

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Marie Elizabeth Michalec
Armstrong**

Interview Date: 09/02/2015

Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Comments: Fort Bend County Courthouse, Richmond, Texas.
Jean Wunderlich contributed some back ground
information.

11 Pages



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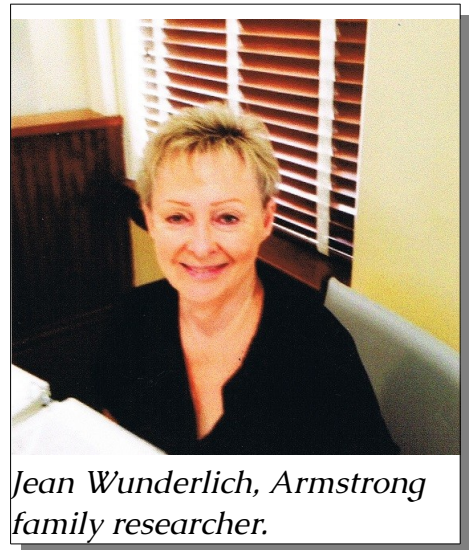
Transcript

TERRELL: We are going to start this interview with Jean, who is going to give us some background information on the Armstrong family that came to Fort Bend County and formed a plantation. She was born on March 4, 1947.

WUNDERLICH: My great-grandmother Maria Armstrong was the youngest child of Thomas Armstrong, who was one of five brothers who came to Texas from Tennessee in 1836, 1837. They fought in the Texas Revolution and received land grants. They settled in Brazoria County first. Then, I believe, it was about 1850s when Thomas Armstrong and David Wright Armstrong moved to Fort Bend County. They settled land on Buffalo Creek, which was a tributary of the Saint Bernard River. They owned a quantity of land in the Guy area.

TERRELL: Did you know a lot of the Armstrong relatives as you were growing up?

WUNDERLICH: I did not. My father, Henry Robert Farmer, did not pass along any family history. There were some family disagreements that caused him to feel bitter toward his father. For that reason, he never shared information and we knew better than to ask because we knew he did not want to talk about it. So, we did not really ever know. I knew that my grandfather, Doctor Robert Allen Farmer, practiced medicine in Needville and in Wharton. He died in a car accident in Lufkin. I was just a baby, so I never really knew him. My father never talked about him. The Armstrong relatives were a mystery until I decided to start digging around and see who I could find.



Jean Wunderlich, Armstrong family researcher.

TERRELL: I am going to switch now to Marie Armstrong who currently lives on the Armstrong family land. Would you tell me your whole name?

ARMSTRONG: My name is Marie Michalec Armstrong.

TERRELL: Where were you born?

ARMSTRONG: I was born in Rosenberg, Texas.

TERRELL: Were you born in a hospital?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, ma'am.

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

ARMSTRONG: When my dad and mom married, they lived in Houston before I was born. Then they moved here on their family farm, the Michalec farm. They farmed, and my daddy worked at the Jefferson Lake Sulphur Company. Then he sold RVOS Insurance on the side.

EDITOR'S NOTE: On February 22, 1901, nine Czech Americans met in Ocker, Texas, and founded Rolnický Vzájemně Ochranný Spolek Statu Texas (RVOS), a non-profit farm mutual insurance association and their vision of neighbors helping neighbors was born. RVOS became commonly known as the Farmers Mutual Protective Association of Texas, which is the American translation of the original Czech name.

TERRELL: Do you know your father's parents names?

ARMSTRONG: My father's parent is Joseph Michalec. He married Elsie Hluchan from Frydek, Texas, in the Sealy area. They farmed, growing cotton and corn. They used to call it "Hygear peanuts". They had cattle and pigs and chickens.

TERRELL: How many children did they have?

ARMSTRONG: They had five. My father was the oldest. My dad's name was Odell Joseph Michalec. His sister was Natalie Michalec. She married Johnny Silajvy. The next two were twins, Irene and Maxine. Irene married Lewis Coker. Her sister Maxine died when she was three years old. Then there was one more brother, J. D. Michalec. He is still living. My aunt Natalie is still living. The rest of them are deceased.

TERRELL: That was your father's parents?

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

TERRELL: What about your mother's parents.

