

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Robert Louis Vogelsang**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Olga Barr

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19 Pages



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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Hi Bob. Thanks for joining us.

VOGELSANG: How are you?

GOODSILL: I'm great, thanks. Why don't we start the interview with my asking how your people got to Fort Bend County?

VOGELSANG: My grandfather came from Germany, and arrived in Galveston and they moved to Ellinger, Texas, where he ran a general merchandise store. His wife's father, his father-in-law, owned it. My Grandfather's name was Louis Adolph Vogelsang. My grandmother's name was Mary Krenek.

One of the realtors in Rosenberg, Texas convinced my granddad to move to Rosenberg because the farming was better. It was blacker land, and he would do much better in his business with his general merchandise store. So granddad sold all of the merchandise in his store and packed all his things on a train and proceeded to come to Rosenberg. But on the day of departure from Ellinger, Texas, he went to the bank to get his money from his sale of inventory and the bank had gone broke. There had been a run on the bank. So granddad proceeded to get a shotgun and go down the Main Street to shoot the president of the bank. His friends pulled him off the street, basically saved him, put him on the train and he came to Rosenberg. The realtor, Pinch Hiller, staked him, paid for his railroad transfer and got the goods off the railroad. Then he took him home to his house, put him up in his house, and then staked him to start his business.

GOODSILL: Wow, that was nice.

VOGELSANG: So he opened a general merchandise store somewhere on Third Street in Rosenberg. When it was available, he moved to the Gray & Son Building at 1909 Avenue G, or G and Second Street in Rosenberg. He had a lease purchase agreement to buy the building. At the end of the lease purchase, which was about a ten-year agreement, it turned out the son of the previous owner really didn't want to sell. So granddad had to sue and go to the court in order to get the building, you know, and not get it taken away from him. That was the first landlord and tenant lawsuit in the state of Texas and granddad prevailed.

GOODSILL: Really!

VOGELSANG: Yes, that's what they say. [laughing]

GOODSILL: Do you remember the name of it?

VOGELSANG: Vogelsang vs. Gray. I've got a picture. They evidently had a pretty thriving business as a general merchandise store. The building that we're in now was built in 1910. It was about 1912 when he opened the business there. We celebrated the building's 100th anniversary in 2010. They did go through some rough times. There are funny stories too. One of them was that they had to barter a lot, so they were always asking people how your crops were doing and how your cattle were doing because that



*Vogelsang Building, Richmond, TX,  
on the National Registry*

meant how much credit they were going to have to give. We always got a kick out of that. The other thing that he is famous for is he used to have a big barrel of root beer in the middle of the store for the kids.

GOODSILL: Liquid root beer?

VOGELSANG: Yeah, they'd get free root beer when they came in and shopped. If they were really good customers my grandmother would give them a scoop of ice cream. Just recently one of the Lane brothers walked in the store and brought the old cradle that held the root beer barrel. He said, "My dad saw this on the floor of the store and didn't want to see it thrown away when the store was gone. And he grabbed it, and so I have the original barrel holder that has the rock on it and everything where they rocked it to mix it." It's quite unusual, so we have it in our antique store now.

GOODSILL: Wonderful, a museum piece.

VOGELSANG: EXACTLY. [laughing] it's a museum piece.

GOODSILL: It was smart of the guy to save it, too.

VOGELSANG: Yeah, yeah. It was real thoughtful of him to do that. The rest is kind of history. As L. A. Vogelsang retired from the general merchandise store they opened a café business, the L. A. Vogelsang Café. They served chili and hamburgers. They say the chili was delicious, and of course, he had beer. There is a good story about the beer, too.

Everybody was raising their price on the beer, and he wouldn't raise his prices. He saved the bottles of course. In those days you returned the bottles. In the final analysis, he was making more on returned bottles than he was on the beer [laughs]. I thought that was funny.

As they got older they rented the buildings to several different people. In the 1950s it was the Knight Chevrolet. They had a ten-year lease. Then there is another five-year lease of just a general merchandise store. After that, I'm trying to remember the name. And then Rosenberg kind of went downhill. In the 1960s and 1970s the building turned into bars. He had five bars in there with, and we still had the Rosenberg Masonic Lodge No. 881 upstairs, and the Joerger-Lindsey office was still there upstairs. Downstairs was in the Cochran Building, there was a saddlery and dry goods store.

