

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Lauraine Ognoskie**

Interview Date: 11/17/2015

Interviewers: Jane Goodsill and Bill Duggan

Transcriber: Megan Moore

Comments: This is part of a series on the history of the building at 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas, where the interview was conducted.

15 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: Today is November 17, 2015. My name is Jane Goodsill and Bill Duggan is interviewing with me. We are interviewing Lauraine Ognoskie for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project for the series on the history of the building at 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas. It's my understanding that this building had three usages. First it was a jail, then it was a Juvenile Detention Center, and now it's the Office of Emergency Management. Would you tell us which of those you worked in?

OGNOSKIE: The jail. I started in May of 1974.

GOODSILL: What was your job?

OGNOSKIE: I was a Clerk. I typed deputy's reports. At that time, deputies wrote their reports by hand, and the next day I would come in and pick up all the reports and Joan Jankowiak and I would type them. Prior to working here I worked at Needville High School as a Teacher's Aid. We were given hand written tests and we typed them so that we could make copies.

GOODSILL: So you were a good typist?

OGNOSKIE: I don't know. I wouldn't say that. (laughing)

GOODSILL: You were adequate. The typing that you did as a clerk at the jail required accuracy more than speed?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: What kind of things were in those reports?

OGNOSKIE: Thefts, burglaries and crimes against people.

GOODSILL: Who they arrested, and where they were, and what they said?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, ma'am, all the details.

GOODSILL: You knew everything that was going on?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, ma'am. When they'd make an arrest they had to take a statement or an affidavit. I would sit in and either hand write or type the content of the interview.

GOODSILL: Could you tell sometimes when somebody was not telling the truth?

OGNOSKIE: I didn't try to do that. I was told that, "You know nothing about what you're typing." So I would type and if a deputy or an officer would say, "Well, what do you think, Lauraine?" I would say, "I didn't read it."

GOODSILL: So it was high confidentiality. They didn't really want you to have opinions. They wanted you to get just the facts?

OGNOSKIE: Just do the work.

GOODSILL: How 'bout that. It took a certain kind of personality to do that.

OGNOSKIE: I feel like maybe I trained myself to do that and I really feel like that still affects me. Even if I watch a television program, if you ask me what it was about, I may not know. I listen, I watch, but I don't remember it. That's how I did my job. I typed what I saw.

GOODSILL: It's almost like you were a recording instrument.

OGNOSKIE: Probably. Now then, when they took affidavits or statements I had to listen. But I really don't remember anything.

GOODSILL: You listened without judgment. That wasn't your job. Your job was to get it all down.

OGNOSKIE: That's right.

GOODSILL: So, let's go back. You started in May of 1974, and my notes say that the jail opened in 1954.

OGNOSKIE: I don't know when this jail opened.

GOODSILL: Well, it had been around for twenty years by the time you joined it. The first day that you came here did they show you around?

OGNOSKIE: No, ma'am.

GOODSILL: They never showed you around?

OGNOSKIE: No, ma'am. Joan Jankowiak started about two weeks before I did. We both came in May. However, she was pregnant and she was going to work part time until after the baby. I was expecting relatives from Illinois, so I asked the Sheriff if I could start permanently after they left because I wanted to be home for them. We both came in May.

GOODSILL: From the get-go you were typing reports?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, right from the get-go she took me into that small room.

GOODSILL: Which room?

OGNOSKIE: What is now Jeff Braun's office and we started typing.

GOODSILL: You did? (laughs)

OGNOSKIE: That was it. She told me that she'd never been upstairs. Until today I have never been upstairs.

GOODSILL: Wow!

OGNOSKIE: Never.

GOODSILL: Well it was mainly a male dominated domain. They didn't want women upstairs.

OGNOSKIE: No.

GOODSILL: But you knew there were cells. Did you know some of the officers?

OGNOSKIE: I don't think I knew any of them.

