

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Stella Svoboda Gaskamp**

Interview Date: 06/30/2011

Interviewer: Tom Stavinoha

Transcriber: Olga Bar

Location: Senior Citizens Center, Needville, TX

8 Pages



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*Transcript*

STAVINOHA: Stella how old are you and where were you born?

GASKAMP: 74. I was born in Rosenberg.

STAVINOHA: Where did you go to school?

GASKAMP: I started at Foster, Concord in Fairchild. Then at Longpoint.

STAVINOHA: That's where I went to school, too.

GASKAMP: I went, not even a year in Needville, then I quit.

STAVINOHA: At that time Needville was consolidated. I think they started in '49. The high school was opened somewhere along in there. How many in your family?

GASKAMP: Not any. I am an only child.

STAVINOHA: What was your maiden name?

GASKAMP: Svoboda.

STAVINOHA: The Svobodas in Damon are relatives? Arnold Svoboda and that group?

GASKAMP: They're my cousins.

STAVINOHA: Where did y'all grow up.

GASKAMP: I was born in Rosenberg. Then we moved between Needville and Fairchild, and then we moved to Pleak. Then I got married.

STAVINOHA: What did your dad do for a living?

GASKAMP: Farm. It was a small farm that we rented.

STAVINOHA: What kind of crops did he grow?

GASKAMP: Cotton and corn.

STAVINOHA: Y'all had tractors by then?

GASKAMP: Yes.

STAVINOHA: 'Cuz some of the people I've interviewed still had horse and mule when they first started.

GASKAMP: No, we had Allis Chalmers tractors.

STAVINOHA: That was a fairly small tractor because I remember the Allis Chalmers. That was a one-row tractor or...

GASKAMP: No, two rows.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all raise any cows or anything like that?

GASKAMP: Yes, cows and hogs and chickens.

STAVINOHA: Did being an only child put more responsibility on you to help with the farming?

GASKAMP: In a way it did. But I mostly had the easy part. Like when we had pickers, I would weigh the cotton. But I did pick and chop. I did do that also.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all garden quite a bit, have a big garden?

GASKAMP: Yes, yes, cucumbers, squash, beans, or whatever.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all butcher your own animals?

GASKAMP: We were in a beef club.

STAVINOHA: Tell us about a beef club.

GASKAMP: Well, in a beef club, you raise a nice calf and when it was time, whoever was in the beef club would butcher the calf. Then they would divide the parts up among the members. You would get different cuts of meat. Every month or so a calf was butchered.

STAVINOHA: I can remember the one that was in Fairchild.

GASKAMP: Well, that's the one we were in.

STAVINOHA: Tell me about going to elementary school.

GASKAMP: Foster was a real small school. Don't ask me how many in a class because there wasn't very many. Even Concord was a small school. Now Longpoint was a little larger school.

STAVINOHA: Right, Longpoint, if I remember, had two buildings, three or four classrooms, and a cafeteria. Who were the teachers back then? Mrs. Sware, Mrs. Brumbelow? Mrs. Harrison may have been later and Mrs. Beard. Those are the four that I can remember that were there. This was back in 1950 something — '52, '53, right?

GASKAMP: Mrs. Yanek was at Concord. I can remember her. I think she was the only teacher there.

STAVINOHA: Okay, so basically one room held everybody?

GASKAMP: Yeah, I think it was like three grades there.

STAVINOHA: What were the other schools that were close by — Concord, Foster, Longpoint? You know all the elementary.

GASKAMP: Well, then there was Brown Community School.

STAVINOHA: Right, yeah, I remember. Then toward the state park, Woodrow.

GASKAMP: There was some more back out this way, but I don't remember the names of them.

STAVINOHA: So, you said you dropped out of school? Why?

GASKAMP: Seventh. At Needville High School you went to different rooms and had different teachers and so forth. I just didn't like school anymore. I wasn't the only one; there was some more — Angeline Curie, if you remember her, Helen Jakubik. It was a gang of us that quit. Then I helped on the farm.

NOTE: See Charles D. Stuzenbaker's interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=39513>

STAVINOHA: How did you meet your husband?

