

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Marseillaise Rich-Hall**

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Marseillaise Rich Hall

Transcript

TERRELL: Good morning, Marcie.

HALL: Good morning.

TERRELL: First I'm going to ask you a little bit about your family history.

HALL: My family history? I've got a stack of it here. I'm sure you don't want to get that detailed.

TERRELL: I do. Just keep talking about it.

HALL: On my father's side, of the family, we descend from Anglo-Saxons. I think they probably were Scots Highlanders, and they must have left England somewhere during the Reformation because of religious problems. They are the people who populated the highlands of North and South Carolina. Most of my stories are from women ancestors from North Carolina. We've had strong women in our family, which I guess was a necessity to survive, because the men died in accidents and all of these wars that we've had.

TERRELL: And when did your family move to Fort Bend County?

HALL: My maternal side of my father's side are the Hollimans.

TERRELL: How do you spell it?

HALL: Now there are many ways to spell that. I believe they spelled it H-O-L-L-I-M-A-N. But in a lot of the records, it's H-O-L-L-O-M-A-N. They speak of the Old Three Hundred and Wincie Campbell wants me to do those papers because, in some lists I'm a member of the Old Three Hundred and some lists I'm not. Actually my ancestor was not with the Old Three Hundred families who first populated Fort Bend County. He met them when they arrived. He was already here.

TERRELL: Okay. And who would that be?

HALL: I'd have to look through here to come up with his first name. But he was a Holliman. He was here in 1822. He was a cotton planter from Mississippi and he had a plantation in Mississippi. Of course he had slaves here and an overseer, and he only came over here to put in the cotton crops. Then he would go back to Mississippi to his plantation. He preferred that.

When we became the Republic of Texas they got real starchy about that. Being a member of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, I'm familiar with all of the rules and regulations, and their main rule is, you can't just own property in the Republic. You had to come here and live on it. So, he would have had to give up or relinquish his Spanish land grant. Instead of doing that, he sent for my immediate Holliman family, and they came from those hills in North Carolina on a wagon train that came through Arkansas, to get into Texas. And they were the lame and the sick and the blind. They were the ones who fell out of the main Old Three Hundred. My great grandmother, who I remember VERY well, is the one who always referred to them as the Little Three Hundred; maybe because they were a smaller or slower or ill group. The man who led them was William Little.

TERRELL: Did your great grandmother live in Fort Bend County?

HALL: Oh goodness yes. She was born in Fort Bend County. Although someone made a mistake in the records and I have chased it back, and had it corrected in the state archives. My great grandmother, Mahalia Roxanna Holliman, was born in Fort Bend County. She was born up near Pittsfield, although some of her records say she was born in North Carolina. That couldn't be correct because her mother was Edifa Ellisor Holliman and when she was a girl, about fourteen or fifteen, she took part in the Runaway Scrape. So Mahalia's mother was in Fort Bend County as a child.

Ellisor was her maiden name. She married into the Holliman family. She married Bryant W. Holliman and I'm double ancestors on that side of the family. Or double cousins because on that wagon train were a family of Ellisors and a family of the Hollimans. And two Holliman boys married two Ellisor girls.

After becoming a Daughter I had to get up and do my family history, and that history has to be approved, not only by the local group - it goes to the custodian general in Austin where it is reviewed before it is approved. And then it's on permanent file at the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Museum. I have not mentioned Mary Wagster. She goes WAY back and she is the one that I used for application to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

TERRELL: And how are you related to her?

HALL: AH! I wrote a story for the Chapter and I called it "A Woman Named Mary - A Love Story". It's actually the story of three women named Mary Wagster.

TERRELL: How fun!

HALL: That was for The Daughters of the Republic of Texas. Many people think when you say that, you're talking about the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution]. The first Mary Wagster would be great-great-great-great grandmother. I think you just have to surmise some of these things, but as far as I know, I would probably place her in England. A woman without means in those days was in a very bad shape. The only thing she could really do would be to become a housemaid or be farm labor or be a lady of the streets.

I really don't know where this woman fit in, but I DO know that she had the gumption and the guts to get up and do something about it, so she bonded herself out. You hear so much about black slavery. I AM the descendant, and proud of it, of a white slave, or a bonded servant. That means that she contracted or bonded herself out to a family to pay for her passage to the United States. She was NOT in debtor's prison or she was NOT on the streets. Because in that instance, very likely, the government of England would have sent her over here, like they did many of them.

The proud, proud families that I was associated with later in my life, in Virginia, many of them are direct descendants of ladies of the streets, who got shipped here. But this lady worked her passage. She came on over and the people who owned her established a trading post. It was a combination trading post, hardware store, grocery store, restaurant and saloon somewhere in North Carolina. I have a little tintype of her - great grandmother Roxanna Holliman, who told me all these stories, referred to Mary Wagster as a great beauty. You can tell, even in this dim little picture, that she was tall and well-built for people of that time. Usually they were very small. She had golden red, curly hair. So she must have been a real beauty.