GOODSILL: I just interviewed Kathleen Lindsey the other day. [See separate interview of Kathleen Lindsey in Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Interviews.]

VOGELSANG: Well, she was a very close friend. She was my grandmother's attorney for years and years and years. She and Angie McNutt came to grandmother's funeral, which was over in Fayetteville. Kathleen is a very old friend. Can you believe how well she's doing?

GOODSILL: Well, when I did the interview, what is she, 98? She spoke in full sentences without one pause without needing any correction, full access to all the facts, and dates. She gave a wonderful interview.

VOGELSANG: She told Marcia yesterday at the Women's Club that she's still going to the office two or three times a week. And she would look up who was trying to get all of the renters in the building, so we can document them in the book that Rene Butler is writing. She's going to help us with that.

GOODSILL: Well, Ms. Lindsey would be a good person to do it because she was a specialist at title abstract law.

VOGELSANG: She's got the history doesn't she?

GOODSILL: Do you want to know something? She and her secretary, Ruth, don't even know how to work a computer. They have no access to the Internet. They do nothing online, nothing.

VOGELSANG: Really? She wrote me a real nice letter at the 100-year anniversary of Rosenberg. It was all typewritten.

GOODSILL: Her secretary's been with her for fifty years, five zero. [laughter] Isn't that great? So, what happened in the 1960s? Why was the town beginning to go down?

VOGELSANG: The town was just disintegrating because the freeway was coming through and everything was moving to the freeway. The town was kind of blowing away or degrading. Nobody went to town anymore. Avenue H was still pretty healthy, but the downtown itself was not healthy because everything was on Highway 36 and moving toward Hwy 59. Offices and businesses were moving. In the 1980s, I think it was, they moved the police department out of downtown, and so the City Hall became vacant.

GOODSILL: Continue with that story because now it is 2014. It's a nice, little thriving area. How did that happen?

VOGELSANG: We lived in Dallas until 1973 when we moved back to Rosenberg. I decided to start remodeling the building in 1983. So I moved my offices into the old building and started working on it. That's another interesting piece of history. I had a leaky roof, and I didn't have any capital to fix it. I lived in Dallas at the time, and I called this engineer to come and check it out. I came down here to meet with him. He walked that whole building; he went up on the roof and everywhere. He came around to me after about three hours and he says, "Now what was your question?" "Well sir, I found a leak in the roof, and I want to know if it is worth it to fix it or should I just tear the building down? I'm just a young engineer in Dallas and don't have a lot of money." He said, "Mr. Vogelsang, this building is going to be here long after you and I are dead. I'd suggest you fix the roof."

So that just tells you how they built buildings in those days. The interesting part about ours is that it was built at three different times. Gray & Son Building was completed in 1908. Then the Vogelsang, then the Cochran Building was completed in 1909, which housed the Masonic Lodge and Lindsey-Joerger Law offices. Then the new Gray & Son building was completed in 1910 which became the Vogelsang Building. There are double walls between those buildings. Very interesting.

GOODSILL: The Fire Department must love that. Those walls must be good fire retardants!

VOGELSANG: They do love that. We moved in and I was able to acquire the Masonic Lodge building, so I got the Cochran Building. Once I did that then I was able to start remodeling all three buildings at the same time.

We kicked every bar out. First we started with a little program recommended by the fella from the Historic Commission. Betty Anhauser got very involved with me. We started working on historical markers. We got a historical plaque, and we got a national registry. We met a guy from the Texas Historical Commission who was a Texas Tech professor of architecture. I can't remember his name, but he dedicated his class to designing how we remodeled the building.

GOODSILL: Really!

VOGELSANG: Yes, it became a class project for Texas Tech students. It was really cool. They came up with these renderings, which are still in the building hanging on the wall. They turned the building into an arts and crafts venue. Our first venture was to put my offices in there. At that time I housed probably four or five people, it later grew to thirty-five.

GOODSILL: Was it in engineering?