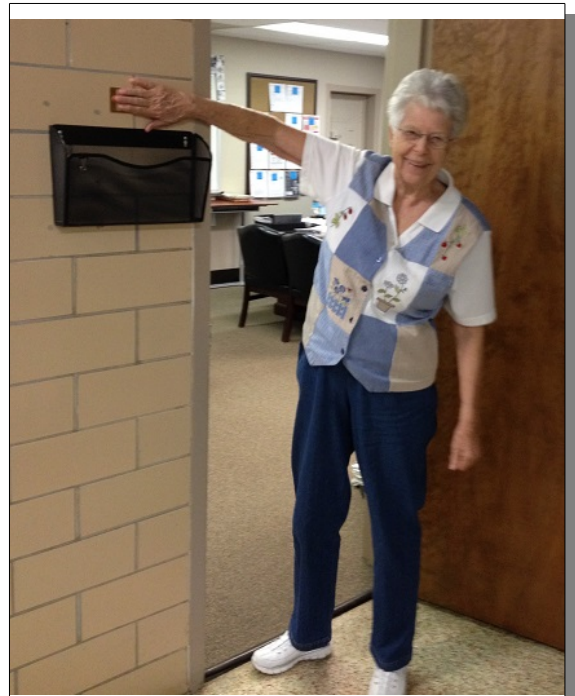
GOODSILL: They kept separate. No intermingling between the officers and the clerks?

OGNOSKIE: No, they would come in. We'd have conversations. Some would say, "Good morning, how are you?" Most of the time the reports were thrown in a basket. We'd take them out and type them. We'd see the deputies. At that time there was three or four detectives; Herb Owens, A. J. Ramos, John Farrer... They didn't have an office.

GOODSILL: They didn't?

OGNOSKIE: There was no detective's office, until we moved out in the garages.

GOODSILL: The garage is in what they now call the media room?



Lauraine standing in the door of her former office.

OGNOSKIE: Joe Thorpe, then myself, A. J. Ramos, Herb Owens, John Farrer, and a Texas Ranger, Jerry Clements.

GOODSILL: Good memory. Way to go, Lauraine! (laughs) Long time ago, wasn't it?

OGNOSKIE: Then along came another detective, Danny Rich.

GOODSILL: You know, I didn't start the interview by asking you your date of birth. Would you be willing to give that to us?

OGNOSKIE: June 24, 1930.

GOODSILL: So you were 44 at the time you were working here?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: Did you do anything other than clerical skills, typing the reports?

OGNOSKIE: No ma'am. My job was typing reports, affidavits and taking statements. When females were transported, sometimes Joan went, or sometimes Mrs. Pochyla would go, but usually the chief deputy would ask me to ride.

GOODSILL: So what was involved when you went on a ride?

OGNOSKIE: Just escort.

GOODSILL: Where would they go to and from?

OGNOSKIE: We would take them to Austin or there was another location of a female prison out in East Texas I went to.

GOODSILL: Really? (laughing) Long way. So you would go just to be sort of a chaperone?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: Not a man alone with a woman in the car?

OGNOSKIE: That's correct.

GOODSILL: So they were then being released from the jail to go to some prison?

OGNOSKIE: Or a mental health facility in Austin.

GOODSILL: So it was a busy job?

OGNOSKIE: Yes. Eight hours a day every day.

GOODSILL: Of all the people I've interviewed I haven't heard one single person talk about paperwork. You're the first. People don't think when, they think about a jail, about the paperwork that's involved to run it.

OGNOSKIE: We would type the copies. After we finished the report it had one, two, three, four, five sheets, carbon copies. We distributed the copies. One to the sheriff. One or probably two to the chief deputy. One for him to distribute to a detective. After they were all separated and distributed we would type what we called, a complainant card. It was a three by five card and included the date, the name of the complainant, a description of the offense, and the location of the offense.

GOODSILL: And the name of the officer, maybe?

OGNOSKIE: I don't think we wrote the name of the officer.

GOODSILL: So this was your system to keep track of these reports?

OGNOSKIE: Yes. We would type a one complainant card about each offense. On that same offense we'd type a location card and we'd file it by location. Complainants were filed alphabetically. A location card. Then if a TV was stolen, we'd type up the kind of television, who the complainant was. If a gun was stolen in that same burglary, we would type a card giving information about the gun. If a piece of furniture was stolen we'd have a different card for it.

GOODSILL: You were doing what computers do now; cross referencing so no matter which way you want to look up this information, you've got it?