Naturally she was never able to work off her bond. These people just kept keeping her on, and telling her, "Well, you know, your room and board and so forth". Until one day, a young man named Henry Bond walked into the saloon and restaurant, and took one look at her and said to himself, "I'm going to marry that woman." So he set about trying to buy her bond. He had to pay these people, of course. Well, they didn't want to give her up because she was quite an attraction for the saloon or trading post or whatever they had there. He just kept working with them until he was able to meet their price. And he bought her bond and married her. Mary Wagster was married, I think at least twice and maybe three times. The records are pretty bad back that far.

TERRELL: And how is she related to you?

HALL: She would be a great grandmother of some kind, way back there.

TERRELL: And also related to Roxanna Holliman?

HALL: No. Holliman is on the paternal side. This is her husband's side, the Davises. These would be the Davises on one side and the Bonds. There is a Bond who was in the Battle of San Jacinto. His name is on the monument.

TERRELL: Okay. So Roxanna was in Fort Bend County?

HALL: Yes. She was a Holliman. I don't know as much about them or how they got here except that they were on that wagon train.

TERRELL: And who were your parents?

HALL: My father was Marshall Howard and we always used it in parentheses "Cap".

TERRELL: Like Captain, but "Cap"?

HALL: "Cap" Rich. He married we called them the Yankee side of the family, although they were originally southerners who moved north.

TERRELL: (laughing) That's a switch.

HALL: Well, I understand from my heart specialist in Houston, I was very close to him and we did a lot of talking about history, he was from the same part of Illinois as this family. He says there's a very proud section of Illinois which they call 'southern Illinois' and they are all originally southerners. I had never heard or read that in history before, but he was from there, so he knew.

I wanted to also mention, because you know her, and possibly love her like I do. I found a relative in Rosenberg I was unaware of; Blondell Scott and I are related. Just how, I don't think we can tell you. But the Ellisors are in her genealogy. I was not only misspelling it, but mispronouncing it. She corrected me. That is German, and I really know nothing about them. She does, of course. While she was still able, she used to go to the large family reunion, the Cynthia Ann Parker family, and the Ellisor people were always there. Because it was the two Ellisor brothers who captured Cynthia Ann and her daughter, Prairie Flower.

TERRELL: What was your mother's name? Was she born here?

HALL: Oh no. She was a Yankee from Illinois. She was Coryne Castellaw. And that's not French, that's Spanish. She had a lot of relatives in southern Illinois, but she was born in Missouri. That family was scattered between Missouri and Kansas and she was born in Lincoln County, Missouri, somewhere around Independence. I don't have a birth certificate on her. I don't think one is available.

Her father, Dr. Castellaw, was a veterinarian and there are some VERY interesting stories about him. He was quite a character; a playboy back in Kansas City, Missouri. He was one the first if not THE first of the veterinarians ever hired by the state of Texas to work on the prison farms and care for the cattle.

They sent him to the prison farms in the Sugar Land area. And he went back to Missouri to visit mother about the time she needed to go off to school. And he was not happy with her circumstances. Her mother's family didn't have very much and he thought he could provide for her better. So he brought her to Texas and she first lived with Captain Flanagan. People my age all knew who Captain Flanagan was. He was head of the prison farms in the Sugar Land area. She lived with them for a short while and then he placed her here in Richmond, at Mrs. Bassett's boarding house. Mrs. Bassett was chaperone and to look after her while she lived at the boarding house.

TERRELL: Well, that's interesting. How long was she there before they married?

HALL: Oh, I'm sure for quite some time. Mother was also sent off to school. She went to Kidd-Key which was a very upscale school, I believe just for girls of that time, and then she also went to a little college which became part of Southwest Texas State College in San Marcos.

TERRELL: Then they married?

HALL: They married in 1920 and I was born in '22. My family had homes in Fort Bend and Brazoria County and they occupied both. They had the BIG house, 902 Front, which is the old family home. They also had a ranch in Brazoria County where I was born.

TERRELL: Do you still have the ranch?

HALL: It remained in the family, although not in my immediate side of the family, until just a few years ago. It was eventually sold.

TERRELL: So you were born in 1922 and you have one sister. Do you have any brothers?

HALL: I have one sister, Marianne, and two brothers, who are twins, John Charles and a Marshall Howard.

TERRELL: Are they still living?

HALL: I think they called him a Junior instead of a II. Yes, they are still living. Marianne passed away, in about 2000, somewhere along there.

TERRELL: And so you married and lived in Fort Bend County or did you move out of the county and back?

HALL: (laughs)

TERRELL: Many times?

HALL: I went everywhere I possibly could. I started to tell you before we started about my real ambition in life. I spoke of the impossibilities of a woman having a career back in Mary Wagster's time - that time actually pretty well lasted until my generation. If it hadn't been for World War II, it probably still would go on.

My ambition was not particularly to marry and have children, which is what you were raised to do. You weren't allowed a career. MAYBE by my generation you could teach part time or be a nurse. And out of those two, I selected nursing. My mother wouldn't agree to it. She didn't think I was strong enough. I was the sick child.

TERRELL: Sounds like maybe 'sick child with a strong will'. (chuckles)

HALL: I think the saying is that I enjoyed poor health all of my life. (laughs)

TERRELL: That's too bad. But you look good. You're going strong.

HALL: Well, I hope.

TERRELL: So you DID have children and you did marry.

