

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Linda L. S. “Muffie” Moroney**

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Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Comment: For the Fort Bend County Museum Association, DeWalt Heritage Project. Mrs. Moroney was interviewed in Houston, Texas

20 Pages



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Transcript

WARE: First of all, I want to start with some basic biographical information. When and where were you born?

MORONEY: I was born in 1943 in Washington D. C. My father was in the Navy during World War II. We moved temporarily to Washington along with much of the Houston business community. My father was a stock and bond broker. The Secretary of the Navy, who I believe was Brown Baker, asked the Houston business community to come to Washington to help run the Department of the Navy in a business-like way. So there were lots of Texans and Houstonians in Washington during the war.

WARE: Including Jesse Jones?

MORONEY: Yes.

WARE: So where did you and your sister grow up?

MORONEY: In Houston and Fort Bend County

WARE: Where in Fort Bend?

MORONEY: Partly in each county — at this house when it was on Highway 6 in DeWalt. It was then the country.

WARE: How much time did you spend out at the house in DeWalt?

MORONEY: A lot. Many weekends with my great-aunt or my maternal grandmother, Mae Robinson who lived in Missouri City.

WARE: Your grandfather died just a couple of years after you were born. Do you have any memory of him?

MORONEY: None, unfortunately. I hear he was a great guy.

WARE: What things have you heard?

MORONEY: I've heard he was very kind, very approachable, very real, not arrogant or stuck up. He was a farmer. He went to Texas A&M back when the whole student body was male and Corps of Cadets. It was free then.

WARE: Because he was in the Corps it was free?

MORONEY: Yeah. I think they paid them some small stipend. When my mother went to Rice it was free. Did you know it was free until the 1960s?

WARE: Tell me about your mother.

MORONEY: She was a country girl, but had the dual exposure to the city and the country, as I did in my childhood. She was born in and grew up in Missouri City, which was then a much smaller, rural community. Her parents, my grandparents, wanted her to have the best education that was available, and she was able to be accepted at Rice; no tuition under the terms of the will of William Marsh Rice, which was later broken during the 1960s when I was in college. She majored in art history, and went on from there to a career as an interior designer/decorator.

She married her first husband, who was a member of the Coolidge family. There were two branches basically of the Coolidge family, career military and political. Calvin Coolidge, the President, was some sort of kin. Her husband was career Army. His name was Charles Austin Coolidge, III. Unfortunately, he died within about a year of when they were married. He developed appendicitis and it ruptured. This was before the days of antibiotics, and he was dead! She inherited from his family many objects of art you will see over there in that cabinet; some Chinese things. His grandfather was the commander of the battalion in Peking during the Boxer Rebellion. There were riots and people were going into temples and houses and throwing things out in the street. The story was that he and some other people went along with gunnysacks and just picked up things that were being looted. With her background in art from Rice and her appreciation for fine things, colors and spaces, she developed an appreciation for Asian art and artifacts.

After Tex died, she came back to Houston and began a career with Inez McHale. They founded the first interior decorating firm that was associated with the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the national professional decorating organization. She did that professionally for several years until she met Bob Moroney who was a confirmed bachelor, and she changed that (laughing).

WARE: How did they meet?

MORONEY: I think they met through mutual friends, which is always a good way.

WARE: Right. What stories did your mother share about her family?

MORONEY: Well, she was very comfortable in Fort Bend County. She loved horses and growing up we rode them. I've got some photographs of her on horseback. We would go hunting, duck hunting, bird hunting. She was a very good shot.

WARE: Did you go duck and bird hunting on the property?

MORONEY: On Oyster Creek, right across Highway 6. She spoke about her friends in Missouri City, growing up there and what a really safe environment that was.

WARE: Do you remember the names of any of her friends?

MORONEY: Yes, the Adams girls, Eloise Adams Jones who owns Ouisie's. She is the daughter of one of the Adams girls. It is a big family in Missouri City. Your history books will have a lot about the Adams.

WARE: Where did your mother live while she was growing up?

MORONEY: She lived in her parents' house, which is still there. It's on Main Street. I don't know the number. Is it FM 2234 that goes down to Blue Ridge?

WARE: Yes, it is FM 2234.

MORONEY: It is right near the corner of, I can't remember the name of the side street. But it's soon after you turn off of Hwy 90-A. My grandfather's store was right there on the right as you go down toward Blue Ridge.

