very quiet, very soft spoken, and when he said something, you listened because it was important. He was a nice gentleman but back in those days, children didn't participate in family meetings or conversations. They were to either play outside or sit and listen, but you didn't talk much. So, my relationship with my grandfather was just seeing him, saying hello, and maybe sitting on the porch with him for a while.

FLECK: What kind of work did your father do?

ROBERTS: He was a plumber in Waco. He came from Oklahoma. I have wonderful memories of my father. He was very firm, spoke to you only one time.

FLECK: What were the names of your mother's parents, your grandparents?

ROBERTS: The last name was Williams. My mother's father passed away in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. I don't know what year. I really didn't know him. I knew my mother's mother. She remarried after the depression, and her name became Sarah Thomasson.

FLECK: Okay, What kind of work did your mother's parents do?

ROBERTS: Not any that I know of. Mr. Thomasson had quite a bit of money at that time but lost most of it in the Depression. The only thing that I have from him was his diamond ring, which is a 3 1/2 caret diamond. It is beautiful.



*Unemployed men outside a soup kitchen opened by Al Capone in Depression-era Chicago, Illinois, U. S. in 1931.
--courtesy Wikipedia*

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Great Depression was the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world, beginning in the United States, lasting from 1929 to 1939. It began after the stock market crash of October 1929, which sent Wall Street into a panic and wiped out millions of investors. --courtesy Wikipedia

Grandmother was a sweetheart, one of those dear little grandmothers. We were all special to her; especially one of my brothers who was her favorite, not I. I was the favorite of my daddy's mother who was a true Indian squaw. She would buy me boots and candy and so forth, and wouldn't buy anything for the other kids. She would tell me not to share.

FLECK: What were your father and your mother's names?

ROBERTS: My father's name was Emmett Floyd Roberts. Mother was Lenora Catherine Roberts. She was a musician. My father was in a motion pictures. He managed theaters throughout Texas, Abilene, Manor, Waco, which was the Hippodrome back in those days and later became the Waco Theater. Now it is back to the Hippodrome which the historical society refurbished. Mother played the organ and the piano in the theaters back in the silent days. I had all the scores for the music and so forth. She passed away in 1996, and at the time, she was the oldest licensed union musician in the state of Texas. She played for Bob Hope and President Johnson and recorded in California. She took sheet music for piano and transcribed it to organ music because back in those days they did not have a lot of organ music. You know like '*Song of India*' and some of the popular things. She spent some years out in California doing that. She was very gifted. Very talented lady.

FLECK: How many children did your parents have?

ROBERTS: They had five. My sister, Dorothy, was the first child, and she died at eighteen months.

FLECK: What is your place in the birth order?

ROBERTS: I was the last. I was the baby! (joyfully)

FLECK: All right, lets move forward to when you did come to Fulshear.

ROBERTS: Yes, in 1967. Fulshear had a population of under 300 hundred people, in fact, 275 when we incorporated. To be able to incorporate we had to have at least 250. I chose Fulshear because it was close to the school districts I was working with; Houston Independent School District (ISD) and the various school districts from Spring Branch to Pasadena, to neighboring school systems. Back then, we did not have any schools out here. The kids in my family went to Lamar Consolidated. We attended five elementary schools before we got into junior high. Young families were coming out here to live. They had children, and when they found out there wasn't a school they weren't really interested in moving to Fulshear. Besides there was no development going on at that time.

Weston Lakes was the first sub-division that we really started in the Fulshear area. As you know, that started on my patio in the back with Jimmy Hill and Peren White. We had Bruce Belin do the development. I traveled around at times to New Orleans, talking to oil companies that were planning to move and locate in Houston and introduced Weston Lakes to them. We held a conference with some of the big executives up there and had a barbecue. That club house was supposed to be about four times larger than what it is. But because of the economy in the late eighties, that put a damper on it.

FLECK: The railroad was still running at that time?

ROBERTS: Yes, oh, yea. Yea it just tooted, TOOOT! All during the night you could hear them. We miss those sounds. We also had cattle drives right down the streets here, still. Horseback cowboys with spurs and boots! Coming right through my yard, going down to the 24 acres at the end of Wilson and Second Street and Third Street, to the Huggins property. Especially when they were separating the calves from the mama cows.

FLECK: What ranches were those from?

ROBERTS: Mostly Huggins' and the Harris' and so forth.

FLECK: Fulshear didn't have a library did they?

ROBERTS: No, no.

FLECK: Did you help get the library in? Tell me about that.

ROBERTS: Let me tell you first about the one in Richmond, that's my baby. I graduated from Baylor University, and the gentleman that was the head of the money for the George Foundation was a lawyer who graduated from Baylor University as well. When they built a library in Needville and we built one in Stafford, it didn't cost either city any money.

Then the gentleman called me, “Are you ready to start the library in Fort Bend County?” I said, “You know I am.” Judge Jodie Stavinoha had just come into office. He said, “Jamie, I can buy this property for the Fort Bend County Library for two million dollars. Can you imagine a building here with children looking out over the golf course and the trees?” I said, “Yes.” The county commissioners were great ole boys, good people who cared absolutely nothing about education and libraries. Roads, bridges that was it.

The county commissioners met on Mondays back then. Every Monday I was there. Being head of the library, I hired the people, did the budget and so forth. He said, “We’ve got to get them to agree that the money we raise won't go into the building fund for roads and bridges, but to build a library.” In that particular month, the commissioner in charge was Johnny Puska. I told him, “Johnny I want a letter from the court stating that the money we raise will go into building a library and not into any other fund.” They came back and said, “We agree to give you a letter if you will give us a letter stating that you will not ask the county for one penny to build that library with tax dollars.” I said, “You got it.” So, I typed up the letter and stated that we would not ask.