HALL: I DID marry. But I really wanted to have a varied career or a varied lifestyle. And I think maybe that's one of the few things that I really accomplished.

TERRELL: How did you do that?

HALL: Well, it started right on the local scene, when I was in school here. It started about the time that I was in junior high, or sixth grade. I was very graceful all of my life, a natural dancer. Mother had me in dancing class. My mother had a trained musical background, which she had picked up in college. She had a beautiful coloratura soprano; a beautiful voice. Sometimes she sang in the choir for Saint John's Methodist Church here. Sometimes I feel like I can still hear her voice up there in that choir. She had me in all the dancing classes available locally. We had May Fetes back in those days. Maybe you've heard of those.

TERRELL: We had them.

HALL: They were big affairs of those times. I wanted to mention that my father was the cowboy in his family. He wouldn't go off to school as the others did, although they were a well-educated family. He was a cowboy. That was all he was interested in. He did the first rodeo for the Fort Bend County Fair, here in Fort Bend County. We had moved from the ranch in Brazoria County and he had a varied career. But by that time, which was about '34 or '35, I think, we were back in Richmond. And he put on the rodeo. My sister and I were not only riding in the rodeos, we were working in the rodeo office.

My mother kept pushing me in dancing. In each May Fete, of course, I was always a Duchess Marseillaise from the House of Rich, in Richmond, Texas, I believe is the way they would say it. So I was a duchess in the May Fete each year that it was held here in Richmond.

TERRELL: And did all the schools hold those May Fetes? Or was it only one grade or the whole school?

HALL: It was in Richmond, which was the old Richmond High School, and Richmond Grade School. I think they only had the two in those days. Anita Darst was Bob Darst's oldest daughter and married a Robinson. She was also pushing me in dancing. She taught dancing. So she came up with the bright idea of my doing a hula. A Hawaiian hula, while I was still in, probably junior high.

TERRELL: Oh that's cute.

HALL: And I created quite a sensation. I loved ballet and I took as much dancing as was available on the local level. Mother took me in to Houston to put me in the dancing academy. I had already been studying under that same teacher, and I wanted to go. And they told me right off that ballet was out for me. I had gotten too tall.

TERRELL: I thought that tall and wispy and willowy was what they wanted.

HALL: Wispy and willowy yes. Tall, no, because you can't be that much taller or larger than the man.

TERRELL: Did you always ride horses?

HALL: Yes. Along with all this I kept riding horses at the same time.

TERRELL: And were you competitive?

HALL: I rode barrel racing some. Not that much. Actually I never really liked barrel racing. I have to admit I was always more of showgirl than I was a competitor.

TERRELL: So were there other friends riding horseback? Did you ride together as a child?

HALL: Mostly my sister and myself, here. Then in 1940, I graduated from high school. I was the valedictorian for the Richmond Grammar School. OH, I was drum major and leader of the Richmond Fighting Tiger Band.

TERRELL: You weren't too tall for that! (chuckles)

HALL: Nope, wasn't too tall for that! Dear Winston Marsh was in my grade. Of course when you win nomination/contest for something, which I did for drum major, there's always a dissatisfied group. And they were pretty loud in complaining one day, probably after class. I can't imagine this going on in class. Anyway, he stood up and said, "Let me straighten you out on this. To be drum major of the Tiger Band of Richmond, Texas, you have to be tall. You have to be beautiful, and you have to be from Richmond." And some of the other girls in that contest at that time were bussed in from the rural communities. But you HAD to be from Richmond.

TERRELL: I see.

HALL: Which fits in pretty well with the stories you hear about old time Richmond.

TERRELL: You sound like a little bit of a clique. I mean, were the outsiders not admitted?

HALL: It was a big clique. I don't think that I was EVER really part of Richmond although I've already told you about all my Republic of Texas families, and I'm not sure I've included all of them. I think there are five altogether. I don't think I was ever really part. I was around the edge of the old Richmond clique, because I was not born in Richmond. I was old family.

TERRELL: How old were you when you moved here?

HALL: I think I was actually ten.

TERRELL: Okay. What are memories of your childhood? Did you live in the big house?

HALL: Lived in the big house. We moved back there.

TERRELL: Okay. So you could have ridden horseback all over.

HALL: Oh, we did. We kept our horses at the house, although we had a place in the country for cattle and that sort of thing. But the saddle horses were kept right here at the house. We rode in rodeos. We started going around to some of the smaller rodeos, just in this area. And in 1941, my sister and I got a BIG break. We had attracted the attention of Everett Coburn who was in charge of the rodeo at Madison Square Garden. My early rodeo days were SO early that some of the old "Wild West Show" type people were still involved. They had the women bronc riders and that sort of thing. They were a completely different element than the showmen wanted to project, because the glamour girls of Hollywood and Broadway were coming on at that time.

They wanted to show rodeo in a kinder, gentler, more glamorous way so they chose girls from Texas and some of the other western states. You had to be of good family, you had to have a ranching background, you had to have finished a certain amount of education, and you had to, of course, ride a horse well. You had to dress well and you had to be nice looking. I was chosen as Miss Texas, but even before that, I had represented the Richmond Rotary Club at the opening of the Will Rogers Coliseum in Fort Worth. I believe that was my first big appearance in a rodeo.