WARE: Do you remember ever going in your grandfather's store?

MORONEY: I do!

WARE: Tell me about that.

MORONEY: I remember the smell of that store. Oh, I can't describe that, but if I smelled it again I could identify it. By then my grandfather was dead and my grandmother was the storekeeper by default. We lived with her for a while after we came back from the war because we didn't have any other place to live, and my father would ride the train into downtown Houston. There was a stop at Missouri City, so he'd take the train into work and take the train back. I wish they still had that service. It would help our traffic.

WARE: What do you remember about your grandmother?

MORONEY: I remember that she was sort of a sad person. She didn't smile a lot. As I was putting together some pieces of a family puzzle, I think I figured out why. I was looking at some property to buy in Sweet Home, Texas, near Hallettsville. That's where my grandmother was born. All of her immediate family, her full siblings and her father moved to Fort Bend County from there after her mother died. When I was looking at the dates of when her mother died and when they moved, my grandmother was seven, which is a very bad time to lose a parent. So she lost her mother and they moved across the state to a new place where she didn't know anybody. Two very traumatic events for a child. It's no wonder that she didn't smile much, she had a hard childhood. But she was great. She was very supportive of me. She would let me drive her old Ford when I could barely see over the steering wheel. We'd go down Fifth Street to have lunch with Aunt Jesse, my great-aunt and her sister in this house.

WARE: How old were you when you were driving your grandmother's car?

MORONEY: I was younger than ten, but there was no traffic then. Fifth Street was a gravel farm road. The only thing you'd see, maybe, would be somebody on horseback or a tractor. It was safe and I never had a wreck (laughter).

WARE: That's safe. What stories did your grandmother share with you about her family?

MORONEY: Well, her father was in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He's buried in Morton Cemetery in Richmond, and has some sort of Confederate Army designation on his headstone. So the Civil War was not too far away when I would hear her talk about him and her upbringing. We're still not over it. I've heard it said that it takes a country four hundred years to get over a civil war. So we are not even half way. But her treatment of black people, Negroes, colored people, as we call them, I think reflected a lot of the background of the Civil War that her father instilled in his children. He had originally been in Mississippi which was devastated by the war. So he moved to Texas.

She referred to them as (the "N" word) which was horrifying to my mother and me. It was contrary to everything that I was taught when I grew up. My parents were fiscal conservatives. My father being a stock and bond broker, part of the business community, was very conservative in his approach to financial matters. Socially they were very progressive. They were a kind of Republican that I think does not exist anymore. I think they have gone the way of the Dodo bird in the Republican Party, unfortunately.

Those were not the values that I was raised with, but that was who my grandmother was. She did not mean to be ugly when she called them (the "N" word). That was just the climate in which she was raised. That was not very far removed from when black people were property, not full human beings or citizens. So that is woven into my background as a child growing up in large measure on this place with black people. I was entrusted to their care as we would horseback ride across that property, work cattle, pick cotton, bale hay, and pull corn.

WARE: Did you help in those activities?

MORONEY: I did! I did under the supervision of black people and Mexican-Americans but we called them Mexicans.

WARE: Did most of the blacks and Mexicans actually live in DeWalt?

MORONEY: Yes, they did, in little shacks.

WARE: You spoke of your grandmother's attitude. Did her siblings carry the same attitude towards blacks, do you think?

MORONEY: The only one of her siblings that I really can say that I had an experience with was her sister, Jesse Dew Agnew, Auntie, who lived in the house and owned the house. I am under the impression that Auntie did not use that language. I never heard her use it. She owned that property. She was in a managerial and business position, which my grandmother was not. My Auntie was sort of the CEO of this plantation operation. She couldn't afford to alienate her help. I think she was very smart. We never discussed this because I was too young to have this kind of conversation with her.

WARE: Who lived in the Dew Plantation house during your childhood?

MORONEY: Jesse Agnew did as a recent widow. She was also married to a career Army officer, Colonel Ernest Agnew, who died when they lived at the Presidio in San Francisco. She moved back and had no children. So, in essence, my mother was her surrogate daughter. My sister and I were her surrogate granddaughters. She moved back to the place and moved in along with a half sibling of hers, Ruth Dew Lalley and her husband Walter Lalley. It was a big enough house to accommodate everybody. As soon as somebody would come back to live in it they'd add another room and another bathroom. It sort of grew like topsy.

