

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Viola Foss**

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Interviewer: Tom Stavinoha

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

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11 Pages



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Transcript

STAVINOHA: Viola, tell us when did you move to Fort Bend County?

FOSS: I was born here in Fort Bend County. I am the oldest of eight children.

STAVINOHA: In what part of Fort Bend County were you born?

FOSS: In Needville near Will Lehmann Road.

STAVINOHA: What school did you attend?

FOSS: I went to Marlowe School off of FM 442 there on FM 1236.

STAVINOHA: What did your parents do for a living?

FOSS: They farmed.

STAVINOHA: Tractors when you were young?

FOSS: No, we didn't have that, didn't have tractors. It was horses. I remember we had mules.

STAVINOHA: How many acres did they farm?

FOSS: Fifty.

STAVINOHA: After a while the farm got to be 400 acres. How did that come about?

FOSS: It was my grandfather's farm. He bought that farm. When he got older he divided it with his children. He had eight children so then each one got 50 acres.

STAVINOHA: Okay, that's how it went. What kind of crops did y'all farm back then?

FOSS: Cotton, mainly, and corn.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all share crop with anybody, farm some other farm?

FOSS: No, never did.

STAVINOHA: Did your dad have a side job that he did to get extra income?

FOSS: No, I don't remember it. He was a barber for a while and then it was just farming and he did work at Dow Chemical for a couple of years when he was older.

STAVINOHA: What did y'all do for entertainment since there was no TVs and probably radios were nonexistent at that time?

FOSS: We always had a good time; we didn't have any toys or anything. I can't remember some of the games we had. Like I told my children the other day about them playing Andy Over and they didn't know what that was.

STAVINOHA: I can remember the name of the game but I couldn't...

FOSS: Yea, they wanted to know what we did or how was it played. I said we just threw the ball over the house or some building and then whoever caught the ball would run around the house and tag one out. I don't remember the details.

STAVINOHA: I remember us playing that same game, Andy Over. Yea, if you caught the ball.

FOSS: And Tin Can Chinny. Now I don't know what that is. A broomstick and a tin can and hitting that over the line. We always had a good time.

STAVINOHA: Were there any musicians in the family? Anybody play instruments?

FOSS: No, nobody in our family.

STAVINOHA: It was Gloria who married Dan? Was he always an accordion player?

FOSS: Yea, and his father had a band, I think, at one time.

STAVINOHA: What was the hardest thing you can remember doing out there on the farm? Besides chopping cotton and just picking cotton and things like that?

FOSS: We walked to school, the country school where we went, Marlowe. I guess it was about three miles and then when we got home we had to change clothes and go out and chop cotton or pick cotton.

STAVINOHA: The corn that y'all raised, I guess you fed it to your own animals?

FOSS: Oh yea, that was just fed to the animals. You had your cows and your milk for your use and all. Like picking cotton. It took us maybe a week or more to pick one bale. It was just the kids and the parents you know.

STAVINOHA: Myself I can remember, where Daddy went to Raymondville to the Valley and got some pickers and seemed like every day he expected one bale of cotton to be picked between us kids and the Spanish people that we hired. One bale a day. I guess one of the fondest things was making ice cream, homemade ice cream.

FOSS: That's what we did. After we got a bale picked we made homemade ice cream that night so we always had that to look forward to.

STAVINOHA: I guess vanilla was the most common flavor. What was the guy who came around in the car selling vanilla? I remember Mama always bought...

FOSS: Watkins Products.

STAVINOHA: Watkins

FOSS: Yes, and we looked forward to that always when he came he gave us a stick of gum, the kids that were out there. We got a stick of gum.

STAVINOHA: Seems like he was never in a rush. He always visited, he took time to visit with everybody and... but that Watkins vanilla I can remember it. I think there were some other things he probably sold that we bought but...

FOSS: Probably cinnamon and pepper. We had all that.

STAVINOHA: Yea, seasonings. What shopping did you all do and where did you have to go to buy groceries and buy your clothing?