TERRELL: There was no school integration?

HALL: Oh no.

TERRELL: Were there other schools for the blacks here?

HALL: Yes. The blacks had their own schools. Not too many of them, back then, continued in school, That would also include the very, very few Mexican-Americans that we had. We only had one or two Mexican families at that time. I don't think we had kindergarten. You started first grade. You finished sixth grade in elementary school.

TERRELL: And was there a junior high? Or you just went directly to...

HALL: No, you went directly, which was sort of a big jump.

TERRELL: So which schools did you go to?

HALL: The old Richmond High School. It was the only one. Just this past month we had the last old Richmond High School reunion.

TERRELL: How fun.

HALL: I believe it was the 65th or 67th I think they had almost three hundred people there.

TERRELL: Oh, that's wonderful. And then the elementary school, did they have more than one elementary school?

HALL: No. Just one. It was Richmond Elementary. There just weren't that many people here (chuckles).

My sister and I rode in Madison Square Garden, and that was the beginning of another career. That took me away from dancing. Going back to the dancing story, when they told me that I was too tall to continue ballet, I could study it, but I would never be used because I was simply too tall. But ballet is good to know, as my daughter learned. Much to her regret, she didn't listen to mother. But if I had another daughter, I would put her in ballet.

I did a lot of tap too. There was a lot of tap dancing at that time because that was the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers period. And there were some good little tap dancers here. Martha Virginia Ansel Payton was one of the best.

I wanted to go into interpretive dancing. That includes Spanish and ethnic dancing. I went in to Houston to this instructor that I'd been studying with and there was no interpretive dancing taught in Houston at that time. That was one of my unrealized ambitions as early as grade school. However in one of the May Fetes I danced a tango with a boy named Murchison. And he was good. He rode a motorcycle and wore a black leather jacket, and I couldn't imagine him being my dancing partner, but he was good. And we did a tango. But, as I said, it was my ambition to do the Paso Doble. And that incorporates everything; ballet, tap, interpretive, and acrobatics. But I never got that far because I didn't get to go to New York.

But riding in the Madison Square Garden was the beginning of a career in the BIG rodeos for my sister and me. She continued in that for a lifetime. She married into that business. And did it for the rest of her life. I did it for a short number of years, until World War II and I came back to Houston and went to school. We appeared first in New York, then in the Boston Garden and the rodeos--I think they had the Ranch Girls for three or four years there to put some culture and glamour into rodeo. In New York, I was introduced to a lot of other things in show business and I met some people who were good enough to show me around and show me the ropes. And for a short period of time, I modeled in New York. And there, of course, the ballet came in to play.

I was a natural. I didn't do that much runway work. Actually I was just a natural-born photographer's model. I was what they were looking for that year. They wanted tall brunettes instead of blondes that they want now. And I have the cheekbones and the jaw line that the camera picks up. Actually a camera doesn't really take a picture. It reflects an x-ray and a lot of my fashion pictures really don't look that much like me. It'll reflect another image.

I did that and probably would love to have continued that, but World War II, of course, hit us, BOOM. Not to put down the wars that we've gone through since, but they are completely different things. That was a WORLD war. Everybody and everything was involved. Although I worked for the Ford Agency and John Robert Powers - they were two of the tops - they were both very frank. They said, "We don't know how much work we're going to be able to offer you. We don't know if we're going to be able to offer you ANY. They might shut us down any time. We're losing a lot of our men."

So that's when I came back to Houston, went to school and went to work in an office, which led to another career. But before that happened, by appearing in New York and Madison Square Garden, we attracted the interest of Hollywood. Rodeos decided that they needed to be even more glamorous.

TERRELL: What did they call your group?

HALL: Ranch Girls. You had to be of a good family, well educated. You had to have the social graces.

TERRELL: Could you be married?

HALL: No. You had to be single. You couldn't be engaged, involved or anything. They didn't want to hear about anything like that. One of the girls was sent home. It was found out that she was actually married, but she wanted to make that trip. Of course that was quite a trip! And, actually my mother went along as chaperone. So we only went certain places and made certain appearances and behaved ourselves. (chuckles)

TERRELL: And you mentioned Hollywood.

HALL: The first big star that they attracted and hired was Gene Autry. He was a delight to know and work with I'm very proud of my association with him. He had a ranching background. In spite of everything he had already accomplished by that time, he was just a good guy. He was really a great little gentleman. And not only that, he had a wonderful singing voice, that was even better than any recording that you ever heard of him.

My sister and I were chosen to make back-up appearances with him; everywhere that Gene Autry went, particularly in the rodeo, we were on our horses in the arena with him. And usually there was a herd of Longhorn steers in there with us.

TERRELL: How many years did you do this?

HALL: I don't think I did that more than about three years. This was JUST before World War II. They extended the rodeo schedule after the Boston Garden. Then there were about five or six more appearances in eastern cities; Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Niagara.

TERRELL: Were you living in New York then? Or were you living here and traveling?

HALL: You were on this circuit and you lived in hotels. These things were fairly close together, so, let's say, it would pretty well fill up the spring of the year. And then you would be back home.

TERRELL: And when you were home, what did you do? How old were you when all this is going on?