Today that building, which is all granite and marble with an amphitheater, is one of the finest libraries in the state for a city of our size. Including the building, the furniture, the land and all other costs, we did not take one penny of tax dollars to build it. It was all donated; individuals made donations, oil companies put in the 95% and 2 or 3% came from the George Foundation.

FLECK: Once that was complete, it was the closest library that anyone living in Fulshear would have access to?

ROBERTS: Yes, the old library was next to Polly Ryon (now OakBend Hospital,). It became a police station and so forth. That little library was so crowded that we had books in the restrooms. We also had a library book service out here to Fulshear with a bookmobile.

FLECK: When did they get the Bob Lutts library?



Going to the Bookmobile, ca. 1948

--Courtesy wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com

ROBERTS: Bob was probably one of the most educated commissioners that we had. He owned a food company and had a college degree. He was a good man to work with. When I was in charge of the library fund, we always told Fulshear and Simonton that the next library would be out in this area. When Bob decided to build a library, the idea became very popular because of the success of the George Memorial Library. He decided not to build it here. He was going to build it in Cinco Ranch area.

FLECK: What made them change their mind and put it in Fulshear then?

ROBERTS: I talked to him. I said, "Bob, Cinco is going to need a larger facility than what your planning on building. Go ahead and put that one here, and I'll help to make sure that you get a really fine library in Cinco." And he agreed to it.

FLECK: You've brought in some newspaper clippings?

ROBERTS: Yes. The first building you see in the newspaper article is a double...it was a hotel facility and dry goods stores. The sidewalk back then was wood. [Jamie could you scan the photo that goes with the article and provide it to us?]

FLECK: This was prior to the fire of 1910.

ROBERTS: This is before the fire.

FLECK: What is there now where that hotel is?

ROBERTS: Oh, well now it is the Shell station. Continue this away back toward highway 359, you'll see this building which later became called One Fulshear Plaza. This corner of the building was the dry good cotton buying from Mr. Hunter Harris, who owned the property, which is now Weston Lakes. The rest of it is dry goods and at one time a saloon.

The side of this building was known to have bullet holes in it from cowboys. Back on the weekends, the cowboys would come into town down Main Street and going on FM 359 toward Brookshire heading north. That street was so loaded with cowboys that you could hardly walk down the street without bumping shoulders. Oh, you know as cowboys do, they'd get a little too much in as far as drinking (chuckles) and their girlfriends shooting their guns in the air having a good time. Once in awhile they would get arrested. The local people built a jail. It was on the back road from what is now the downtown buildings near Ray and Pepperonis. It was double wood construction, so they couldn't break out. It had a dirt floor and a cot that was tied with rope for a mattress to lie on. That was all that was in there. The window to the door was diamond shaped.

FLECK: Who told you these stories?

ROBERTS: Dozier and some of the old town folks. We asked, “What was this structure? It doesn't look like a smoke house. He said that it was the jail where they had them sleep it off.

ROBERTS: Ed Huggins, had a strip of land there and I think that was on his property. We had a drive for the school bus to pull back there in a shed built for the kids to stand under to keep out of the weather in case it was raining and so forth. It was torn down probably by Lamar Consolidated.

You asked me about the Post Office. The Post Office was next door to Meyer's store which is on the corner where Rays is located today.

FLECK: Okay, but this is where the L. A. Briscoe Post Office was, where Rays is now?

ROBERTS: Right in that area. That was the only post office we had, and everybody that had mailboxes had to come to the post office. I had one of the original mailboxes from the old post office. It stayed in operation until we opened the new one. The new one was located where Wallace State Bank is. I was involved in opening that as mayor of the city at that time. We still don't have a house delivery for mail. The town of Fulshear has to go to the post office to get mail, which is confusing to a lot of UPS people.

FLECK: (chuckle) Can you tell me one of your favorite and most vivid memories of Fulshear? If someone asked you what was your favorite, most...

ROBERTS: The people. Oh, I love the people. You know, let me tell you a quick story. When we moved out here, we had one child, and my wife was pregnant with our second child. Mr. Dozier had moved from the corner over across the street from Meyers store, which today is called the Sweet Tooth. That was his barbecue place, and he had saw dust on the floor.

FLECK: That was the first Doziers?

ROBERTS: First Doziers. He opened up the new one which is still located up the street going toward Brookshire on FM 359. He came over to my house and said, “HERE!” He handed me a key, and I said, “What's that for.” He said, “This is the key to my store. Don't call me at two o'clock in the morning needing milk or formula for this new baby.” He said, “You go get it, and then tell me.”

I had a charge account there. I still have that same charge account today. I charge everything I buy at Doziers and I pay that bill as soon as I receive it, usually the same day. They have continued, I guess, for us old folks. But that's the way it was. I had a key probably to almost every ranch gate around.

We used to gather our corn during the corn season at what's now Weston Lakes. It was run by a caretaker by the name of Self (spelled) S E L F. He was related to Bo Self and the Self's that used to live in the outskirts of town here. As a group of families, the Meyers, Doris Jones and Sewen Jones, Lee John Bentley and Carol Bentley, and all those would go out there and fill the back of a pickup full of corn. We'd come back to my house and shuck it. Half of it, the ladies would can. We would cook the rest of it. We had a big old pot, you know. We cooked it, put a lot of butter on it, and always jumped in my swimming pool afterward. I always said I had a butter ring around my pool.

FLECK: (hearty laugh)

ROBERTS: Those are things we used to do as a community. We kind of grew up together, and many of their children still live here. I have three sons today. Two of them still live in Fulshear and have raised their families here, and there's one traitor who moved to New Territory.

Interview ends