OGNOSKIE: If we recovered a stolen television we would have to go through the 3" x 5" cards that had TVs and find a serial number or identification to match that television and give it to the detective.

GOODSILL: Excellent. I get it.

OGNOSKIE: We did a lot of three by fives!

GOODSILL: You did? And there had to be a specific organization to things.

OGNOSKIE: Yes ma'am.

GOODSILL: Who came up with the system?

OGNOSKIE: It was here when I came.

GOODSILL: Was it a pretty good one?

OGNOSKIE: For that time, yes. Joan Jankowiak stayed in this building and I went out to the detectives in the garage. I typed cards to keep out in the garage. She typed cards to keep in this building.

GOODSILL: So they could have two sets?

OGNOSKIE: We had two sets.

GOODSILL: So the detectives didn't have to go from here to there to find what they wanted? It was all right in their little area. What year was that, that you moved out to the garages?

OGNOSKIE: I would say 1975.

GOODSILL: How long did you work in this building?

OGNOSKIE: Well, basically all 17 ½ years.

GOODSILL: You did this for 17 ½ years? (incredulously)

OGNOSKIE: Yes ma'am, in some capacity but in different buildings; the old jail, the garages (as the detective bureau referred to them) and the new jail.

GOODSILL: Did the system ever change?

OGNOSKIE: When we got on computers.

GOODSILL: When was that?

OGNOSKIE: That would have been the early eighties.

GOODSILL: Oh, that must have been a hard learning curve, learning a computer?

OGNOSKIE: (laughing) I didn't want to. I wanted to be able to retire.

GOODSILL: But it was too soon?

OGNOSKIE: (still laughing) I wasn't old enough to retire.

GOODSILL: How many typists were there when you started?

OGNOSKIE: Two in the detective bureau. There were others in the records division. They'd type up the reports and send it to the printer in our office.

GOODSILL: Oh, you had printers then? They would be typing on computers by this time?

OGNOSKIE: Yes ma'am.

GOODSILL: Typing on a computer wasn't too much of a transition for you?

OGNOSKIE: No.

GOODSILL: That was an improvement over typewriters, don't you think?

OGNOSKIE: Oh, yes.

GOODSILL: When you started, what kind of typewriter were you typing on?

OGNOSKIE: I had an electric but there were some manuals here. I was the lucky one and I had an electric.

GOODSILL: Do you remember IBM Selectrics? Weren't those great?

OGNOSKIE: Oh, yes. (both laughing) When I was at the school the machines were manual where you had to put pressure on the keys.

DUGGAN: I was wondering if you had any famous people arrested? Did Bonnie and Clyde ever come through? Are you still held to confidentiality after all this time?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, I think so. I just kind of eliminated remembering things like that. The only thing I could think of every time they'd walk by my desk, was how sorry I felt for them. I always felt like a person that does wrong has a mental problem. I really felt sorry for them.

GOODSILL: Well let me ask you this, did the nature of the crimes change? When you first started you were doing television thefts. Fifteen years later...?

OGNOSKIE: (sighs) We had more crimes against people in the later years than we did when I first started.

GOODSILL: Did you have to type up the reports verbatim or could you correct?

OGNOSKIE: No, ma'am. Verbatim.

GOODSILL: If the writing officer didn't have good grammar you wouldn't correct it?

OGNOSKIE: No, ma'am.

GOODSILL: I bet you could have though.

OGNOSKIE: (laughs) Well there always was a challenge. We took the reports out of the basket as they came. But we had special ones we would rather type, some were easier to read. But no, they were typed as they were written.

GOODSILL: And some people were probably very verbose and some people were very succinct.

OGNOSKIE: Yes. (laughing) After we moved into the garages, the chief deputy had me come to work at seven. I would be the first one. He wanted me to go through all the reports, pick out the ones that I thought needed to be priority to work on first. Of course, I would have to assign each report an offense number. We had a large book with offense, complainant, type of offense, location. That all had to be recorded in this book. So I was coming to work at seven and I would go through all of the reports, assign the number, and then take priorities out and start typing.

GOODSILL: This would require somebody with a fairly organized brain. There were a lot of steps that had to be done. You had to go through the log, and you had to do the report, and then you had to do the three by fives, and you had to file them all. So being a person who could categorize things was a helpful skill to have.