VOGELSANG: Yeah, it was in satellite technology.

GOODSILL: Satellite technology?

VOGELSANG: We were the first people to put satellite antennas in apartments in America.

GOODSILL: Reception for television?

VOGELSANG: Reception for television. We did it in Houston, Texas at the Harold Farb properties.

GOODSILL: Oh, that must have been really great business.

VOGELSANG: It was! We installed eighteen thousand units. But you know how your antennas, this will probably sound funny to somebody a few years from now, but your antennas today are just a little DirectTV or EquiStart?



*Vogelsang National Historical Marker, Richmond, Texas*

In those days, our first antenna cost us \$75,000 and were fifteen feet in diameter. You put one in the parking lot and then ran the cable to the apartments.

GOODSILL: So it's outdated technology, but at the time it was the latest and greatest.

VOGELSANG: Yeah, it was the latest and greatest. When they said you could install satellite antenna in a complex, we said, "You're crazy." It turned out we did it for seventy-five thousand. Yeah, it is a changing world.

We actually ran our company out of that office, and we also ran a magazine on the industry, which was called The Private Cable Industry. It was designated Private Cable because of the fact that all of our equipment was put on private property. We only had to make an agreement with the landlord. We paid him the franchise fee. We paid him ten percent instead of paying the city because he is the one that gave us the right to put the equipment up.

It worked extremely well, and we built an industry in the United States. I became the first president of that industry called the National Satellite Cable Association (NSCA). We ran that out of those offices. We also published the Private Cable magazine at that office. We still publish a magazine that now concentrates on fiber deployment because we've moved from private cable to wireless fiber. Fiber development is the new best and greatest. It's the way the world is going as you know, Google fiberizing these cities. It's the future.

So while we're doing that, we're remodeling and opening up the first arts and crafts fair. It's called Main Street Market Place. That was in the 1980s. I'm trying to remember what year. We had a good, good, good, good showing. The community just loved it, and they really supported it. Everybody showed up, the city manager, the mayor, all the old-timers, Lindsey, Myrtis Lane. All those people just really thought that was great. But it really didn't catch on like we had wanted it to in that you'd almost have to throw an event constantly. But the next event that did come up was 1986, the sesquicentennial year. We opened an office just for that event. We manned it with volunteers. We had a huge event in the street, and did a barbecue cook-off and the whole nine yards. We then had arts and crafts again. We had the alley filled with barbecue cooking. We kind of got the excitement back again for the event. Progress kept moving and more and more people starting to fix up their buildings. Then in 1991 we kind of reached a peak. We were extremely excited. We created the Rosenberg Downtown Development Association. We changed the name later to the Rosenberg Revitalization Association, the RRA. With that we brought in the Christmas Magic program every Christmas.

According to The Chronicle paper we had about seven thousand at one point. In an old bank building across the street we had the police headquarters setup up where they could watch the crowd. We really had a very successful event. Things were kind of really going our way.

We took the whole downtown area to the City Council in 1991 to see if they would join the Main Street program and hire a Main Street director. We lost that vote. The City Council felt that they didn't want to spend \$30,000 a year to hire a director for the downtown.

We had some great supporters, Carl Hopkins, Michael Richard. Dorothy Ryan, Fran Naylor, Herb Pheland and Wayne Sebesta were against it. We got voted down. That kind of put a damper on a lot of the activities for a while.

We moved on into the 90s with everybody sort of fixing up. Along came Bill Butler, who was a really great push. He purchased a lot of the buildings, believed in downtown. He started moving the project forward again. I sold a lot of the property to him. At that time, I had 29 renters. I had purchased everything from my building to Avenue H. I recruited Bob's Tacos and got them in my building, and got them started.

GOODSILL: Ah, Bob's Tacos!

VOGELSANG: They were on The Food Channel! Bill Butler owns the building and is his landlord. It was an old auto repair, before that it was a gas station, now Bob's Tacos. It was Lane's Gas Station; the first covered gas station between here and south Texas.

GOODSILL: Really high-end.