Now those extra rooms have pretty much been taken off of the house. It's been restored to its original footprint. I know a number of rooms were removed. Lynn Edmunson took them off and salvaged what she could of the wood.

WARE: What do you remember about Ruth Dew Lalley?

MORONEY: She was a very gracious, generous person, who was married to a man who nobody seemed to like. He was very unfriendly and gruff. Before he died there was a falling out between Walter and Ruth on the one hand and Jesse on the other. They decided that they could not be co-owners of all of this property and this house, so they divided it, they partitioned it. Ruth basically took the land that became Quail Valley. Her house is still the house that she built when she and Walter moved out of this house. It is still on the banks of Oyster Creek off of FM 1092. Jesse took the land basically that was on the same side of Highway 6 as this house.

WARE: About how old were you when that split took place?

MORONEY: I think I was maybe ten or so. The family tried to shield my sister and me from those unpleasantries. Walter Lalley was not liked in my family. After he died I moved back in that house and was living very close to her. We actively worked on repairing that relationship that had been damaged earlier.

WARE: What sort of things did you do together?

MORONEY: We ate meals together and particularly when I started having children. She loved children, and she loved my first child, Robert. She just thought it was great that we had babies coming and living in that house again and that there were young children in the area. She'd buy him beautiful clothes and toys. We had a very nice relationship.

WARE: One of the things that strikes me about the Dew family, the eight siblings and then the four latter siblings with the stepmother is that there are twelve children. However, there were only four offspring in those twelve children, your mother being one of them. Did your mother ever speak about her cousins or interaction with her cousins?

MORONEY: I think they were pretty well scattered. Ruth had no children. Jesse had no children. Walter, George, and, Frank had no children. Mother knew Tommy DeWalt, Maggie's son, but he was younger, so there's an age difference. Fay Barnes was Henry's adopted daughter. I was close to Fay's children, particularly Henry, who's named for his grandfather.

WARE: What are your childhood impressions of the Dew house itself?

MORONEY: Well, I always associated it with very pleasant activities, going out there to spend the weekend to ride horseback, work cows and just wander around. It was country then with Highway 6 as a two lane road. One story to illustrate how remote that was when we were living in the house and Robert, my older son was born. I and my then husband owned and ran the Country Store. It was maybe two football fields down the highway right where Oilfield Road comes into Highway 6 just south of the house. It is not there anymore.

I was down working in the store one day as the Post Mistress. Robert decided he wanted to come down and see me. Somebody saw him riding down Highway 6 on his tricycle from this house and stopped to pick him up and take him back. (laughter)

WARE: Which would be a disaster nowadays.

MORONEY: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

WARE: Had that store been there for a while?

MORONEY: No, it was the successor to a store that had been on the other side of the railroad tracks that backed up to Oyster Creek.

WARE: Do you remember that earlier store?

MORONEY: Oh, I do!

WARE: What do you remember about it?

MORONEY: Well, smells again. It had a butcher shop. So I remember the smells of fresh meat, and merchandise, and sweet feed.

WARE: Do you remember anyone who worked in that store?

MORONEY: My great-aunt did!

WARE: Your Aunt Jesse?

MORONEY: Yeah.

WARE: Anyone else?

MORONEY: I don't remember. But there were a collection of photographs in storage. I think reproductions are in one of the history books of the commercial buildings that made up the community of DeWalt. It was a stop on the railroad from Angleton up to Sugar Land. There was a blacksmith shop, a cotton gin, the store. I'm not sure what else. Those are the main buildings that I remember.

WARE: Did the store have a name?

MORONEY: If it did, I'm not aware of it. It was all sort of Dew Brothers Mercantile entities. They even had their own money that they coined. I have some somewhere around here. Let's make a note to look for them. The workers on the land were sometimes paid in that Dew Brothers' money that they could then take to the store and turn in. It was not very far removed from the plantation economy of the prior century.

WARE: Or the company town economy?

MORONEY: Exactly, Sugar Land probably was that way.

WARE: I want to back up a little bit because I meant to ask you about your mother's education before Rice. Where did your mother attend school?