OGNOSKIE: Oh, yes.

GOODSILL: Was Joan like that, too?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, yes.

GOODSILL: They probably had no idea when they were hiring clerks that they should be looking for that skill?

OGNOSKIE: (with humor) Probably not.

GOODSILL: But they got you gals. And they were probably lucky. (both laugh)

OGNOSKIE: I would say Joan was probably faster in typing than I was.

GOODSILL: Yeah. But there was a lot to that job, and as we say, speed wasn't of the essence, but accuracy was.

OGNOSKIE: Yes, Ma'am.

GOODSILL: What would happen if you made a typo?

OGNOSKIE: Oh, in those days we had white-out. Of course, that didn't help the carbon copies.

GOODSILL: (laughs) Hasn't White-out improved over the years?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: Yes, now it's like magic.

OGNOSKIE: Yes, I noticed a clerk using that the other day and I thought, "Oh my gosh, if we'd only had it."

GOODSILL: If only, if only. Did you actually use carbon paper?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, five pieces per report. They came assembled and at the end we were able to take them apart by putting your hand at the top part and tearing them apart. Then the carbons, all together would go in the waste basket.

OGNOSKIE: We had clipboards fastened in the hall and they were according to offenses. You filed them numerically. Or you hung them on the clipboards. Burglaries, thefts, vehicle thefts...

GOODSILL: That's a whole other level of organization you had to do?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, Ma'am. Rape. We didn't have a lot of rapes. But all of that was filed in the hall.

GOODSILL: Did you feel this was a safe place to work?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, I wasn't afraid. Yes, it was safe. I had one little episode, and I really didn't know it was happening. I was walking with a female prisoner from the female side downstairs, and I was a little bit in front of her, I guess. First thing I knew; the officer had caught her arms. She was attempting to hit me.

GOODSILL: And the officer grabbed her before she could hit you?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, he stopped her, yes. We were transporting her.

GOODSILL: She was going to do a getaway? You were going to be her first victim?

OGNOSKIE: I guess (laughs). But that was the only time. I just never was afraid. I spent a lot of time in the garages by myself. Everybody, the detectives and everybody, gone. A gentleman came in and brought a gun. I don't know if he found it or if he had recovered it. I don't know, but he brought a gun in. He sat it in the corner, or he came in with it, and I said, "Just put it there in the corner."

DUGGAN: A long gun?

OGNOSKIE: A shotgun. I went on about my typing, and a little bit later I got a phone call that we were going to be bombed. That didn't bother me.

DUGGAN: Did you get those kinds of calls often?

OGNOSKIE: No. Then we had a lady come in that said she was raped. I was sent out with she and Officer Park Slott to the location. When we got out there I said, "Park, you know what? First that gentleman brought that gun in and then I got a phone call that we were gonna be bombed and now this. Do you think we ought to call back to the office?" (all laugh)

OGNOSKIE: I think he radioed back in, I don't remember, but nothing ever happened.

GOODSILL: Was there very much security in this building?

OGNOSKIE: None other than the officers coming and going.

GOODSILL: It was nothing like when you go to the airport today.

OGNOSKIE: Oh, nothing, nothing.

GOODSILL: You had a key. You could come and go whenever you wanted.

OGNOSKIE: Yes, Ma'am. This building was always open in the mornings. When I was outside in the garages, then I had a key and I would open it and go in.

GOODSILL: This jail was manned twenty-four hours a day, so there was always somebody here, and there was always an officer here?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, always.

GOODSILL: Probably the safest place to work in town.

OGNOSKIE: Probably.

GOODSILL: Except for that shotgun and the bomb. (all laugh)

OGNOSKIE: I have to laugh about that. The only other two ladies were Jean Pochyla and the warrants clerk.

GOODSILL: What does a warrants clerk do?

OGNOSKIE: After an indictment a warrant is issued through the Sheriff's Department. It was recorded in a book. Then it was given to a warrant officer. We had deputies that took reports and we had warrant officers. Mrs. Pochyla was in charge of recording those and giving those to the warrant officer.

GOODSILL: Was that a full time job?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: Really? There were that many warrants?

