

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewees: **Virginia Davis Scarborough**

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Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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Mary Jones Prowell (left) and Virginia Davis Scarborough fishing at George Ranch, 1943



*Courtesy the George Ranch Historical Park, Richmond, TX*

*Transcript*

GOODSILL: I have the pleasure of interviewing Virginia Davis Scarborough of Richmond, Texas, for the second time. Today our focus is going to be Henderson Wessendorff family history.

Virginia, would start by stating your name and your date of birth?

SCARBOROUGH: Virginia Scarborough, born May 6, 1921, in Richmond.

GOODSILL: Can you tell us your connection to the Wessendorff family?

SCARBOROUGH: My mother was Lizzie Wessendorff. She was the oldest child of T. B. Wessendorff and Jennie Jones.

GOODSILL: How many siblings did she have?

SCARBOROUGH: There were six (6) of them. She had five (5) siblings.

GOODSILL: Can you go back any further than T. B. Wessendorff?

SCARBOROUGH: I noticed on his father's will, that I read recently, that he was listed as A. B. Wessendorff, so he was really named Antone, like his father, but he shortened it to Tony. And he came to America in 1854 with two older brothers. The two older brothers were Bernard and Joseph, and they settled in Galveston. But Antone came on to this area [Richmond] and married a lady who was also from Germany, her last name was Janentzy. Johanna Janentzy. She had come to America with her parents and two sisters, and they settled around Bellville.

GOODSILL: Did they come from Germany as well?

SCARBOROUGH: They came from north Germany.

GOODSILL: About what time?

SCARBOROUGH: They probably came about 1850. They were earlier than the Wessendorff boys. When the Wessendorffs came, it took them seventy-five (75) days to cross the Atlantic, and they landed in Galveston. And I think it was in November. Their father--all their family had died. Not the mother's family but the father's family had died in Germany.

GOODSILL: Could you tell us what was happening in the 1850s in Germany that caused them to leave?

SCARBOROUGH: I really don't know. I think they just wanted a new experience. I don't know any more than that.

GOODSILL: Do you know what their trades were -- what kind of work they did?

SCARBOROUGH: Peter Wessendorff was their father.

GOODSILL: Peter was Antone's father?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, he was a cabinet maker, I guess. Antone brought his tool chest with him when he came here. I think it is either at the George Foundation or at the Museum. For a while it was on display at the Fort Bend County Museum.

GOODSILL: Have you seen it?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes.

GOODSILL: What does it look like?

SCARBOROUGH: A real large chest.

GOODSILL: Three or four feet wide?

SCARBOROUGH: Probably.

GOODSILL: And opened from the top?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes.

GOODSILL: And when you opened it, what did it look like inside?

SCARBOROUGH: It's been a long time since I've seen it, but there were some tools-- carpentry tools--in there. Antone took up that trade when he got to Richmond. And eventually opened a lumberyard, I suppose. Now, I'm not sure that it was--I KNOW he did carpentry work when he was here.

GOODSILL: Do you know how they got from Galveston, where they landed, to Richmond?

SCARBOROUGH: No, I don't know that.

GOODSILL: It would be an interesting story, wouldn't it? I'm always curious to know what happens when immigrants land.

SCARBOROUGH: He married the lady from around Bellville, so I don't know how all that happened.

GOODSILL: Do you know anything more about Johanna's family? They came in around 1850. What her parents' trade was?

SCARBOROUGH: I have a LONG record of their history, but I can't remember it.

GOODSILL: Do you have it written down as a genealogy? Could get a copy of that?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes.

GOODSILL: It would be good to put that in the records.

SCARBOROUGH: I should have brought that with me. Yeah, her family was traced back, I guess farther than I could get back Antone's family.

GOODSILL: So, Antone and Johanna married and they have their son.

SCARBOROUGH: They had thirteen children.

GOODSILL: OH - thirteen children?!

SCARBOROUGH: Antone and Johanna had thirteen children.

GOODSILL: And was T. B. the oldest?