VOGELSANG: It was high class and they had an auto shop in there. Everybody kept beating on me to put another car dealership in there, you know, used cars. I just held out until I finally got a restaurant and got a good one. He's really done well there. I owned the building next to him, which was the first Rosenberg Herald Building. The building next to that was the first Rosenberg Bank and Trust building. It was the J. W. Davis Bank when granddad was there. I bought that building and the lots. Anyway, we just kind of moved on like we didn't know any better. We just kept kicking people out and remodeling buildings and then looking for new renters. Bill Buttler kept doing the same thing. With his help we got Another Time Soda Fountain going in that historic building.



Oh, one of the big things from the Revitalization Association, we also appointed a committee to create a Railroad Museum. That's how the Rosenberg Railroad Museum got started. Linda Wilkerson was our president and ran that committee. We then broke it off from the association and made it an LLC. Travis Reese, of course, and all of the locals played a big role. Martha Ray, Myrtis Lane, all of those played a big role in getting that started and getting it off the ground. Travis, with a lot of support from Maddie Butler, was able to build an education station and create a real activity center for kids.

It has grown now from zero to I think we just had over 1,200 attendees this last year, so we are very proud of that. It makes a real attraction for Rosenberg. The City didn't want to spend money on any special interests in Rosenberg. That kind of made me laugh because, I mean you're rebuilding a historic area. If you compare how Richmond feels about their city versus Rosenberg, Richmond really takes care of their history. It just seems kind of funny in 1991 that we couldn't get their attention. Now Mayor Joe Gurecky and Vicente Morales have taken the reins, there is a whole new interest in downtown and preserving the history. They are even looking at now redoing the old City Hall, turning it into a city museum. The Railroad museum just really sticks to railroad paraphernalia. The city museum would show all the old stuff about the whole city.

GOODSILL: That could make Rosenberg a tourist destination. It would bring some good money into the community.

VOGELSANG: Definitely make Rosenberg a tourist destination. That would be wonderful. So we are doing everything we can to start creating that. That's what the events are about. Last November we were named a Cultural District in the State of Texas. I think it is the 24th cultural district in Texas. That brings tourists. It shows that we have got a lot of art and artists. We have an art league. We have independent artists here. We have Performing Arts groups bringing orchestras to the town; Houston Symphony, Rosenberg Symphonic Band. They're good. That has been a real incentive, and has given the town a lot of life. We have serious parking problems, so we're trying to get some land from the BNSF railway.

We're also working on getting them to give us a rail spur. The uniqueness of our museum is that it is right on the rail. The kids love it because you are looking at three different lines there, three different tracks. Kids can stand at that fence and hear those whistles blow. They get a kick out of that train going right by them. It is within thirty feet of them.

GOODSILL: What would be the purpose of the rail spur?

VOGELSANG: The rail spur would allow us to bring the Kansas City Santa Claus Train to Rosenberg. Every other year Kansas City brings a Santa Claus train to Hungerford. The entrance lines to get into the train to see it during Christmas are about a half a mile long. If we had a rail spur we could bring that train right into our yard and open it up to the public.

GOODSILL: So the train would go off the track and park on the spur?

VOGELSANG: Exactly.

GOODSILL: Then when it was time for it to get off, it would back off and get back on the main track? Do you think it is a possibility?

VOGELSANG: Oh, yeah. We are working with Union Pacific right now, and we have engineers on it. We have spent about a year on this project. So far, it is all about getting designs, permission, and engineer approvals. So far, we haven't had any roadblocks. The project is moving forward with engineering drawings and plans. We don't know exactly how much it is going to cost yet. Once we get there, we'll figure out how to get the money.

GOODSILL: Would Union Pacific use that spur for their purposes?

VOGELSANG: No, they have a maintenance yard right down the road from us about two hundred yards under the freeway. They would be close by, but they really couldn't use it. The interesting part is that there is a spur already there where they pull off to maintain there. They used to stop there and drop off feed according to Travis Reese at the big feed store, right where the freeway comes across FM723. I have great hopes that it will come through. I envision that that will happen.

The other hope is cars like the Patrick Henry. It has been through Rosenberg a couple of times. Patrick Henry owns a car and hooks up to Amtrak and moves people all over the country for entertainment and also for board meetings. He'll take you to Chicago and you'll have your meeting on the train.