FOSS: That was all in Needville. We never did go to Rosenberg. That was quite a distance for us them days.

STAVINOHA: What stores did they have back then?

FOSS: I remember the grocery store the most, Shindle's. The other, Schrader's, I don't know but that was some time later and the variety store. That was a fun thing for us, we got to go in there.

STAVINOHA: Wasn't there a Blaze there and then Rebocks had that R&R department store but that probably was quite a bit later.

FOSS: That was later. I'm trying to think of that name. It was the Claytons that had the variety store but before them, I think, was her parents. I can't remember their name now.

STAVINOHA: Dance halls, we had the Fairchild Hall. Did y'all have anything close by for weddings and dances to go to?

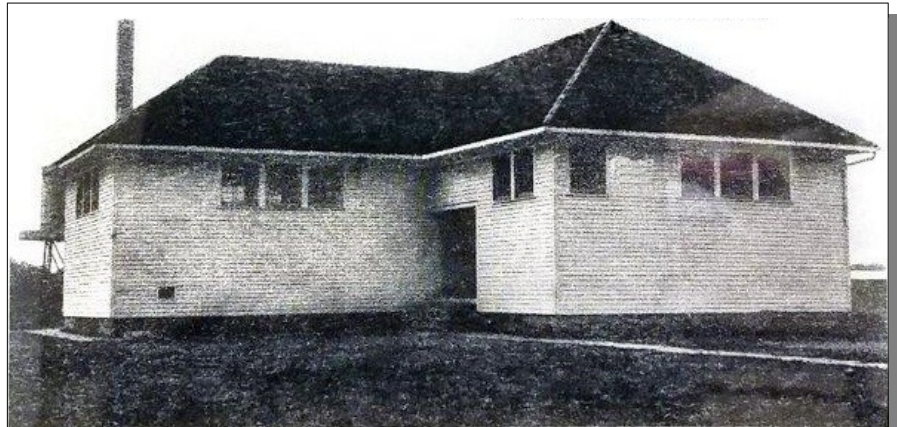
FOSS: Yea, the Needville Round Hall.

STAVINOHA: Was that the American Legion Hall?

FOSS: Yes.

STAVINOHA: Getting back to your school, you said you went to Marlowe?

FOSS: Marlowe, to the eighth grade and there were three classes in one room then. I remember in the eighth grade it was three of us. There was a seventh grade and a sixth grade all in one room. How we did that I don't know (chuckling).



Marlowe School, Needville, Texas, ca.1936

STAVINOHA: Seems like Long Point was similar to that. It was four rooms at Long Point. Most of the teachers shared two classes, it worked out somehow.

FOSS: Well, Marlowe had three rooms. There was the first, second, and third in one room. The fourth and fifth were in the other room.

STAVINOHA: At what age did you get married?

FOSS: Eighteen, I believe (chuckling).

STAVINOHA: Eighteen, yea. What did you all do when you and Clarence got married?

FOSS: He went to the Navy. He had just joined the Navy. You know, foolish kids. We got married and then he went off to the Navy.

STAVINOHA: What year was that?

FOSS: Must have been 1942.

STAVINOHA: 1942 so World War II was still going on then?

FOSS: Oh, yea, it was in the middle of it.

STAVINOHA: That was the worst part. Because 1941 was Pearl Harbor, so in 1942 we really go involved.

FOSS: Yea. He was in the Philippines and Okinawa and Guam.

STAVINOHA: So, in the Navy he probably stayed on the ship as a mechanic?

FOSS: He was an Aviation Machinist Mate Second Class.

STAVINOHA: When he came back from the service what kind of job did he have?

FOSS: He went to work for Mr. Chance in Rosenberg delivering gas. Gas and oil to the farmers and to stations in town.

STAVINOHA: I don't remember him.

FOSS: It was pretty far back.

STAVINOHA: Where was he located in Rosenberg?

FOSS: Where Henry Bernhausen is now.