SCARBOROUGH: No, he was the middle. Joe Clyde's grandfather, Joe G. Wessendorff, was the oldest. And I don't know the 'G' stood for. Three of the boys died before they were six years old, and two of the sisters, that I did not ever know.

GOODSILL: But you have all of them on the chart?

SCARBOROUGH: I have all of them.

GOODSILL: Wonderful. Did they all stay in Fort Bend County?

Mary Jones Prowell (left) and Virginia Davis Scarborough at George Ranch, 1943



*Courtesy the George Ranch Historical Park, Richmond, TX*

SCARBOROUGH: No, Uncle Joe, the oldest one, lived in Bellville for a while. I know they have a son buried there. And I can't even remember what the lady's name was that he married. I never did really know her. I know they had Joe Clyde's father, Joe, and the boy that died and buried in Bellville, and then four sisters of Joe.

GOODSILL: Joe Clyde is in your generation?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes. He was born about 1917.

GOODSILL: So we're back to your family. You said Lizzie was your mother, and she's the child of T. B. and Jennie.

SCARBOROUGH: And she had five sisters; one died when she was a year old, but the other four lived.

GOODSILL: And who did your mother marry?

SCARBOROUGH: Syd Davis.

GOODSILL: Syd. That's an interesting name. Where was he from?

SCARBOROUGH: He was born around Wharton County. His parents died when he was four years old and he was raised by his father's brother and sister. He had a brother and a sister, Daddy did.

GOODSILL: So Lizzie married Syd and how many children did they have?

SCARBOROUGH: Six.

GOODSILL: Can you tell me the birth order?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes. Antoinette, and I'm next, Virginia. Then Syd, Junior; Tony; and Frank and Tommy. Frank's the only other one living, beside myself.

GOODSILL: So, the Wessendorffs were fairly prolific.

SCARBOROUGH: Yes. [smiles]

GOODSILL: And other than Joe G. going and living in Bellville for a while, they stayed in Fort Bend County?

SCARBOROUGH: No, he came back here in his later years. His wife had died. They lived in Fort Worth, most of the time, I think. That's where all the girls lived, I know. Now Joe Clyde and his parents stayed here. Joe's father was Joe A. Wessendorff. Joe G. was Joe Clyde's grandfather.

GOODSILL: So, Joe G. was the grandfather, and then Joe G.'s son was--

SCARBOROUGH: Joe A.

GOODSILL: Do you know what the "A" stood for?

SCARBOROUGH: It was probably Antone, but I don't know that. He married Jane Johnson.

GOODSILL: They had one child, and that was Joe Clyde. And you said he was born around--

SCARBOROUGH: --1917. I think he had a July birthday but I'm not sure about that. Now Joe's mother was the daughter of Doctor J. C. Johnson. Do you want any of his parentage?

GOODSILL: Sure. Go ahead!

SCARBOROUGH: Now this is Janie's parents. Janie was the daughter of J. C. Johnson (I don't know what his initials stood for), her mother was Carrie McMickin. I can't remember where she was from, down in the Valley I think, somewhere.

And Loise was the daughter of Bob Henderson and her mother was Loise Jackson. And the reason Loise is associated with Richmond, was that Loise was a sister of Annie Darst, who lived here always. And so, she was 'baby Loise' and she would TELL you she was 'Baby Loise'. And they used to come out [to Richmond]. She was an only child.

GOODSILL: You knew her when you were children?

SCARBOROUGH: Oh yes.

GOODSILL: You grew up with her?

SCARBOROUGH: Well, she would come out here to birthday parties and weekends. Bob and Loise Henderson lived in Houston. Loise was born there and lived in Houston. But she would come out here with the Darst family, because their mothers were sisters. It was such a small community -- and she would come out to our birthday parties and different things like that. But she lived in Houston until she and Joe [Clyde] married.

GOODSILL: Did you go to their wedding?

SCARBOROUGH: Isn't that strange that I don't remember whether I did or not?!

GOODSILL: What year do you think it might have been? Can you just guess?