MORONEY: She attended school in Missouri City for a while, then she moved into Houston and lived with relatives. Oh, that's another cousin, Lily Veal Dew Brickman was the daughter of Doctor Hugh Saunders Dew, another one of the siblings. My mother lived with them and attended, I think, Central High School. Then she went for a year to finishing school at the Martha Washington Seminary in Washington, D. C. I've got her diplomas in storage. I don't know if I told you that my younger son and his wife and two year old granddaughter and their dog are living here right now as their house in Royden Oaks is renovated. So a lot of things are in storage just because there is not room here. After high school and finishing school, she went to Rice.

WARE: How long have you known Nancy Woods?

MORONEY: All of my life. She worked for Auntie when I was growing up. In fact, she would be put in charge of me. Bless her heart (laughs). I didn't know her obviously until we moved back to Houston, but I was still young then. I was two years old when the war was over. So you don't have too many memories that you can call up from that age. I've known her ever since I was mindful of what I was doing until now. I called her Nan-nan.

WARE: Would you share some shared experiences that you have had with Nancy Woods?

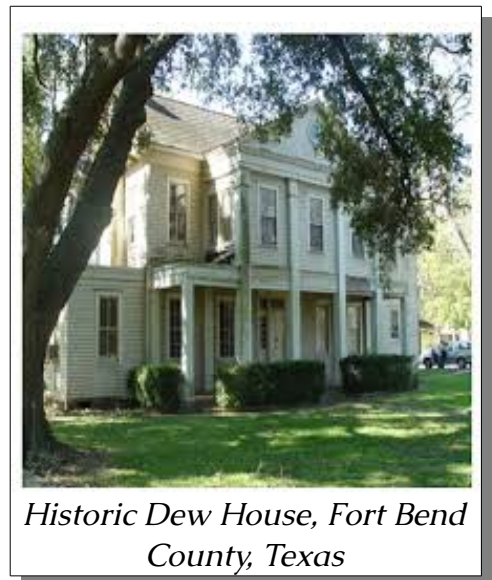
MORONEY: One of my earliest memories was during the 1950s when Texas and most of the country were still racially segregated. As part of Nan-nan's duties, she would try to entertain me. She's old enough to have a driver's license. So we would go to Sugar Land to the movies. She could not sit on the ground floor, so I would go and sit with her in the balcony with the rest of the black people. I can remember separate drinking fountains. You're apparently not from here, so you're looking surprised. I don't know where you grew up and whether the obvious signs of segregation were apparent in your community. I can remember going with her to a seafood restaurant over on West Gray in Houston near the River Oaks Center. There was a window in the restaurant where black people would come and get their food. They could not go inside.

WARE: When you went to the movies in Sugar Land was that the Palms Theater?

MORONEY: Yes, the Palms. It's not there anymore.

WARE: How often did the Dew extended family gather?

MORONEY: I remember getting together with cousins at various points in time for different functions. We would have Easter egg hunts at this house when I was growing up. That's was always a big gathering time. At that point, in my childhood, though, many people lived in Houston. So we'd see them from time to time in Houston in smaller groups.



WARE: Do you remember any other special occasions at the house?

MORONEY: Well, Christmas was a big holiday. Auntie began to give annual New Year's Eve parties that a lot of people from Houston would drive out for. That was a highlight for the guests as well as everybody else with lots of food and good drink.

We always ate plenty at that house from this table, in fact. This was in the dining room. Have you been in the Dew House to see how big that dining room is? I have the middle section that has a pedestal. It's been turned into a round table. Ruth got that as part of the division of the property. She took the top of it and made it round. But the pedestal I still have. So that would go in the middle and two leaves, one on either side of it. So by the time this table was fully extended it could seat twenty people.

During the times when work was going on, like working cows, the white help would be invited to come in and eat what was called dinner. The big meal was served in the middle of the day. We would stop work to eat dinner. It was usually hot and you wanted to eat plenty. So we'd have fried chicken, mashed potatoes, cornbread, green beans, okra gumbo which is sauteed okra and tomatoes. Much food and nobody was fat in those days because we all worked it off. (laughs)

WARE: Were there any of the Dew relatives that you considered a role model?

MORONEY: I considered my aunt, Auntie, a role model. She was in her way a pioneer businesswoman. We never talked about business. She made some decisions that looking back on it I question in terms of business judgment. But she came from a very different life as the wife of an Army officer to this position as head of this agricultural enterprise. She ran it well. She would entertain beautifully. She dressed beautifully. I have photograph of her when I was 8 or 10 with some old scruffy horses. And there she was in the pen with the horses with a beautiful dress on, jewelry and well-coiffed. She was always very well put together. She probably is flipping in her grave at the way I look sometimes when I'm gardening or come in from the country or go over to the Rice Food Market and run into people. (laughs) She was a very dignified person.