HALL: I was about seventeen. I toured with Autry maybe two years, and then he went into the army. If you would remember, he volunteered. Then along came Roy Rogers, and his Hollywood entourage and I got picked up by all those people. The man who was the choreographer of his act in the arena became a great friend of mine. He took me with his family, his wife and two small sons, to California to live with them. He introduced me around Hollywood. I actually got an equity card, which was very, very difficult to acquire.

TERRELL: Goodness.

HALL: Hollywood did not 'hit me' in the same way that New York did. I could have stayed in New York, actually, the rest of my life. To me, it's still one of the most fascinating places I've ever been.

Hollywood was a big disappointment because I was a fan--still AM a fan of the movies, good movies. I think they're works of art. But when you look at how they're actually made and what goes on around them, it just was not MY lifestyle. And I was not really looking to stay. I was taken to Republic Pictures to be put to work; they were going to start me out as a stunt woman. Well, there again, I never really loved the competition in the rodeo so I certainly wasn't going to do stunts. So I just chucked the whole thing and came back to Richmond. Then I moved into Houston, and went to business school. And that, of course, was when the war had hit.

TERRELL: What did you father do in Richmond?

HALL: He was always in the cattle and horse business. He never did anything else.

TERRELL: So he wasn't in World War II?

HALL: It's kind of a joke. He almost was. He laughed about it. I can remember him leaving the big house, over here, one morning, and he said, "I've got to go down to the Draft Board and sign up." And he said, "You know, I went down and volunteered in World War II and they wouldn't take me." When they examined him, they found a heart murmur. And he lived and died with one and possibly so will I. I have the same thing, exactly.

TERRELL: Well, did he do his cattle and horses in Thompson? You said you had a ranch there.

HALL: Yes, in the Booth area. Oh, he moved around everywhere. Actually this family that I first started talking about, the Bonds and the Davises and the Hollimans, they were all up in the Fulshear Foster part of the county. And so he had some places up there too. And then he also had cattle in Harris County at one time.

TERRELL: Well, your mother was a good sport to be the chaperone.

HALL: Oh, well, that was a cush job when you went to Twenty-One Club for lunch! I don't think we stayed at the Waldorf but we ate there many a time. We didn't eat anywhere except the very best places. And I'll always remember one Chinese place with fondness. What was its name? King Fu or something like that. He was the sweetest old Chinese man you ever saw. We were taken these places, most of them, in our rodeo clothes for publicity for the rodeo. They wanted people to look at us and say, "Well who are they? Where are they from?" And we met many, many other show people.

Every time he saw us coming, we had the center table, and we didn't have to order. He just started sending out all these piles of food and when it came time, of course we had a woman--businesswoman/caretaker for us from Madison Square Garden or the Boston Garden--they picked up all the tabs for this. But when it came time to present a bill, at his restaurant, he NEVER presented one. He just loved having us. He just had the biggest time with us. And there were many places like that.

I wanted another career. I wanted to go into the Army. I wanted to become a WAC--Women's Army Corps. And we had one or two in Richmond, you know. Antoinette Davis Reading who just passed in the last few years was a WAC. And, oh, I just thought that was the greatest. My mother was not about to sign the papers. So then I got acquainted with the Navy recruiters, and I brought them out, and I wanted to be a WAVE. And Mother wouldn't go for that either. So I finally just went behind her back and I just simply went to work for the Army.

I worked in the Pentagon. Of course, that thing is huge; they have all kinds of people on down the line. We had, colonels, majors, and captains. That's about all I worked for, at a pretty high echelon. I think a captain was really a paper boy, in our office. He's the one who toted the papers up and down the halls. (laughs) The majors actually did the work. The lieutenant colonels and the bird colonels, they thought they were in charge. Most of them were West Point.

I was there about three or four years. During that time, I had met someone that I became interested in, although I think to some extent, he was more interested in me, than maybe I was in him. But he was a wonderful, wonderful person. He was from a First Family of Virginia. He used to get after me and encourage me to do all this genealogy that I have now. And I can remember him saying, "Oh, you just must trace your genealogy. I can just tell by looking at you that you are a lady." And I just thought that was hysterical. I was not interested anything like that. Sure enough, my mother had Lee cousins.

TERRELL: Oh my goodness. He was right.

HALL: He was right. And his mother was a Lee. She wasn't actually a Lee, but they are related to the Lees. And in my mother's family, my direct ancestor, James English married Edmund Lee's daughter, Nancy. I'm not sure just how Edmund was related to Robert E. I don't know whether they were brothers or cousins. I think possibly more like cousins.

In Virginia, they take all of this very seriously. You talk about cliques! I thought I had been brought up on the edge of a clique in Richmond, but it was full of pussycats compared to what they have in Virginia. Tom Brokaw is a member of those old families in Virginia.

TERRELL: Well, so, you didn't marry that fellow.

HALL: No, he asked me to marry him. He put a gorgeous HUGE diamond on my hand. But, there again, I think I was not ready to marry. And I realized he was as much of a Virginian, if not more, as I was a Texan. And working there in the Pentagon, although I LOVED that and enjoyed every minute of it, the climate in Virginia just did not agree with me.

