

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Thomas Fonville**

Interview Date: 06/24/2011

Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcalba

Location: Riverbend Country Club, Sugar Land, Texas

6 Pages



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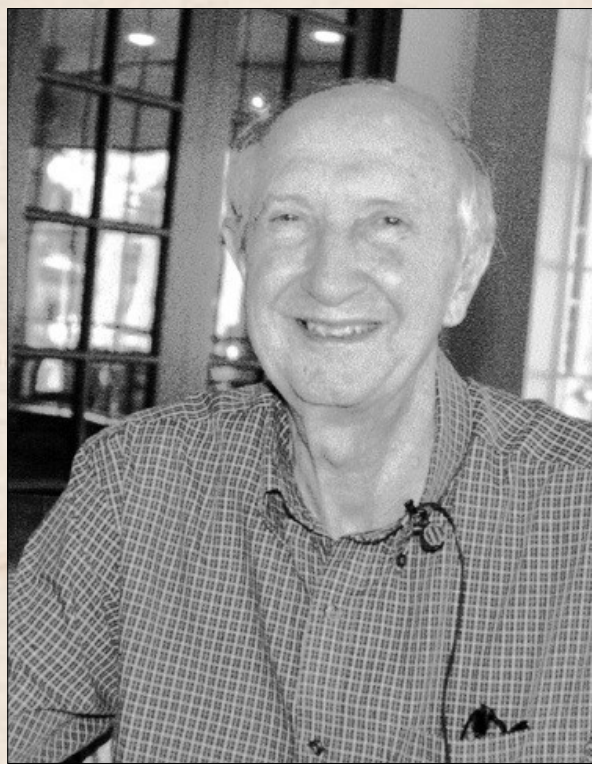
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Transcript

WARE: Let's start. Where and when were you born?

FONVILLE: I was born in San Augustine, Texas in 1938.

WARE: Okay. And what brought you to Fort Bend County?

FONVILLE: My dad worked for the prison system. He got a job here in 1955 so we moved here. He was the electrical superintendent for seven of the farms. Like Central One, Two, Three. The Ramsey Unit was one of them. He was responsible for keeping the electrical things up to date. When we first moved here, we lived out by Central Two. The telephone was the old crank type that you turned the handle on and some operator in the prison system would connect you with people in town. My dad got all that changed and got the new phone system in.

WARE: Wow! What year was that?

FONVILLE: I don't remember. It was sometime after we had moved here when I was in the 10th grade.

WARE: So you were maybe 15-16. 1954?

FONVILLE: Something like that.

WARE: Did you have any other family that lived in the Sugar Land area?

FONVILLE: No.

WARE: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

FONVILLE: Not here. I was the youngest of eight.

WARE: The baby (chuckling).

FONVILLE: Yeah (laughs).

WARE: Where exactly did you live in Sugar Land?

FONVILLE: It was just past where Highway 6 comes in to 90. There was a road that went south right at that same intersection and went down to Central Number Two Unit. We lived in the first house. That house has been torn down. There's another house right next to it, the big white house. It's still there.

WARE: I know where that is. What other families lived near you?

FONVILLE: The Friersons' lived next door to us. We were in a two-story house. We lived downstairs. There were some other folks that lived upstairs named Lister. One of the boys, John, was in the class before me and the other one, Jimmy, was in the class under me I think.

WARE: So there were four people living upstairs?

FONVILLE: Yes.



Thomas Fonville (l) and John Frierson at Sugar Land High School reunion in June 2011

WARE: Describe a normal day in Sugar Land when you lived there.

FONVILLE: (chuckles) Well, I was in school. But, one thing we did that is interesting that kids probably don't do today is the old Sugar Land High School was on the lake where the water came in. I guess it was fed from Oyster Creek. We would set out fishing lines in the morning, bait the hooks and after school was out in the evening, we'd go by and check the fish. If we caught any, we'd take them home and have those for dinner that evening.

WARE: You're right, I don't think children do that nowadays! That's neat. Right there in Cleveland Lake, behind the school?

FONVILLE: It was down toward the sugar company, on down that direction, where the water fed into the lake.

WARE: People still fish there. (both laugh) What year did you graduate from Sugar Land?

FONVILLE: 1957.

WARE: Tell me what students did for recreation and relaxation other than fishing during classes.