GASKAMP: At a dance at the Moonlight Hall in Pleak. We were living where the Lane Airport is, back of Pleak.

STAVINOHA: So, what did your husband do for a living?

GASKAMP: Well, he roughnecked to start with.

STAVINOHA: In the oilfield? In the local area, or did he have to drive a pretty good ways?

GASKAMP: Well, at times, he had to drive a pretty good way.

STAVINOHA: What kind of vehicle did y'all have getting around when you were a kid – very small?

GASKAMP: The first vehicle was a Chevrolet coupe.

STAVINOHA: What were the roads like back then?

GASKAMP: Bad! You know where Jerry Vacek had his farm? Where Pete Vacek lived? Well, we lived in that last house, and we had a dirt road all the way to the house. It was bad.

STAVINOHA: So, it was good when it was dry, but when it rained?

GASKAMP: It was bad. Daddy had to put chains on the car to get out.

STAVINOHA: Did you ever get stuck so bad where you had to get a horse or something like that to pull y'all out?

GASKAMP: No, usually with chains we made it.

STAVINOHA: That had to be a lot of trouble.

GASKAMP: Yeah, oh yeah. It was hard.

STAVINOHA: Where did you shop?

GASKAMP: At Fairchild Grocery, which was owned by Robinowitz, I believe.

STAVINOHA: Was he a cotton buyer at that time, too?

GASKAMP: You know I don't remember that, but I remember when Ernest Rebock had the store.

STAVINOHA: I remember him. I think Johnny Stavinoha had it there for a while. One of the Stavinoha's had it. They had the White House in Rosenberg, plus I think they had this one, too.

Where was the cotton gin located for y'all?

GASKAMP: Fairchilds. I believe it was two there.

STAVINOHA: And of course, y'all put the cotton onto the trailer. Was it a one bale or two bale trailer?

GASKAMP: One bale, one bale.

STAVINOHA: But I guess then everybody picked one or two bales a day? That was probably the most. How much cotton could one person pick in one day?

GASKAMP: All depended on how long a person picked. Up to two hundred pounds.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all have anybody from the valley come in and help y'all pick the cotton.

GASKAMP: Yeah, we had some pickers. They would come in and stay in a garage or something like that, and then they would help for a couple of months before they went wherever else to pick cotton.

STAVINOHA: When you got married, did you have a job anywhere?

GASKAMP: I worked just about all my life. Don't ask me where I started. I worked in Rosenberg, but not very long. I worked at Pleak Village there for the Falses. I worked there for a while. After I got married, I worked at Carranza's Café here in Needville. And I worked at Seabar. I worked at Damon for a while. That's when I think daddy got me to go to work at Pleak – it was closer to home.

STAVINOHA: Did you have any children.

GASKAMP: No.

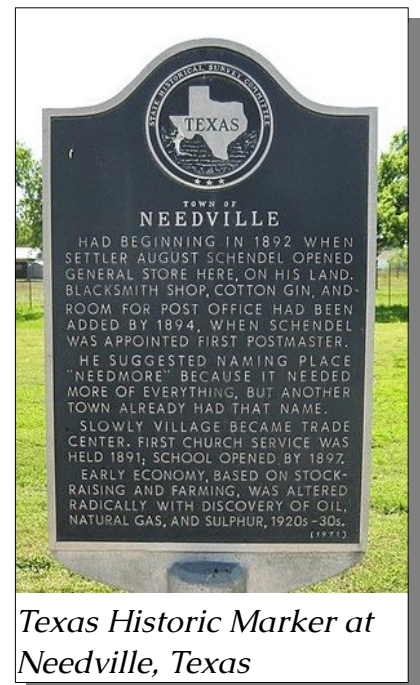
STAVINOHA: When did your husband pass away?

GASKAMP: In '95.

STAVINOHA: You said y'all used to go to the dances, and you met your husband at the dance at Pleak at the Moonlight Hall. What type of music did they play over there?

GASKAMP: Country Western. They mixed it up. There were some polkas and waltzes.

STAVINOHA: Was there a dance there pretty regular?



*Texas Historic Marker at  
Needville, Texas*



GASKAMP: Every Saturday.