I had always heard about the Texas climate and our differences in temperature. To me, there was nothing to compare with what they have in Virginia. You were either burning up or you were freezing to death.

The war in Germany was over at the time that I went to work. But then the Nuremberg trials were coming up and I went down to apply for that. But I was not chosen for that. And, so then, there was going to be the occupation. On my way, I think, to Washington, I believe was when they dropped that atomic bomb. I also felt maybe that I might ask to go to the trials, although they were sort of different, in Japan, than the trials for the war criminals in Germany. But in those days, you had to actually be 21 not to need a signature, so my parents said, "No way are you going."

TERRELL: So you're still not 21 when all this was going on?

HALL: I don't think so, no. Not quite.

TERRELL: You've packed a lifetime into living before you ever got to be an adult.

HALL: Yes, I did it pretty fast. I decided not to marry Richard. He had a lot of school ahead of him. He went to the University of Virginia. He had all of those years to put in to study law. He had seven or eight or more years ahead of him. I wasn't ready to tie myself down to that.

I guess I still had a rambling spirit so I came back to Houston. And there wasn't a whole lot going on in Houston quite yet. But they were beginning to develop as a business town. I got a lucky break and an introduction to the personnel manager for Tennessee Gas Transmission Company, which was the big upcoming gas transmission company. And he was Hollywood-struck himself and when he heard about all my experiences and appearances, naturally I got a job. (laughs)

TERRELL: And who was this...this man? Was it Mr. Simon?

HALL: No, but I remember Gardiner Simon well. Because, there again, I was lucky I was able to work at a high echelon. I first went to work in the geological department. I was just sort of a pool secretary. I worked for two geologists and a petroleum engineer. They were all wonderful men. The head man, the chief of the department, Ralph Graham, was the head of oil and gas production. He chose me to be his secretary. I went from the 21st floor of the Commerce building down, I think, to the 5th or 6th floor. It's what they called in those days, I was 'on the carpet', the red carpet. They did not have carpeting in all of the offices in those days only in the executive suites. Ralph Graham was on that floor, as a vice president by then, of Tenneco, of course it became Tenneco.

TERRELL: What year was this?

HALL: That was the late 40s by then. As you say, I had done a lot in the earlier years, and then it sort of slowed down to a more normal lifestyle, which I really didn't mind. I was working there and sometimes I would have an apartment in Houston and then sometimes I would live out here at home. They had a commuter bus from Richmond. It was early hours but I rode the commuter bus a good bit of the time.

TERRELL: And how many years did you stay there?

HALL: I guess maybe four or five. By that time my childhood sweetheart had come home to Sugar Land and we had started dating again. We certainly didn't have a whirlwind courtship. We'd known one another a long time and we actually dated for about five years before we were married.

TERRELL: And what was his name?

HALL: Hulon Hall. He was from the Madisonville Bedias area. The Halls are an old cotton planter family in Madison County. But they had moved down here during the Depression when everybody lost their cotton farms. He went to school and played football for Sugar Land and I went to school in Richmond.

TERRELL: And where did you meet?

HALL: I was drum major during our high school days.

TERRELL: So there was interaction between Sugar Land and Richmond?

HALL: We played them in football.

TERRELL: And there wasn't much mobility back and forth.

HALL: But there was and before I graduated high school kids from Foster, Fulshear and Simonton, all got bussed in here. It's what brought Billie Wendt to Richmond. Then Needville and that group came. Then, instead of just having the 'old Richmond clique', you had all these other cliques too. So it became a more complicated thing.

TERRELL: So you and your boyfriend dated for five years and then you got married? How old were you when you married?

HALL: OLD! By that time, the older ladies that you were around, Mother's friends and older, (chuckles) if you were not married at that time, something was definitely wrong! So their first thing when they would see me was, "When are you going to get married?" Then after you married, it was always, "Well, when are you going to have your baby?" I was married eight years before I had a baby! (laughs) I put off marriage and parenthood as long as possible.

TERRELL: But how old were you when you did get married?

HALL: I was twenty-seven. And that was old.

TERRELL: And you had how many children?

HALL: One. She's the light of my life. She is Cynthia Ann. She was named for Cynthia Ann Parker, by the way. I was in the process of trying to adopt an Indian boy that I had seen and met, when I got pregnant. Which I think happens sometimes. Cynthia Ann Parker lived with the Indians.

TERRELL: Did you live in Houston when you married?

HALL: After we married, yes. We lived in Houston for a while. He worked for the old Humble Oil Company, which became Exxon. He worked in the field, for about thirty-seven years, until he retired. I didn't move around with him that much. We sort of had an extended honeymoon, I guess, on weekends. I would go wherever he was. And he didn't get moved around that much.

TERRELL: Well, that was lucky.

HALL: Yeah. He was fortunate in that.

TERRELL: Well, what organizations have you been involved with, in Richmond? You're a member of Saint John's Methodist Church?

HALL: Yes. Since I was about ten, when we moved back here. Joined the church the first thing.

TERRELL: And Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

HALL: Yes. It's chartered out of Sugar Land and it is the chapter for this entire area. It's the Fort Settlement Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. I'm eligible I think in all of these lines. In Mother's line there is a huge, huge story. On Mother's side we had a Union general and a Union colonel, and I am a direct descendent of the colonel. So I was what they called a divided family. That was in the War Between the States, or the Civil War.