GOODSILL: The Patrick Henry is...?

VOGELSANG: It's a promotional rail car, owned by a man named Patrick Henry. It's Patrick Henry Promotions. Patrick is a great rail car fan. He said he would be willing to park it in Rosenberg. Now he parks it in Houston. It is behind some hurricane fences and barbed wire in a very undesirable area. He is always fighting potential graffiti and all kinds of things. It is just a nasty place even to leave your car when you go on a trip.

We've been on a couple of trips. He sold the car trip to San Antonio for the auction at our museum fundraiser a couple of times. It is a real treat. We'd love to have it just sitting in Rosenberg. We've also teamed with the Houston Railroad Museum. We just acquired a new locomotive from them, which will be a nice showpiece. They have many cars that they could bring out if we had a rail spur.

GOODSILL: Traveling exhibit?

VOGELSANG: Yes, like a traveling exhibit, exactly. We could do that off and on all the time. That would give us a big, big push forward. The most unusual thing that we did was in the old bank building. As you might know, even as we fix buildings up in those days it was hard to find renters. We didn't have any renters. But now you can't find any space in downtown. People are looking. There is a waiting list. Even in our antique shop, we have a waiting list of people wanting to get in.

We wanted to do training in the satellite antenna field, so right behind Bob's Tacos in the parking lot, we put up seven antennas, the first one about a thirty footer, a fifteen footer, and a couple of ten footers. We did wiring all around the little park next to the bank building. We turned the building into a classroom. We created the first satellite technology school in America.

GOODSILL: That was very creative! In Rosenberg, Texas! (laughing) Was it well received?

VOGELSANG: We had such fun. We had six hundred students a year. Some of them came all the way from Hong Kong.

GOODSILL: Oh, can you imagine them coming to Rosenberg?

VOGELSANG: Hong Kong Telephone came all the way to Rosenberg.

GOODSILL: Eating at Bob's Tacos!

VOGELSANG: YEAH, and I just recently met with some big shot at Cox Cable in Las Vegas. He said, "You probably don't remember me because it has been lots of years ago, but I was one of your students at your satellite technology school." I said, "No, I don't remember, we had a lot of them, probably 3,000." It was quite unique for us to do that.

The other thing we did in those days that lends itself to the cultural arts is we created the Fort Bend County Arts Council. That was with Tom Delay, myself, and Don Russell from Sugar Land Properties. It was very well received in Fort Bend County. We put those offices in our building. We had a president and volunteers working. One of the first shows that we put on was an art show by a local man named Jarsolav Belik. He was from Czechoslovakia and moved to Rosenberg. He designed kinetic art. The definition of kinetic art is that it moves. He was a mechanical engineer and an artist. He also designed fountains.

We took his stuff and created a Fort Bend Arts event, which we did every year. He put in an exhibit in the brand new library in Richmond. He exhibited seventy-five pieces of kinetic art, everything moved. It was a beautiful exhibit. Since he was doing fountains, I asked him to build us a fountain in the little park next to our building.

He needed to experiment and be able to show fountains to people and customers. We built a fountain in the park, and it was really, really beautiful. It had lights in it. He had the fountains streaming from a central pole. What you don't know is that when you shine lights up the light will only go up the water stream, it follows the stream. It was really pretty. He ended up doing one of those in a Hyatt Regency lobby, and started doing them all over the country in Hyatt Regency Hotels. I don't know how many he ended up doing, but it was a real success story. I heard he went back to work for an oil company, but he has also been featured in the Houston Czechoslovakian museum as quite an artist. He was written up on the front page of their newsletter recently. He is quite talented. We had several functions in the Fluor complex in Sugar Land. It became a well-received event.

The Rosenberg Revitalization had a life of its own and then it was kind of over. We had something permanent. Now we have the Rosenberg Railroad Museum. The whole attitude has changed now. We have more restaurants and we need even more. People are starting to come downtown to eat. Cast Theater started in our building and is now twenty-five years old. They are a community theater, a little theater in the round with sixty-five seats in the old Masonic Lodge part of the building. We picked the old Masonic Lodge because it already had the windows closed up. What else were we going to with do it? So we decided to turn it into a theater. They didn't need windows.