WARE: Describing her in the pen with you sounds like she may have been a very practical person also. Did she ever do any of the work herself around the plantation?

MORONEY: She did. She oversaw it so carefully that she would make sure it was done. Here is another memory that might be interesting to you. I remember going out to spend the weekend with her before the days of air conditioning. We slept with the windows open and ceiling fans, and it was actually cold even in the summer with fans going. I don't know what's happened to our climate, but it's not cold in the summertime here in the same way. You could hear the sounds of the outdoors. So in those days before air conditioning, before our houses were hermetically sealed, we slept with the windows open under ceiling fans and you could hear the noise of the surrounding area.

I was sound asleep one night and my Auntie came and woke me in the middle of the night. She said get up, get your clothes on because there's a cow out there that is in trouble trying to have a calf. I got up, put on my clothes. We went down to the house right behind this little country store where Slim Blake lived with his wife who was the cook in this house. She woke up Slim. He got in the car and we drove out in the field behind the house where she thought this cow was located.

In fact, this cow was down and the calf was breached. She couldn't get it out. So Slim let the lights of the car shine on the cow. Slim was able to pull the calf out and save the cow and the calf. She did not actually get out of the car and pull the calf out herself, but she knew that something had to be done or she'd have a dead cow. She was able to hear it because we didn't have air conditioning to muffle the noises of the outdoors.

WARE: Was Slim Blake's wife Eliza?

MORONEY: Effie, yes.

WARE: Did you ever hear trains while you stayed out there?

MORONEY: Oh, sure but not often. A train would go up to Sugar Land and then down to whatever the south terminus was. I don't think they ever came by at night. It'd be one a day and it wouldn't go very fast. I'd try to race it and do like the cowboys did in the movies back in those days. Poor old horse that I was riding. (chuckles)

WARE: Did you ever see the train stop and see it loaded with any kind of material?

MORONEY: Not that I can remember, but there was a siding that went over by the store and the blacksmith shop. I think it went down to the cotton gin.

WARE: Do you remember anything about the Hutchins family?

MORONEY: I've heard of them. They were not around in my childhood.

WARE: Do you know of anyone who's buried in that Dew Plantation area?

MORONEY: I don't aside from the DeWalt cemetery across Highway 6. I think there was a black cemetery in what was called the Sand Field, which is now part of Quail Valley. I don't know what the developers of Quail Valley did. Certainly they must have found those graves. I don't know what they've done. I know what they should have done.

WARE: Where was your mother living in the latter years of her life?

MORONEY: She was living in Houston, in River Oaks. We moved into that house, the last section of River Oaks. It was the last block before you got to Willowick. We bought it after somebody else built and lived there not very long.

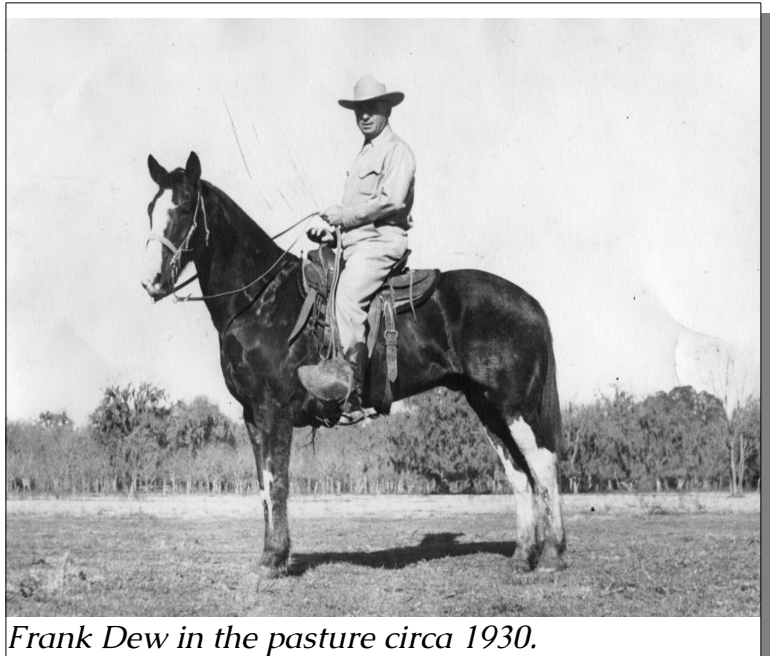
WARE: What do you remember the circumstances of your Auntie's death?