For DAR, mother's line goes back to Rebel Wharton of the famous Wharton family. She has quite a lot of distinguished people in her family, whereas my family was more the every day people. Except I have just gotten a genealogy on the Rich family. I knew absolutely nothing about those people, ever.

TERRELL: This is your father's family?

HALL: Father's family has a long, fascinating story. They go back to Virginia. Actually they go back in Europe, back in the Middle Ages or Dark Ages. They were possibly, it doesn't say exactly, what they called Sephardic Jews. That was the Spanish Jew. When we got that information, my brothers all threw it away. Wouldn't even share it with their wives! Didn't want to talk. They still don't want to talk about it or hear about it.

My father would feel the same way. For some reason, he was prejudiced. I just never was. I had a lot of Jewish friends. I dated a lot of the big Jewish names in Houston. They all swore I was Jewish!

TERRELL: (laughs)

HALL: And--maybe, if I had found that out sooner I might have been a Bodenheimer or a, gosh, what were some of the other big names? I dated Sid Atlas. They owned a large fan manufacturing company.

TERRELL: You've had quite a life.

HALL: I was vice-chairman of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission for about twenty-five or thirty years, until just recently. Because there were just a few of us who, more or less, held the thing together. Jane McMeans, Bettye Anhaiser, people like that. We used to have meetings, and if we had four or five or six people there, we thought we were doing great! And now it's a big thing.

I was involved with the docents for the Fort Bend Museum, for years. I was on the board of the Museum of Southern History for about thirty years, until they moved to Houston. And now I'm no longer affiliated with them at all. What else is there? I'm a member of the garden club. My mother was a founding member of the Richmond Garden Club and so was my aunt, who was Lucille Birdwell, a sister to my father. They were both founding members of the garden club.

TERRELL: You said your mother was involved?

HALL: Yes, she was very involved in the church, more so than I am. She sang in the choir.

TERRELL: I am wondering if there is something that we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

HALL: I think you said you wanted me to tell you a little bit of what Richmond was like.

TERRELL: I do. I would like that.

HALL: Okay. Richmond was not the place it is now. I don't know whether it was better or worse. I can remember instead of pea gravel that we have now, the big rocks this big around (gestures), big as an apple, that lined the streets of Richmond. The roads were all unpaved. Many a time I walked from the Jane Long Elementary and cut through for lunch.

Mother was a GREAT cook and she always had a great cook in the kitchen. And between the two of them, they put on a big hot lunch every day. That was it - dinner. We had a BIG breakfast early and then a big lunch and at night just sort of whatever you could find. There was nothing for us to have eight or ten people for lunch every day.

TERRELL: Your friends, or friends of your mother's?

HALL: Mostly friends of my daddy's. Most of them were cattlemen from around here. And in those days, we had cattlemen and gentleman farmers. The men didn't work. Nobody went to work until World War II (laughs). Unless you just had to be a farm laborer or something like that. If you were a Darst or a Winston, you owned a lot of land. You had people working on the farm.

TERRELL: Were they white people or black people or Hispanics?

HALL: Sort of a mix. Mostly blacks working in the fields. So the men all sat around downtown and either drank coffee or, a generation earlier, my grandparents' generation, most of the men would have just been considered drunks today. Alcoholics that needed to go to dry out. There was nothing else for them to do. They had other people to do it for them. But in my early days, my father stayed busy, working cattle, either for himself or other people. So he was busy and working buying cattle and moving around a lot. My mother went with him a lot. I was the oldest of four children and although we had help in the house, and we had an old white man, I think he sort of adopted us, who came from my father's pipelining days. My dad was one of the old original pipeliners, speaking of Tenneco. And he laid the ground beds, many of which are still in use today for the pipelines that go back East. I think he went as far as Arkansas and Louisiana. He did that for a while. Just before we came back here.

TERRELL: What did you do on weekends? I mean, did playmates come over or were there neighbors close by?

HALL: Well, in our younger days, we were still playing paper dolls. My daughter gets a kick out of this, because she looks at me and she says, 'Mother, I cannot believe you ever sat down on the floor and played paper dolls.' We had paper dolls and in that group were Judy Darst and Mary Peareson and Mary Ann Crowell. Most of them were about a grade younger than I was. I visited Billie Wendt and Tita Walker out at Fulshear. I would ride the bus with them, spend the night out there and come back here. And I was introduced around out there. I dated Carl Bentley who was a Constable or Justice of the Peace or something. He's still around.

I remember the rocks in the street, but in the springtime, it was glorious. That was before the curse of Saint Augustine grass, which we all think we have to have now. I don't approve of it. Never have approved of it. I had one house that was all Bermuda grass. It is hard to keep, harder than Saint Augustine, but it's pretty. It's blue-green. It's really pretty. But in the springtime, in Richmond, the whole thing burst out into bloom.

TERRELL: Wild flowers?

HALL: Wildflowers. Everybody's yards were just full of wildflowers. The ditches, the cow pastures, everywhere just gorgeous blooms. We had bluebonnets, buttercups, Indian paintbrushes, and all those things that you now have to ride up to Bellville to see, it was all right here in Richmond. And then, after World War II, when all the subdivisions came in, they said you had to have Saint Augustine grass, then worse than that, we began using all the agricultural chemicals, which ruined all of that.