OGNOSKIE: Yes. And we had civil warrants. Joe Wayne Gold was in charge of civil warrants and Betsy McInvale was his clerk.

GOODSILL: Wow. A lot going on in this county.

OGNOSKIE: Not only did they do the warrant division. Whenever there was going to be a jury trial, we would type jury notices. Maybe two hundred.

GOODSILL: What is a jury notice? Calling somebody in to do jury duty?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, ma'am.

GOODSILL: Two hundred for each trial?

OGNOSKIE: Depending on the type of trial.

GOODSILL: You did those?

OGNOSKIE: I helped them in my spare time. Especially the civil warrants. We typed their name on the letterhead, make copies, and typed the envelopes.

GOODSILL: Well there's a lot of paperwork if you're going to get two hundred people to come to be vetted for jury duty.

OGNOSKIE: It was different amounts each time. It was never the same.

GOODSILL: Well, one interesting aspect of this is that in 1974 the population of the county was increasing, fast.

OGNOSKIE: Oh, yes, fast.

GOODSILL: Do you remember anything about that?

OGNOSKIE: Other than I had heard that we were the fastest growing county in Texas.

GOODSILL: Right. And so, you were here when it was hopping. Because as population increases, sometimes crimes and arrests and police activity increases.

OGNOSKIE: Oh, yes. When I started here I couldn't say how many deputies we had working the East end. But usually it was one deputy on the West end of the county. The rumor was, if you have trouble out on the West end, the citizens will help you.

GOODSILL: Ah, is that right?

OGNOSKIE: But if you had trouble on the East end, you needed more deputies.

GOODSILL: That's interesting. I haven't had anybody tell me that either. That's interesting. The citizens would help?

OGNOSKIE: Would help an officer.

GOODSILL: Yes.

OGNOSKIE: If an officer needed help, they could depend on the citizens. So we never had as many – we usually just had one deputy cover the West end.

GOODSILL: That's interesting. So now, back to all your typing. Did you ever have any injuries or pain from doing so much repetitive typing?

OGNOSKIE: No (whispered). And I am thankful for that.

GOODSILL: Yeah, it would be wearing – seventeen and a half years of typing like that. Look at your hands, they're just straight as they can be. We should take a picture of your hands.

OGNOSKIE: No (laughs).

GOODSILL: (laughing) They look good!

OGNOSKIE: No! That's country hands. Farm hands.

GOODSILL: Yeah? That's what you did in your spare time?

OGNOSKIE: Yes.

GOODSILL: You lived on a farm?

OGNOSKIE: Yes, all my life. We lived at Needville on the farm. We grew cotton, milo, things like that, and we had cows.

GOODSILL: As a girl did, you do the planting and the harvesting?

OGNOSKIE: Oh, I did a lot of it before I went to work anywhere.

GOODSILL: Working might have been a relief to you! (both laugh)

OGNOSKIE: In 1976 we moved to Cottonwood Church Road. From then on all we had was cattle. We built a red brick house and we had red cows.

GOODSILL: Red cows. These cows were pets?

OGNOSKIE: To me, they were pets. We didn't use them for milk or anything. We just raised calves and took them to the market.

GOODSILL: So when you'd come home from work, you would do some of the farm chores?

OGNOSKIE: Oh yes!. Cattle is my thing.

GOODSILL: What was your husband's name and main occupation?

OGNOSKIE: Albert Lee. He was a machinist. He died in 2005. The kids thought I was working too hard and wanted me to sell the cattle. So I did. I was MISERABLE. I went to the same man and bought some more red ones. I was living in Needville and I would come over to Cottonwood, and I'd work. If the top of the barn needed painting, I'd get on top of the barn.

GOODSILL: At this age?

OGNOSKIE: This age. Eventually I sold them again and rented out the pasture.

DUGGAN: Do you know any ghost stories about this building?

OGNOSKIE: No, I don't.

GOODSILL: There were stories back then. They probably didn't tell you anything so you wouldn't be freaked out.

OGNOSKIE: Maybe so. I didn't know that.

GOODSILL: Well, this was great. I think we should take a walk around the premises and you can point out a few things, the way they used to be.

Interview Ends