GOODSILL: The Masonic Lodge moved to Highway 59. They were upstairs in the Cochran Building and they moved out on Highway 59. When they did, we bought it from the headquarters in Waco, Texas. It made a beautiful setting. Cast Theatre did a wonderful job.

Bill Long who was a systems engineer founded it. He is still there today, retired and operating it and getting new volunteers and new people. They do 4-5 plays a year. They put about 6,500 people through that theater a year. It's now grown so popular we have a restaurant in the building along with the antique shop, a jelly factory, and a little wine room. It has created an atmosphere that keeps that theater really packed. I take a big group each play, and we have to book way before the play starts to make sure we get seats. Our group has gone from just nine people getting together to 45 or more.

GOODSILL: That's great! (laughing) It must be fun to have the theater to yourselves.

VOGELSANG: Yes, we pretty much take over the theatre that night. They are going to decorate their lobby in an Orient Express railroad theme. They have already got plans drawn up to move to the other side of the building and have 165 seats.

GOODSILL: Will they keep the existing 65 seats?

VOGELSANG: That will be a rehearsal and training area and a summer camp for kids. Summer camp for acting, rehearsals, and then they will keep the big stage for the plays. We have got those drawn up. Now they are looking into how they are going to raise money. That is the really good news. The other good news is that downstairs the café that moved in is named Old Railroad Café which uses a railroad theme also. It picks up from the Railroad Museum. It has trains on the walls, old pictures of trains.

On the board of the museum, we have a Union Pacific official, and he says you can always tell a railroad town because they draw the streets east and west and north and south and just do a grid. There is never much architecture (laughing) to it at all. And that is exactly the way Rosenberg is laid out. It is just a grid.

GOODSILL: Did the railroad design the town originally?

VOGELSANG: Yes, the railroad laid it out and then started hiring people to run the railroad.

GOODSILL: So that is how Rosenberg started? It was a railroad town.

VOGELSANG: It started with Henry Rosenberg in Galveston, who came over and put the depot in. Richmond rejected the depot. They didn't want those blue-collar workers in their town. They were a cattle town. The law said you had to come within a mile of the courthouse. There is a big jog in the track as it comes through Richmond and runs one mile from this courthouse where we are sitting today (Richmond County Courthouse).

It then jogs back out and goes around to Rosenberg. We hit Rosenberg and that is where the depot was, and that is where the town was built, and they built housing for the people, a similar story to Imperial Sugar in Sugar Land. Well things are transient and when the railroad era was over the vitality of the town changed.

They built a rail line to Victoria, which went on down to Brownsville. They called it the Macaroni Line because they hired over 150 Italians to build that railroad. But all the workers were transient. They had camps and stuff set up; it was a railroad town. When I started remodeling in the 1980s there were about 30-35 trains a day to Rosenberg.

I always read in the history books that back in 1913-14 there were a lot of trains, fifty to sixty a day. I had an uncle who worked for Anderson-Clayton (cotton merchants) in Mexico City. I asked him if he knew where Rosenberg, Texas was. He said, "Bob, you can't get from Houston to South Texas without going through Rosenberg. It is the junction." It was known for that. But the point is that 75 trains go through there today. We've had a count as high as 80.

GOODSILL: And when they finish the Panama Canal extension there will be many more.

VOGELSANG: Yeah, even more, I agree. If we could get the rail spur and develop the tourist thing and then work on getting that high-speed train from Rosenberg into Houston... It is so easy to go from Sugar Land to Rosenberg all the way down to really El Campo. Use a good anchor and Eagle Lake. That would be quite a feat if we could get a high-speed track in there.

GOODSILL: For public transportation?

VOGELSANG: We could get a trolley car that would do a tourist run! A tourist run back and forth would be fun. If you think about it, the railroads were our airports in those days, the only way to travel around the country. You dressed up to go on a train, had your luggage, it was a big deal. And kids today haven't even been on a train.

GOODSILL: Ms. Kathleen Lindsey said that her father used to take the train from Rosenberg to the Richmond Courthouse every day.