I dated many Jewish men in Houston, nothing terribly serious. The first thing that all of those men did, they were all gentlemen, was they took you home to introduce you to their mother. And usually, mother axed things right away because I wasn't Jewish. Or, if I had known that I was, I wouldn't have been Jewish enough because the Sephardic Jews that I mentioned were the least Jewish of all. It thrilled me to death, because you know who they usually became?

TERRELL: Who?

HALL: Gypsies! I always wanted to be a Gypsy. When I grew up, actually I looked like a Gypsy, I was so dark. This is a family portrait (gestures).

TERRELL: That's beautiful.

HALL: And, you saw this one. My rodeo pictures and all of my rodeo things, unfortunately, were left all together with Mary Ann Staines and that became a great tragedy when the husband and wife both died and had no heirs and outsiders stepped in. Most of the better antiques out of my mother's family, my mother's silver, all of that went. Plus my rodeo clothes.

TERRELL: That's a shame.

HALL: I was on the cover of the magazine section of the Houston Chronicle. My daughter has that picture framed.

TERRELL: Did you and your husband ever live in Richmond? Or were you really in Houston?

HALL: We lived in Navasota for a while, Houston. We stayed because he was gone so much. He did a lot of firsts for Exxon. He was on the first big, deep water, offshore drilling rig. They chose him because he had been in the Coast Guard and was a member of the Marine Corps and made those big landings in the South Pacific. So he knew his way around a boat. He was also on the first well that came in up at a little place in East Texas, named Sedgwick.

A young black man, a wonderful person from the Thompson area, called me after Hulon died and he said, "Miss Hall, I just heard about all this." He said, "I am so torn up, I can't even talk about it." But, he said, "You know, Hulon got me a job with Exxon. I had been lucky enough to go to school, but I was hanging around Thompsons but nobody here was hiring a young black man with a degree. They weren't interested. Hulon took me in to Exxon and introduced me and got me a job." He said, "You know, I am calling you on a company line from the top of the oil well that brought in the field at Sedgwick."

TERRELL: Oh how wonderful.

HALL: He said, "I'm in his absolute old position. I'm up in the tower, they called it."

TERRELL: Gosh, that's wonderful.

HALL: He came to see me the next time he came back to Richmond. In fact, I had more nice calls from Hulon's black friends than I did whites.

TERRELL: Well, isn't that something.

HALL: Oh, goodness. Hulon knew and did so much for the blacks in Thompson. He really did. And they were his best friends.

TERRELL: The name of the Holliman who met The Old Three Hundred here, what was his name?

HALL: His first name was Kinchen Davis.

TERRELL: The original house was built in three different sections?

HALL: Oh, here it is. This says it was enlarged to the present size in the 1870s by Doctor Samuel Stone, and that's probably about right. Doctor John Rich bought the home in 1908. It's presently owned by his granddaughter. Reportedly it is haunted. I also did a recorded tour which they show, of the Fort Bend County courthouse. I was an expert on the courthouse at one time. In fact, I wrote the history of the courthouse.

TERRELL: Well, that's wonderful. Those walls are pretty thick.

HALL: Yes, those walls are thick and they're really special. I did a lot of research on that. And, actually, when the courthouse was redone, about the same time that I was redoing this house, they had some young men, students, possibly some women too, from Rice Institute, came out and copied that green tile that's in the rotunda. That is very rare stuff. It's no longer available. They came out and remade enough tile to patch it with. I used to be able to walk right up and show you where the patch is. And it looks good. But it's not the same. You can't duplicate it.

TERRELL: You were going to tell me memories of downtown Richmond.

HALL: Yes. Downtown Richmond, on Saturdays, was a very, very interesting place. So was downtown Rosenberg. But in Richmond, the people who lived in the country did not shop every day. They came to town on Saturdays, and it was a combination of checking their mailboxes at the post office, going to the various grocery and hardware stores, which were owned by the Oshman family, the Robinowitz and Robinson families, and the Josephs.

All the parking places were full. Some came in wagons. And the old watering trough, at my insistence, is still there on the square, where the old City Hall is. When they redid the grounds and set Mayor Moore's statue, I called Bob Crosser and said, "Go down there and don't let them do away with the watering trough." The horseshoe place was right across the street. If their horses or mules needed tending to, they could get that done. They tied up. There was a long hitching post which is gone. I've asked Bob to look into replacing it. I offered to pay for it.

TERRELL: That would be nice.

HALL: People would hitch their horses. My grandfather would saddle up here and ride his horse downtown, water it, and hitch it to that post. They would always loosen the saddle a little bit. Nobody stole anything. You could leave all your belonging on the horse because punishment in those days was swift and immediate.

Whenever my grandfather came to Richmond he would get with his buddies down there at the saloon and they would probably stay on a two week binge. Most people ate at home. There was one restaurant right there near the courthouse. That was, oh, I would say, in the 40s, maybe 30s-40s. It was the Ideal Café. Served wonderful food. There was one downtown as well, the old Jane Long boarding house. You've heard about that, I'm sure.