STAVINOHA: I can vaguely remember one on Avenue H. I think he was just a service station, I don't know if he did bulk sales, but he was around for a long time.

FOSS: He worked for Mr. Chance and then he sold it to Mr. H. A. Kadell, you won't remember him. He worked for lots of years until he bought out Mobil Gas and Oil. He was in Mobil for ten years, I think, until he retired from that.

STAVINOHA: You got a good size farm over here. Did he farm part time then, too?

FOSS: Yes, he farmed at night mainly. With a two-row tractor. It wasn't like now, you make one round and you have an acre.

STAVINOHA: What is Sunny farming now, Ubanek? Twelve, sixteen, at least twelve rows.

FOSS: That's what I am saying, twelve rows that I know if it's not more and he made a round and that's an acre. Clarence used to take two rows on that little Ford tractor at night with the lights and did most of the farming at night and on Saturdays.

STAVINOHA: How many years have you lived here in Fairchild?

FOSS: We lived here about 55 years right here on this place.

STAVINOHA: So it wasn't long after y'all got married then that y'all moved here then?

FOSS: While he was in the Navy and then we got out of the Navy, came home and we lived at Pleak in a little house there for, I guess, about eight years. Then we bought this place, bought this farm and it wasn't worked or anything it was all in trees and mesquite. We bought this on that GI Loan with him being in the Navy.

STAVINOHA: Since there was trees, what kind of equipment did you use to clear the trees and to farm it?

FOSS: Mostly just us. We did it ourselves. It wasn't big trees. It was like mesquite trees. He mostly did it with an ax. I have a picture somewhere, but I don't know where it is.

STAVINOHA: Every year the farmland got more and more because he was able to clear?

FOSS: Um-hum.

STAVINOHA: Two row Ford tractor and that what farming... probably forty, fifty acres, back then?

FOSS: Yea, well no it wasn't that much because we had some in cattle.

STAVINOHA: Cattle, well just about everything you have now other than the creek and the pond back there, almost everything now is in cultivation?

FOSS: We don't have any cattle. We sold them and just turned it all into farmland.

STAVINOHA: Do you remember offhand what y'all paid per acre back then?

FOSS: Yes, we paid a \$100 an acre.

STAVINOHA: (chuckling) a \$100 an acre.

FOSS: We were debating about buying it and Mr. Gomez, who lived down here a little way from us, told my husband that's too much money don't buy that, don't buy that. We went ahead and bought it anyway. He got it on that GI Loan and paid 3% interest.

STAVINOHA: That's good. How many years did it take to pay it off?

FOSS: I don't know.

STAVINOHA: Forever (chuckling)

FOSS: Yea, and to think that was 72 acres - \$7,000. That doesn't even sound right when you say that compared to prices now. Yea, and it took us awhile to pay that and then we built this house. I know we paid twice a year on this house. \$73 and some cents that we paid.

STAVINOHA: Did y'all build the house or did you have a builder come in and pretty much do everything?

FOSS: We had it built. Rudy Kunz was the carpenter then Clarence did a lot of it and his dad. We did so much of it ourselves like painting and Clarence did all the plumbing and electrical wiring and so much of it he did himself.

STAVINOHA: Seems like that was quite common back then for the families to kind of get together, especially barns. I am not so much sure about the houses, but to get together and build barns and just swap off labor, I guess.

FOSS: This house cost us \$8,000 when we built it in 1953.

STAVINOHA: How many kids did y'all wind up having?

FOSS: Three; a girl and two boys.

STAVINOHA: We were talking a little bit about high school. Tell me about going back and forth to Richmond and your senior ring.

FOSS: We would have to go to Needville to catch the bus. It took us to Richmond to high school where I went to the tenth and eleventh. We graduated at the eleventh grade then. It just amazes me. I don't know how we did it. The windows rolled down, there was no air conditioning and how we looked must have been another story. I will never forget about my class ring. I almost didn't get my class ring because my parents couldn't afford it. They debated... then my dad finally said, "Yea, you know we'll get it." I will never forget the cost. It was \$10.60.