ARMSTRONG: They came from Poland, the Russian side of Poland, I guess. Her name was Josephine Wesnewski. I'm not for sure how you spell that last name because I've seen it written several different ways. My grandfather came from Poland.

My mother was born in the Chappell Hill area. They lived in New York and had children in New York. They had children in Wisconsin, Oklahoma and then Texas. They had 13 children and settled in Rosenberg. My dad is Odell Joseph Michalec and my mother was Gertrude Cecilia Jankowski.

TERRELL: After they married where did they settle?

ARMSTRONG: They settled in Fort Bend County just outside of Fairchild in the old farm place on the Michalec farm.

TERRELL: How many children did they have?

ARMSTRONG: I just have one brother, George Michalec.

TERRELL: Your parents were farmers?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, my father was a farmer, but he worked at the Sulphur Company and sold insurance. My mother canned and worked at the store at Fairchild. Before that, she worked at a place in Houston. The rest of the time she just worked at home. We picked cotton. Even I picked cotton. We chopped cotton, pulled corn. We had cattle.

TERRELL: When were you married?

ARMSTRONG: Jimmy Armstrong. I married him in January of 1977.

TERRELL: How many children do you have?

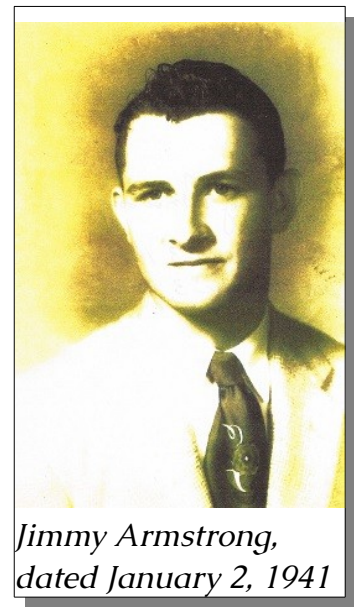
ARMSTRONG: I have two. My daughter is by my first husband. She lives in Katy. Her name is Tammy McCool. My son, James Armstrong, lives in Fairchild. He works for a company from the Denmark and Sweden area. It is just outside of Pleak, out in the country. It is called Heisman.

TERRELL: You live on the Armstrong property?

ARMSTRONG: No ma'am. I own it, but I live in a little town called Guy. It's not that far.

TERRELL: Your husband passed away?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, ma'am. Three years ago, June 3, 2012.



TERRELL: Can you tell me a little bit about your husband?

ARMSTRONG: He went to Needville High School. He was very popular, very handsome. He went to Sam Houston college. He graduated, and then he got drafted and went to Vietnam. He was a Navy Seal, but they didn't call them Navy Seals back then. They called them something else. Then he came back here. I was friends with him for years. I was married to another person. We got a divorce. Then he asked me out, and we got married.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The U. S. Navy SEALs evolved from underwater demolition teams (UDT) in the 1950's. The new unit would build on the UDT's elite qualities and water-borne expertise, but would add land combat skills, including parachute training and guerrilla/counterinsurgency operations. These new teams would come to be known as the US Navy SEALs (which stood for SEa, Air, and Land). Initially there was a lag in the unit's creation until President John F. Kennedy took office. Kennedy recognized the need for unconventional warfare, and supported the use of special operations forces against guerrilla activity. -- Wikipedia

TERRELL: Did you have children by him?

ARMSTRONG: I had one son by him.

TERRELL: What are your memories of living in Guy? Humorous ones, a friend of yours mentioned a murder or...

ARMSTRONG: Well, that's the thing. The Armstrongs owned a lot of property, a whole lot of property. (Asks Wunderlich) Where your sister was born, what's her name?

WUNDERLICH: Olivia Brower.

ARMSTRONG: Where she was born, George Armstrong lived. Supposedly he got sick or his wife got sick and they had a caretaker. She supposedly got her niece to come down here to help. Somewhere in the deal this lady got poisoned and the property went to the people that own it now instead of going back to the Armstrongs. But before my mother-in-law passed away, she and her sister-in-law looked into it, but the paperwork was changed. Everything was changed. Everything was done, I guess, illegally. I don't know how they did it, but they did it. So, they ended up with a lot of the property.