SCARBOROUGH: I know Joe was in the army during World War II and I don't know what branch or what rank he was or anything.

And then, after the war, he came back here and I don't know what Joe had done for business before he was enlisted in the service. He went to A & M. I know he and Joe A. and Joe G. all went to A & M. But I really don't know when it was. Uncle Joe, the older Joe G., came back here in his later years. He had a little insurance business on Morton Street, and he may have lived in that little house, too. I don't know -- it was just a little kind of house on the block where our Methodist church building is now.

GOODSILL: Tell me the full name of the Methodist church?

SCARBOROUGH: Saint John's United Methodist Church. But he [Joe G] was the only one that ever came back, and I don't know when his wife died or where they are buried. I think around Fort Worth, but I'm not sure.

GOODSILL: What kind of business was Joe A. in?

SCARBOROUGH: My grandfather was in the lumber business. He bought the others out. I found that out, reading Antone's will, just about last week. I refound it. T. B., Tony, my grandfather, bought out the others so he could have the lumber business. And Joe A. worked for him, in the lumber business. When my grandfather died--

GOODSILL: Here in Richmond [speaking of the lumber business]?

SCARBOROUGH: In Richmond.

GOODSILL: Where was the location?

SCARBOROUGH: It was across the railroad tracks on 8th Street, and I know it backed up to Preston. But I can't--you know, things didn't have addresses in those days. But anyway, when my grandfather died in 1930, he left the business to his five remaining daughters. They didn't know anything about running a lumberyard, and so they gave Joe A. a one-sixth interest in the business to manage it for them. Which he did, until his death. And soon after that, Joe Clyde was back after the war [WWII], and he and his mother met with my mother and her sisters, and wanted to buy the business, the lumber business. And there was talk back and forth and finally Joe Clyde said, and this isn't very nice, but he said, 'If you don't sell it to me, I'll build across the street and put you out of business.' [chuckles]

So they sold it to Joe Clyde. And I don't know how many years he ran it. Stanton Marsh worked with him and ran the lumber business. But then these larger lumber companies started moving in the area and eventually put him out of business. [chuckles] And they weren't really on unfriendly terms, but Joe Clyde was a very--determined, I guess is a good word--businessman and he wanted that business.

GOODSILL: Did it make a difference in the fortune of YOUR family to have sold?

SCARBOROUGH: I really don't know whether it did or not.

GOODSILL: All the sisters were okay?



SCARBOROUGH: Yeah, they were fine. I don't have any idea what money exchanged or anything in that deal. And then, of course, Joe Clyde opened-- maybe carrying on his grandfather's insurance business-- he opened that insurance business and then got into real estate part of the time. And I really don't know how Joe got as much money as he apparently had, but anyway, he was well-off financially when he died.

GOODSILL: Did he have children?

SCARBOROUGH: No, they didn't have any children. No children. I don't know whether it was intentional or not.

GOODSILL: And 'Baby Loise'?

SCARBOROUGH: 'Baby Loise'.

GOODSILL: Was she part of the community? And involved?

SCARBOROUGH: No, not really. Loise was kind of a private person. I think she was active in the Episcopal Church. And that's another thing. Joe Clyde was raised a Baptist. And Loise was raised a Methodist. But when they married, they joined the Episcopal Church. And I think Loise was active in the church.

GOODSILL: You know, that reminds me. We were trying to establish when they might have been married. Just your best guess.

SCARBOROUGH: Isn't that interesting, that I can't--I would think in the late '40s, probably. Jack and Billie Wendt may remember that better.

GOODSILL: Jack and Billie Wendt were friends of theirs?

SCARBOROUGH: They were neighbors and they all built on Hillcrest Drive. Jack's family came here in 1928 so he's been around a long time. Billie was raised in Fulshear and didn't move here until she and Jack married.

GOODSILL: Was your family close to Joe Clyde and Loise? You're cousins.