VOGELSANG: You're kidding.

GOODSILL: No, every day. The roads were so unreliable the only way to really get there would be on a train. He would just get off and walk right to the Courthouse.

VOGELSANG: There is a story about the old Ebell house, which is right across the street from our building on Second Street. Former Mayor Gurecky has just purchased it. He is remodeling it into real nice location for events and a historical site. It is probably 104 years old; a historical landmark. Mayor John Carter is the guy who built that house. He was the one that ran the brick factory. He built all those buildings out of Brazos Brick, every building downtown. The Ebell house was built out of Brazos Brick, it was a wedding gift to his wife.

You're talking about the train going to the Courthouse and getting off the train and walking to the courthouse, well, voting polls evidently were right there next to the depot in the old days. A lady stepping off the train at a quarter to seven and walking into the poll and giving her vote elected one of our mayors. The mayor won by one vote. He walked over and gave his acceptance speech on the Ebell House porch. We have recreated that for the 100th year anniversary. Mayor Gurecky and Steve Albas, who just had finished building Town Center, compared the new with the old. It was really good.

GOODSILL: It reminds me of the engineer you hired to look at the roof. He was so intrigued with the building that he couldn't even remember your original question! He was impressed with how they built things back then.

VOGELSANG: (laughing) That's exactly right.

GOODSILL: However, it does make me think since you're in a high-tech business, what's it like outfitting an old building with Wi-Fi and computers and such.

VOGELSANG: Oh, we ran cables, and Wi-Fi goes right through that brick without no problems, it is only a problem with metal. But the other interesting thing is that we have wireless now so we don't need the cables. I put cables all over the building! We don't even fool with cables. Interesting side part of our business was that we sold programming to satellite antennas all over the country. As a matter of fact, every third antenna that you would see in a commercial property; hotel, motel, church, school, prison, hospital, they were all being served outside of Rosenberg, Texas. Very, very early we had visits from all of the content providers. We had Showtime, HBO, the Movie Channel, all of them would come to Rosenberg to visit us. It was kind of humorous because we had no place to entertain them, so we had to create our own entertainment center. When the day was over, I could hardly take these people downtown Houston to Tony's and entertain them trying to outdo New York City. So we put on a Texas barbecue in the alley and then we'd shoot pool and drink beer in the recreation room, and then take them back to their hotel.

GOODSILL: Where was their hotel?

VOGELSANG: We would put them in the Comfort Suites. We didn't have any hotels.  
(laughing)

GOODSILL: I bet they loved it.

VOGELSANG: They would get home and never quit talking about coming to Rosenberg and eating barbeque, and shooting pool, and drinking beer in the old Vogelsang Building. So we were able to create something that we couldn't do in New York.

Then I always made them agree to take me out when I got to New York, knowing that it was a lot more expensive in New York than here. We'll do the barbecue in Texas, but you guys take us to fancy restaurants in New York City. One of my employees carried a top-ten list with her, and we'd ask to go there.

GOODSILL: Well, you know we skipped a generation. I need to know your father and mother's name. How many children were there of Louis and Mary?

VOGELSANG: Louis and Mary had one child, my father, Louis Oscar Vogelsang, born Jan 13, 1902. He died in 1986 at 84 years old. He was raised in Rosenberg and went to the school here in Rosenberg. He wanted to get into ROTC and he went to Austin High School to finish his high school education. Then he was very determined to get a degree and then get into the Army. So he applied to Texas A&M, but in those days with the German atmosphere with the war and everything, he was not accepted. So he went to the University of Texas. He got two degrees, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering. I think that may have been in 1929.

GOODSILL: Did he have a German accent?

VOGELSANG: Not really, not really.

GOODSILL: His name was just a dead give away?

VOGELSANG: Yes. A lot of Vogelsangs changed their names to Birdsong, which is a literal translation. Vogel is bird and sang you know, so that kind of got them around that.

GOODSILL: But he didn't do that.