TERRELL: Do you know how much property is left in the Armstrong family?

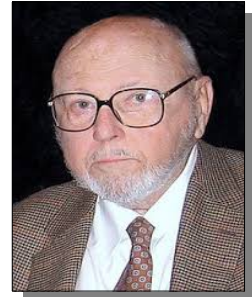
ARMSTRONG: The original part was over 250 acres. But before that it was thousands.

TERRELL: Was it a land grant?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, Mexican land grant. It's all documented in the courthouse.

TERRELL: You said something about Hilmar Moore.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Hilmar Guenther Moore was the longest serving mayor in the history of the United States. On September 22, 1949, he was appointed to fill an unexpired term as the Mayor of Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas. After that, he won 32 consecutive elections, and served a total of 63 years as Mayor. Hilmar Guenther Moore died on December 4, 2012, at the age of 92.



ARMSTRONG: He owns part that he bought from Allen Armstrong.

TERRELL: Do you know how many acres?

ARMSTRONG: It's thousands. This is out there where my land is in Guy, out in the country. His is attached to it.

TERRELL: You are in Fort Bend County, but wasn't it right on the county line?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, ma'am, it is.

TERRELL: What did you do for relaxation and recreation? What do you do in Guy?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I'm with someone right now and we travel. We go to different places. I visit with my children, grandchildren. We get together.

TERRELL: How many grandchildren do you have?

ARMSTRONG: I have four.

TERRELL: Do they live in the county?

ARMSTRONG: My daughter lives in Katy. She has one son. He is 12 years old.

TERRELL: What is his name?

ARMSTRONG: Christian McCool. She's married to Craig McCool. They live in Cinco Ranch, in the west side of it. My son lives in Fairchild. He has three children, Aiden, who is eight, and Avery, who is a three-year old little girl. Then they have a little boy, Aaren, who is two years old.

TERRELL: Tell me about your schooling.

ARMSTRONG: I went to Needville High School and graduated from Needville High School.

TERRELL: Have you been a part of any organizations?

ARMSTRONG: The Disabled American Veterans.

TERRELL: Growing up, which church were you affiliated with?

ARMSTRONG: Catholic.

TERRELL: Did you go to church in Fairchild?

ARMSTRONG: No, in Needville.

TERRELL: What are the major changes that you have seen in this area that most impressed or depressed you?

ARMSTRONG: The big growth of Fort Bend County because where I lived, it was just a few houses and now it's LOTS of houses. It's still farmland, but it's a lot of houses.

TERRELL: So is that a good change?

ARMSTRONG: In a way it is, and in a way it's not. The school has gotten bigger.

TERRELL: The schools out there are very good, I understand.

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

TERRELL: Do you have any comments on technology, how it has changed lifestyles?

ARMSTRONG: I think it's good, but I think it's bad too. A lot of people use it for the wrong reasons.

TERRELL: I know you said your husband was in Vietnam. Were any of the other family members in the military?

ARMSTRONG: No, except for my brother. He was in the Army. He ended up in Turkey.

TERRELL: So you are actually not on the original Armstrong property?

ARMSTRONG: No, ma'am, but I own it. We gave the part that the house sat on when my husband and I inherited it to my son. He tore the house down because it was an old, old house. He built a barn out there. They lived out there for a while. They had a house there. The house is no longer there.

TERRELL: When it was a plantation, did they own slaves?

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

TERRELL: Do you know how many?

ARMSTRONG: No, ma'am.

WUNDERLICH: I know that Thomas owned nine at his death. I have an inventory of his estate. He died in July of 1864. At that time, he had 1,100 acres of land and nine Negroes valued at \$4,000, \$20.00 cash on hand, and \$4,000 in confederate money and over \$17,000 in livestock. That's his estate. So, I guess he needed those slaves.

ARMSTRONG: About some of those cattle, it's on the property that I own. One year, this is before I was born, it got down to five degrees, and those cows froze to death in one corner.