STAVINOHA: What were some of the other halls around here that y'all may have gone to?

GASKAMP: Well, we went to Foster School when they turned it into a beer joint. But they didn't have any live bands there. They had like a jukebox and the Melody Lane.

STAVINOHA: Meldilane was south of Needville on 1230, FM 442 and 1236.

GASKAMP: Needville had a hall here. We didn't go there too much. My husband played in a band. Oh, this other little place on this side of Pleak on the right. It's a Spanish place now. They played there quite a bit.

STAVINOHA: What was your husband's name?

GASKAMP: Clarence Gaskamp.

STAVINOHA: I remember him playing in the band now. It seems like in Fairchild. Sebesta operated it? The Gold Antique.

GASKAMP: Golden Antique! I forgot about that place. Yeah, they played there quite a bit.

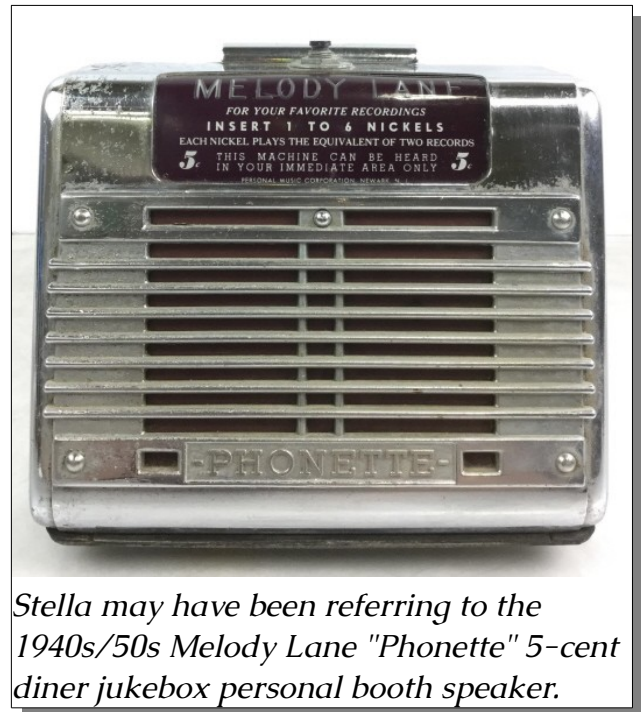
STAVINOHA: Always had a pretty big crowd. Get back to when you were growing up, what kind of games – I know there weren't a lot of toys, so you had to create your own games to play with neighbors or even in school?

GASKAMP: I nearly played school by myself.

STAVINOHA: Being an only child.

GASKAMP: Yeah, we had a little old room in the barn. I cleaned it up, and I was playing in there. I didn't associate with the neighbors hardly any.

STAVINOHA: How far away were the neighbors?



*Stella may have been referring to the 1940s/50s Melody Lane "Phonette" 5-cent diner jukebox personal booth speaker.*

GASKAMP: Well, about half a mile away.

STAVINOHA: Can you remember some of the prices – what the groceries were like back then? Other than gasoline prices being a nickel a gallon. Seems like fryers were a real popular item. We bought a lot of fryers. Did you buy the flour, sugar, salt, and pepper – ingredients for your seasoning.?

GASKAMP: Yeah, we raised our chickens and mama butchered quite a bit at home.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all sell anything out of your garden? Did y'all produce enough eggs, or enough vegetables?

GASKAMP: We sold eggs. Not at the grocery store.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all feed any of your own cattle, or did you to bring them to slaughter age?

GASKAMP: We butchered ourselves. We fed them corn, hand ground corn.

STAVINOHA: How did you bale hay? Did somebody custom bale your hay for you?

GASKAMP: Yeah, we had a small hay meadow, and we had someone to come in and bale it for us.

STAVINOHA: Square bales, right? You remember about how many bales it would take to get y'all through the winter – 100 or so?

GASKAMP: I don't remember that 'cuz the hay meadow was small.

STAVINOHA: Okay, is there anything else you can remember before we close this interview?

GASKAMP: No, I can't think of anything.

STAVINOHA: Okay, well that will conclude this interview then.

Interview Ends