VOGELSANG: No. Then he went to work for the Corp of Engineers in the Army. He became a full career Lieutenant Colonel. He retired, and then he went to San Antonio public service, and served there for, oh, I don't know ten years or so. And then was drafted and after that was hired by the Rio Grande Valley Gas Company in Brownsville, Texas, and became their President for twenty years, and retired there. I was born in Dallas, moved to San Antonio, and then Dallas when he was in the Corp of Engineers, and then moved to San Antonio, and then moved to Brownsville.

GOODSILL: What was you mother's name?

VOGELSANG: Bernice Meadows.

GOODSILL: And did your mother and father have other children besides you?

VOGELSANG: Yes, I had one sister. She was four years older. Her name was Patricia Anne Vogelsang. She graduated from University of Texas and married a professor of history at Baylor. She had two children. One teaches here in Houston, and the other works in San Antonio. She's deceased with MS, multiple sclerosis. On my mother's side, her father was named Meadows. He was a big polo champion, played polo with Will Rogers. He owned the San Antonio, Texas stables called the Lackey Stables. And that is the stables that became Breckenridge Park. We used to have a polo ball that was autographed by Will Rogers. And that has since left my side of the family. (laughing)

GOODSILL: Yeah, it is somewhere. Too bad that guy that saved the cradle didn't save it.

VOGELSANG: Yeah, EXACTLY.

GOODSILL: Tell us your wife's name.

VOGELSANG: My wife's name is Marcia Jane Putegnat. Interestingly, my wife's dad and my dad were best of friends and hunted together for 40 years before we got married.

GOODSILL: Ha! Did you have children?

VOGELSANG: Yes. One boy aged 43, James Louis Vogelsang.

GOODSILL: Is he interested at all in historical preservation?

VOGELSANG: Yes, very much so. He was a real historical nut earlier.

GOODSILL: Oh, that must make you very happy.

VOGELSANG: We had a generation of hunting going on in our family down in Brownsville. Also, my brother-in-law's ranch in Mexico. So we do a lot of hunting in Mexico, well used to. We don't now with the mafia.

GOODSILL: Not safe to go there?

VOGELSANG: Not safe

GOODSILL: Does he still own it?

VOGELSANG: Yes, unfortunately. We wish some big rich guy would just come and buy it (laughing).

GOODSILL: Well, this has been quite a story. I particularly appreciate you telling us the evolution of the town.

VOGELSANG: Downtown Rosenberg has a lot to offer, number one its proximity to Fulshear which is exploding and also Katy.

GOODSILL: How would Fulshear and Katy impact Rosenberg? As a place to come to for recreation?

VOGELSANG: Yes, a place to come to shop. Even from Katy we are only fifteen minutes. From downtown Fulshear we're 5-10 minutes. And they come for the arts as well. Since we did some TV advertising our newcomers have switched from 80 recurring customers (20%) to 80% new customers. I'd say eighty percent of the new customers are coming from Katy. They come all the way for the antiques.

GOODSILL: Sounds like the advertising paid off.

VOGELSANG: The city has turned into an antiques center. As part of our study back in the 1990s we hired the architects that had worked on the San Antonio Riverwalk. The city put up half the money and the Rosenberg Revitalization Association put up the other half, \$12,500 each I think, \$25,000. They came up with a plan. One of the things they said was the city needed to stay where it was because authentic Texas towns were disappearing. If you have an authentic town keep it, old town.

GOODSILL: Not to mention that those buildings are going to outlast us!

VOGELSANG: Yes, really. They also said to have a theme. So we considered Western, Hispanic, Czech, and it ended up that the arts and crafts/antique theme really caught on. So we now have probably 20+ antique shops in town. But each one has their dealers. In ours, we have 36 dealers. This number of antique dealers downtown draws other people. That's big, it's working out for us.

GOODSILL: You haven't mentioned anything about shooting movies. Do you know anything about that industry?

VOGELSANG: Yeah, we actually didn't do any movies. They did shoot a couple of movies down around our buildings, and came in and closed off all the streets. I don't remember seeing the final result. No, no movies.

GOODSILL: Well, that feels like a good place to stop. Can you think of anything else I should have asked that I forgot?

VOGELSANG: No, but I can get back to you (laughing).

GOODSILL: You can get back. You can put an addendum on the end of this interview. And photos as well!

Interview ends.