MORONEY: I was living in Virginia. All I know is what I had been told that she probably suffered a heart attack in the night. I understand that one the physical manifestations of a heart attack is that you can't breathe easily. I understand that she went to the window in her bedroom to open it, probably to help her breathe. She probably died and fell out the window in that sequence. They did an autopsy and they found that she did die of massive heart Houston attack. The speculation is that she was dead before she fell out the window.

WARE: Did your Auntie or your grandmother ever talk about the circumstances of their brother Frank's death?



Frank Y. Dew, principal owner of Dew's Ranch in Liberty and Chambers County. He was a rancher, lumberman, and rodeo producer in Houston.



Frank Dew in the pasture circa 1930.

WARE: Did your Auntie or your grandmother ever talk about the circumstances of their brother Frank's death?

MORONEY: A little. He was shot by a former or jilted girlfriend. I don't know her name but I heard she shot him while he was in bed with another woman. She was represented by Percy Foreman, who was then a young, highly regarded criminal defense lawyer here. He convinced the jury to acquit her because Uncle Frank died from the shock of seeing her and not from the bullet that she fired. Have you ever heard that?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Frank Y. Dew was shot and killed on April 29, 1941 by his girlfriend Lucyle Richards, a well-known rodeo performer at that time. She was acquitted in a highly publicized trial at Houston in December 1941, according to an online article at <http://lifeonthebrazosriver.com/Dew,%20Frank.htm>

WARE: I've heard of some unusual defenses, but not that. (laughter) Did the actual murder take place in Houston or out in DeWalt?

MORONEY: I'm not sure.

WARE: I would love to find those court records. What circumstances led to the move of the Dew House to Kitty Hollow Park?

MORONEY: The development of that region from rural agricultural country property to suburban Houston is what prompted it. As the owner of the property, I had to pay the taxes on it. We were able to get some relief from the taxes through agricultural treatment of the property.

he house and the surrounding yard was not agricultural nor was the commercial property that was occupied by the Country Store. Missouri City taxes are pretty stiff. So it was a financial burden. I was never going to live there again. The nature of the changes in my life around that house when I divorced and brought those two sons into Houston.

Then I went to law school. Houston has become the focus of my life. I still love the country, but I'm also a Houstonian. That commute from that area into Houston, well you know, I worked downtown at Vinson and Elkins for a number of years. I don't know how long it would have taken me to commute from there to downtown Houston.

It was a combination of factors that made it clear that I was never going to use that house. It was deteriorating and tremendously expensive to repair. I had a succession of tenants in it who did not take care of it well. Tenants often do not treat property well. It needed repairs even before it moved. So I was able to connect with Jim Arnold, who is a historic preservation architect and an adjunct professor at the U of H Architecture School. Do you know Jim?

WARE: I know of him.

MORONEY: He took on the documentation of the Dew House for a class project. The students came out and they measured, photographed, researched and did a report. I don't know if you've seen it.

WARE: Yes.

MORONEY: It was through Jim that I got to Lynn Edmonson and Historic Houston. I talked to a friend of mine who was on Bill White's staff in Houston. You know we've got that wonderful Sam Houston Park adjacent to downtown. This friend who was a lawyer said possibly the City of Houston might be interested in the house and advised me that I would be better off giving the house to a non-profit, and let the non-profit entity deal with the municipality rather than going directly to the city, or the county, or the whatever. So Jim suggested Lynn. It was a little bit of a stretch at first for Historic Houston because it's not in Houston, first of all. But clearly it is historic. She got excited about it. She got her board excited about it. They decided to take it on. She knows house movers. She does that all the time.



It was a very interesting coalition of public and private entities, of individuals and companies. We had Historic Houston, Jim Arnold, Johnson Development, which was developing Sienna Plantation then across from the park. We had the City of Missouri City and Fort Bend County. Sort of on the outskirts was the Fort Bend Museum, but they were not really in the center of the group that pulled this off. So it was amazing to see how that was able to take shape. I credit Lynn with much of the energy and imagination that was necessary and perseverance to pulling this off. There were several obstacles that came up along the way that made it seem that it was not going to happen.