WUNDERLICH: There is one thing that I have been researching. Thomas Armstrong's brothers were the guardians of his children and conservators of his estate after he died. There were six children orphaned when he died in 1864. In 1871, two of his daughters filed a lawsuit here in Fort Bend County against David White Armstrong who was the living brother that was still managing the estate wanting to get the estate settled and wanting to receive their land. They basically accused him of stealing from them and mismanaging the estate. I've gone through the probate file pretty carefully, but I have not yet found the order that settled the estate. I am going today to continue looking for that. I do know the land was distributed to the children in 1876, I believe. So, something happened!

TERRELL: I think you told me that two brothers came together from...

WUNDERLICH: Five came from Tennessee. George Armstrong settled in Brazoria County in the Chances Prairie area near Matagorda. One brother, Allan, died just shortly after they came. Then Thomas and David White were the two that settled Fort Bend County. Their other brother, James, was here and lived with them, but I don't know much about him. He died and was buried in Snake Creek Cemetery.

ARMSTRONG: Fort Bend County. It's not real far from Highway 59 close to Beasley. It's not too far from there. It's a creek called Snake Creek.

WUNDERLICH: I don't know whether David White Armstrong had land in that area. That may be why they buried him there. I think he also owned quite a bit of land back in that direction. His brother James was visiting and died at his house and was buried at Snake Creek. I don't think they carried people around to bury them back then.

ARMSTRONG: She has a picture of the grave. Then in Brazoria County, Ann Armstrong, donated money for that church in East Columbia. She was George Armstrong's wife that settled in Brazoria County.

ARMSTRONG: She also donated money for a black church. These churches are still there.

WUNDERLICH: There is a little booklet that talks about some of that.

ARMSTRONG: There's a lot. She's got it all written down. It would be good if you could get copies of that. It was Marian Franklin Kolar.

WUNDERLICH: One thing that struck me about the Armstrong family as I have done this research, in the probate file there were stacks of receipts, is how much they valued education. All of the children were educated, the girls and the boys. There are receipts where they paid tutors. There are receipts where the children were sent to schools. Receipts for school supply kinds of things. I would like to learn more about some of those tutors and what life was like. I know that my grandfather, the physician, was educated at home with tutors before he went to medical school in Galveston.

ARMSTRONG: My great-grandmother, Maria Armstrong, attended the Ursulan Convent School in Galveston. I have checked with their home office of the Ursulan sisters. Naturally, the two years that I need are the two that they don't have. The very nice gentleman that helped said he had years on either side. But the two years that I think she went there has no records, none at all.

TERRELL: Can you tell me a little bit of what your husband told you?

ARMSTRONG: He said there used to be a cemetery on the Armstrong property at Cedar Creek. One year a long time ago, a flood came and a lot of the bodies and coffins floated out. Some of them were up in trees. But when you go there now you can't find any remnants of a cemetery.

TERRELL: What about the invitation for the Armstrongs?

ARMSTRONG: It was several years ago, my husband and I received an invitation from the Queen of England to come to a family reunion in England, but we didn't go.

TERRELL: It's a nice invitation. Why were you invited?

ARMSTRONG: Something to do with the Armstrongs, that's all I know. It was the Armstrong reunion.

TERRELL: Is there an Armstrong Clan Society?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, and they have a coat of arms.

TERRELL: Who is a member of this?

ARMSTRONG: I'm not.

TERRELL: Was your husband?

ARMSTRONG: No. This was given to me at the school when I worked at the Needville High School. A student drew this out.

TERRELL: What did you do for Needville High School?

ARMSTRONG: I was a substitute teacher for ten years.

TERRELL: What year did your husband pass away?

ARMSTRONG: 2012. Anyways, in this paperwork that I have it says Lady Godiva was the mother-in-law of an Armstrong.

TERRELL: That's entertaining.

ARMSTRONG: Yes. Then there's the Pal Tower. Pal Tower were Armstrongs castles. They must have had castles in England.

TERRELL: I think you mentioned one of them fought with George Washington at Valley Forge.

ARMSTRONG: Yes, that's in over here, too. It reads, "U. S. General John Armstrong camped with General Washington at Valley Forge." There are over 50 spellings of Armstrong.

TERRELL: That is amazing.

ARMSTRONG: And that's about it, I guess.

TERRELL: Jean, do you have anything else you would like to add.

WUNDERLICH: I don't think so.

TERRELL: This concludes the interview with Marie Armstrong and Jean Wunderlich.

Interview ends