STAVINOHA: Ten dollars and sixty cents.

FOSS: I value that ring to this day.



STAVINOHA: Kids now, I think, it's those \$300 and \$400 rings that they get now are awfully expensive. It makes you wonder if they appreciate those things.

FOSS: Yea.

STAVINOHA: You said when you were going to Marlowe School y'all pretty much had to walk there. When you were going to Needville to get on a bus to go to Richmond, how did y'all get to Needville?

FOSS: We drove a car from home. I think I drove then, I guess, I was the oldest one. Then some of the other cousins that were... we all grew up together on grandpa's farm, they rode with us... we rode together in a car. I don't remember that real clearly who rode with us. I know coming home sometimes the road was muddy and we had to drive through that mud.

STAVINOHA: Do you remember what kind of car y'all had back then?

FOSS: I think it was a 1934 Chevrolet. I can just see it now.

STAVINOHA: 1934 Chevrolet. I have no idea what that thing looks like. I can't remember those vehicles back then.

FOSS: That pictures at the top, that's the three classes. Three grades- sixth, seventh, and eighth grades right there in one room.

The other two pictures below are the first, second, and third and then the other picture is the fourth fifth and sixth grades. It's hard to imagine how a teacher taught like that. They taught the classes all separately and yet they were all in the same room.

STAVINOHA: Was there a cafeteria in the school?

FOSS: (chuckling) We didn't know what a cafeteria was then.



Viola Foss, front row, fourth from the left, with her Upper Room (6th, 7th, & 8th grades) classmates at Marlowe School. ca. 1936.

STAVINOHA: Yea, so I guess with no cafeteria you either didn't eat or you brought your lunch from home.

FOSS: Homemade sausage.

FOSS: You brought your lunch in these metal containers, these pails...lunch buckets. We called them pails and put them in what we called the cloakroom. They were up on the shelf there and... we just didn't have any other way. Like I said we didn't even know about a cafeteria (chuckling)

STAVINOHA: The windows seem awful high in that school, I guess to keep the kids from falling out. Seems like the ventilation...

FOSS: It had big windows all on the other sides. They had the big windows and, of course, we had a big wood burning heater in there.

STAVINOHA: I see one chimney coming out of the corner there, so that one heater had to... wood burning...?

FOSS: I don't know. I don't remember that chimney ever being there. Of course, it was a big round stove that kept a big room... there was one in each... I don't know if there was one in each room... Must have been. I don't remember.

STAVINOHA: Did you all trade off putting fire in the stove or how did that... kids had to stay away from fire?

FOSS: Yea, at Christmas time we had a tree. We had a big tree and, of course, there was no electricity there so there was candles on the Christmas tree. You know in these little clip things and you had candles burning. You would light that for a while and I think back now how dangerous that was.

STAVINOHA: Yes, golly. I can't imagine no electricity in a school building but I guess...

FOSS: No, and the restrooms were outside. Didn't know what indoor plumbing was.

STAVINOHA: So I guess no running water?

FOSS: No, but we did get a water fountain in a hall later and... from the water they run it inside. That was about the end of the conveniences, that water fountain.

STAVINOHA: Do you remember what other schools joined together when Needville consolidated? I guess all these schools were independent of one another?

FOSS: Yea, I don't know. I guess it must have been Williams School, Siller,.

STAVINOHA: There was a Siller School and Concord here at Fairchild.

FOSS: Sure, because all these people that I know... they went to Richmond to school then. It must have been Siller.

STAVINOHA: The one out toward Joe Kovar that was the Monroe School, the building is still there. By Crafts Store, Meyers store...

FOSS: Yea, but it wasn't Monroe, it was a Rikay School.

STAVINOHA: Rikay was further off back toward the Nash Ranch, if I am not mistaken.

FOSS: I know this school, the Crafts I remember the Crafts one... came from that school. I can't think of the name of it though.

STAVINOHA: Well, this pretty much concludes the interview. Thank you.

FOSS: Sure.

Interview ends