WARE: Let's backup just a little bit before we continue in that train of thought. Tell me about how you came to live in the house.

MORONEY: Well, I was married, no children at that point and living in Virginia with my husband. He was not real satisfied with his career path there. He had been to the house at the time of our engagement and upcoming marriage. He knew my family, my great-aunt and my parents of course. My great-aunt had died and within six months of my mother dying suddenly of a stroke. The house was empty. My mother had suggested, obviously before she died, that we should consider moving back and taking up residence in the house. She thought that it needed to be lived in. It had a staff. Nancy Woods and Effie Blake were there.

In those days it was still an easy commute because there wasn't that much traffic to deal with. My husband interviewed with some television stations, and was convinced that it would be a good move to go with a TV channel. I forget who he went with first, either Channel 2 or 13. So we moved into the house before we had children. Then the kids came along.

WARE: Tell me about living there.

MORONEY: It was in some ways idyllic. It was in many ways a working place. It was not the size that it was at one point when the Dew brothers owned it. But we had cattle, chickens, a few pigs and sheep. It's not good territory for sheep. (laughs) We bought the store from the people who had run the store. They decided to move.

WARE: Who was that? Do you remember?

MORONEY: Roy Schmidt and his wife, Anita Schmidt. They moved closer to Austin. Due to the fact that my husband was working during the day and trying to play gentlemen farmer in his spare time, I did much of the work connected with the animals and the store. It was work and it was interesting. I learned a lot, but it was time consuming.

WARE: Tell me about raising children out there.

MORONEY: Robert was the only one who was old enough when we moved from there. There was no place to go to school. There was no Quail Valley. There were no daycare facilities. The closest school of any sort, I guess, was either Sugar Land or Stafford. It wasn't that much further to go to Houston. So he went to nursery school in Houston. I am going to suggest that you talk with them, particularly Robert, the older one. He would have more vivid memories of what it was like to be a child there. Justin, the younger one, said he'd be happy to talk to you, but he was so young that his memories are very spotty.

WARE: What years did you live in the Dew House?

MORONEY: It was about 1968 through 1975. By then my husband was thinking that it might be better to move back to Virginia for his career and for the sake of our marriage, which was beginning to show signs of stress and strain. So we moved back to Norfolk for a year to see if a change of location could fix some of these problems. It was clear at the end of that year that change of venue was not going to fix everything. So that's when the boys and I moved backed to Houston.

WARE: Did you ever experience or hear about any ghostly activities.

MORONEY: Yes. I don't know whether it is one or more. I believe it is called a poltergeist, which I understand is the spirit of a dead person who dies unexpectedly and the spirit is still around playing tricks. I never experienced any sort of aggressive or harmful behavior directed at me or my family, or my then husband or kids. But this is why I think it's a poltergeist; it could be Auntie or it could be Lord knows who else. There were plenty of people connected with that house through the years who had died. So what would happen is that mirrors would come off the wall. They'd be securely anchored and hung. In one case, one mirror above a chest of drawers dropped down and rested on the chest of drawers. It didn't break or hurt the chest of drawers. In another case, a mirror came off the wall and flipped over and was face down in the middle of a bedroom without breaking. Now that's weird! (laughter) I don't know how to explain that otherwise.

WARE: That happens during the day or night?

MORONEY: At night. I never saw these things happen. I would see what had happened after the fact. Nancy may have told you about her and Effie's experience when they were in the house after Auntie died and before we had moved back in. They would hear doors close upstairs, the sound of footsteps. I never did hear that.

WARE: When the mirror came off the wall, did you hear it?

MORONEY: No, I didn't. I just saw it the next day. Now, I don't place a lot of stock in those stories, but I believe that there could be such things. Those experiences at this house have convinced me that the spirit of somebody was doing something for some reason.

WARE: Did anyone other than Nancy ever report to you any type of activities?

MORONEY: Well, she and Effie did.

WARE: Now we are going to jump way back ahead again. Tell me about the farewell celebration for the house.