FONVILLE: Gee, I don't know. We were out away from town. It was almost like country life. We did things that kids today wouldn't do or can't do. But we were allowed to hunt on the prison property. I remember one time going hunting with one of the boys that lived just past the Frierson's, in that house, Tom Drew. We had shotguns. We were going to shoot ducks on the ponds out by Central Number One. You could see trustee prisoners walking out on the roadways.

We were over close to the pond and we didn't want to scare the ducks away, so we started crawling up to the pond. We didn't want to shoot each other so we put our shells in our pockets. When we got up to the lake, neither one of us had a shell! They had come out of our pockets, so we had to crawl back to find the shells. We DID get a couple of ducks. They were probably mud hens because I know my mother tried to cook one and it smelled SO bad that nobody would eat it but me! (laughs)

WARE: The ducks were pretty safe, weren't they!

FONVILLE: Yeah!

WARE: Did you ever play any sports?

FONVILLE: Yes, I did. I played football and basketball. I was basketball captain along with a couple of others. There were three of us. Sonny Astorga was one. I think John Heitman is at this gathering today.

WARE: Did you or any of your classmates work at Imperial Sugar or any place else?

FONVILLE: No. I played music on the weekends with a country band.

WARE: Tell me about that.

FONVILLE: I was in the 10th grade and I always played the guitar and sang. I was singing at the fair, down at Rosenberg, and some guys heard me there, and wanted to know if I would play in their band. They didn't contact me. They went by and talked to my mother and tried to convince her that a 10th grader would be very safe with them, playing at a honky tonk. They did a good job, because she okay'd it. Then they went up to the high school and talked to Edward Ernest, our principal. He came and got me out of class to go talk to those folks! Something else that would never happen today.

So, I talked to them and I agreed to play in their band with them. That was my first start to playing with a band. While I was in high school I did record a record that was played around the Houston area. It never made the big time but one of the stations said it got up to Number Two on their most requested hits. They had it on the jukeboxes around town.

WARE: What was the name of the song?

FONVILLE: The 'A' side, which was the one they pushed, was called 'To Prove My Love To You'. The 'B' side was 'Pledge Me Your Love'.

WARE: Was it the group that recorded the song or you personally?

FONVILLE: It was part of the group with me. One of the fellows couldn't make it that day. We had to get somebody else to stand in.

WARE: So what group was it recorded under?

FONVILLE: Well, I can't even think of the name of the band now. We changed our name several times (laughing). I'm not sure which name went with it at that time.

WARE: (laughing) Okay. Do you still play music?

FONVILLE: I still play music, mostly fiddle now. I spend my time going to fiddle contests, not only in Texas, but in other states. I play in the Senior Division. Pretty obvious with my age! But I've won the Senior Championship in New Mexico, the Senior Championship in Alabama, and the State Senior Championship at the Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association Convention here in Texas.



Tom Fonville, two-time Senior State Fiddle Champion, competes at the Texas State Fiddle Championships in 2017 at Hallettsville, Texas.

WARE: Wow! I'm impressed!

FONVILLE: I finished in 8th place in the national contest in Idaho in the Senior Division.

WARE: When you were in Sugar Land, nobody was teaching you music, were they?

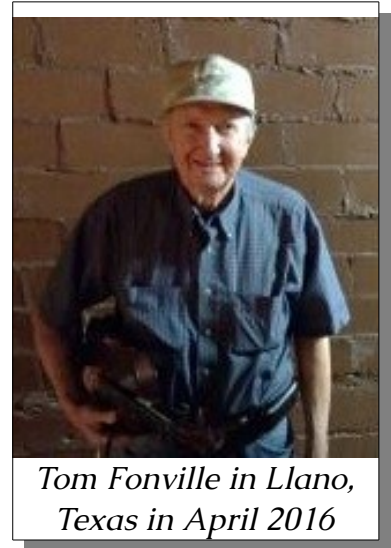
FONVILLE: No, I just learned on my own.

WARE: What's your favorite memory about when you lived in Sugar Land?

FONVILLE: Oh, goodness. We were a small class. There were thirty-five in our graduating class and we were a close-knit group. We did a lot of things together; did things as groups. I just remember the closeness of everybody in the class.

WARE: Many of them are at this reunion today. Thanks for taking time away from them to talk to us!

Interview ends



*Tom Fonville in Llano,
Texas in April 2016*