MORONEY: Well, it seemed to me that once I'd made the decision to give the house to Historic Houston, with the view toward its move down the highway; that it would be fitting to have a good send off because I had lots of friends and family who had memories of it. I would bring friends out there with me on the weekends. So a lot of my Houston friends who were classmates at St. John's School would remember coming out to ride horseback, work cows and all of that sort of thing.

So they all had very pleasant memories of it. It just seemed that it would be a fitting time to have a farewell party while it was still in its original location. A good friend of mine, Sally Fox, is an Episcopal priest and she's very gifted at writing liturgy, so she wrote a really wonderful short liturgy that everybody participated in. Lynn and Jim Arnold spoke. Steven Fox, I don't know if you know him, was out there. He spoke a little bit. It was a very fitting occasion to bring together a lot of people who were interested in the house, its past and their association with it. It was a lot of fun and hot!

WARE: I've seen the photos. (laughter) The same breeze didn't blow then, did it?

MORONEY: No, it didn't.

WARE: How did you feel about the Dew House being moved over to Kitty Hollow Park?

MORONEY: Well I was glad that it could be saved but I was convinced that the developers who were buying the property were not going to save it. I tried to talk them into carving out a reserve to protect the house and the trees.



There are some beautiful trees around there. I tried to get them to preserve the pecan orchard that was there. They did not. The only trees that they saved are the ones that are in the highway right-of-way. They had to leave those alone because they belong to the state of Texas. But somebody came in there and they just mowed all of those beautiful pecan trees down overnight. I could see them doing the same thing.

I looked into transplanting some of those trees. I got a quote from one of the big tree companies, Davey Tree, to transplant the big magnolia around the driveway. The estimate was a hundred thousand dollars with no guarantee of having the tree live. They would have to get such a huge root ball to try to insure its survival that it would weigh so much they would have to essentially build a railroad to put it on.

It couldn't be carried on a truck or a regular truck. That was just out of my reach, especially when they would not guarantee that it would live at the other end. With the realization that the developers might knock it down, I thought it was worth saving and so did Jim and Lynn. Moving to save it, that's what Lynn does.

WARE: What happened to the house that Nancy lived in on the property?

MORONEY: It was demolished.

WARE: All the other buildings were demolished?

MORONEY: Yeah.

WARE: I want to review real quickly to make sure that we have covered everything. Can you remember anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to share?

MORONEY: One memory is my mother talking about my grandfather, Emerson Robinson, walking on the salt dome at Blue Ridge and finding a cannonball that had been dropped by Santa Anna's army. They camped near Stafford before they went across that property down to San Jacinto for the battle that took place. They had dropped a cannonball. I'll show it to you. He found a lava, I think it's called a metate, a scooped out utensil that the Mexicans grind corn in by hand. Those survived as family lore. Another thing she told me about my grandfather is that he and some other folks, I guess his other relatives were some of the early owners of oil and gas wells.



Salt domes contain oil and gas because of the way they're formed. Somewhere around we have a photograph of an oil well coming in on the salt dome at Blue Ridge. It's spewing all this oil up in the air and getting all over him. He is covered in oil from head to foot. She kept a little bottle of oil as a reminder of the early days of those wells in that field. I guess they have all been capped now. I don't know if there are any producing wells there anymore.

One other memory of note is my mother's rendition of my grandfather's involvement in a group called the Jaybirds. The Jaybirds were basically the landed gentry after the Civil War that were resistant to Reconstruction. Their enemies or opponents were called Woodpeckers. Feelings got very strained between these groups. I understand that there was actually a shootout in Richmond close to the courthouse. I don't know if Clarence Wharton describes it, but it's in the history books of Fort Bend County. Jaybird was my grandfather's, signifying his membership in that organization.

WARE: Do you know who carved it?

MORONEY: I have no idea. I mounted it. It is not very well mounted on this piece of driftwood because I thought it needed to stand up. Obviously he's not standing up. I need to re-wire him.

WARE: Do you have any document records of your grandfather's involvement? They would be very important to the history.

MORONEY: Yeah. It is another indication besides the way my grandmother treated black people and her use of the "N" word and the segregated facilities that I remember as a child. That's another indication that the Civil War is really not over.

WARE: Do you remember any blacks coming into your grandmother's store in Missouri City?

MORONEY: No, I don't.

WARE: Did you grandmother have any black servants?

MORONEY: Yes, a woman who lived there in a room next to the garage.

WARE: Thank you for this interesting interview, Muffie.

Interview ends