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, we were, but we used to play together when we were children because his--Joe Clyde's-- family lived right behind where my grandfather's house was. And I can remember playing out in the yard, playing Red Rover and Wink and all these child games. Joe Clyde used to have a friend from Nederland and I think his name was Newt Griffith or Griffin.

They used to come and spend some time with Joe Clyde in the summers. And we'd all get together. And the Ransome girls just from down the street--we all lived so close. We'd all get together and play. When kids played outside, before we had television. I'm trying to think when Joe Clyde--I guess he graduated about four years before I did.

GOODSILL: So he was a little older than you?

SCARBOROUGH: Mmh hmm.

GOODSILL: So you were cousins but at that age, four years makes a BIG difference. At this age it doesn't make much difference, but back then it does! (chuckles) And he was an only child?

SCARBOROUGH: He was an only child, and Loise was too.

GOODSILL: How about other cousins? Did his aunts have children and did they live in this area?

SCARBOROUGH: One of them did. I remember a boy about the age of my brother, Syd. Wallace--what was his first name? One of Joe A.'s sisters married a man named Wallace, and I don't remember which one of the girls it was. But they had--I think his name was Bobby [Billy?] Wallace--I don't know--but there was a boy named Wallace that was first cousin of Joe Clyde.

GOODSILL: Lived out here in this area?

SCARBOROUGH: No, no, they lived in Fort Worth, I think. But he would come spend time with Joe and Janie.

GOODSILL: And were your brothers, Syd, Tony, Frank, Tom--were they close or friends with Joe Clyde? They were even younger than you.

SCARBOROUGH: They were younger than I, and of course knew him well, and everything. But they might have hunted together some, I don't know.

GOODSILL: Where did they go hunting in those days?

SCARBOROUGH: We lived between Richmond and Rosenberg-- my parents raised us between Richmond and Rosenberg. And there were I don't know how many acres out there where they hunted. And sometimes they would go to the Moore Ranch out near Orchard. I really don't know. I wasn't--

GOODSILL: It wasn't a girl thing!?

SCARBOROUGH: I wasn't a fan of hunting. I DID have a BB gun when I was little but [chuckles] gave that up pretty fast.

GOODSILL: (chuckling) So, Joe Clyde was fairly ambitious?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, I would say that.

GOODSILL: From early on? Did you know it from early on, when you were playing games?

SCARBOROUGH: Not really. I think it was just when he came back after the war, maybe, that he just was determined to make it big.

GOODSILL: And, he did!

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, he did.

GOODSILL: Was that a source of pride for your family?

SCARBOROUGH: Uh, not especially [chuckling]. No, I liked Joe Clyde. You know, we were friends.

GOODSILL: Did he do some interesting things with his money, do you know? Did he help with the community at all?

SCARBOROUGH: I really don't know that. If he did, I'm not aware of it.

GOODSILL: Well, it's an interesting story, looking back. We are looking back at Peter, the cabinet maker in Germany, and his son Antone, came to Galveston. And then Antone got to Richmond. And his children stayed here.

T. B. was in the lumber business and so then children were had from that generation, including your mother, Lizzie, and her cousin, Joe A. And then they had the next generation, you on one side, Joe Clyde on the other.

SCARBOROUGH: Uh huh. [nodding] Most of the Wessendorffs, those thirteen children, stayed in this area. I knew that Annie was probably the third oldest of those children and she was named the guardian of the three younger boys, who were, I think, eight, ten and twelve when their father died.

She was married to Alec Holmes and lived--all the Wessendorffs lived within about three or four blocks of each other, in Richmond. Of course Richmond wasn't very large then. But I think Antone had bought a lot of property, wanting his children to stay near, and so Mamie and Annie, Tom, Tony, Ed, Bob--all of them just lived right within five or six blocks of each other.

GOODSILL: Do those houses still exist?

SCARBOROUGH: I don't think any of them are still around.

GOODSILL: What part of town was that?

SCARBOROUGH: It was on Jackson, the highway, and 11th Street, I guess. It's the Life Check Drug now. That's where my grandfather lived.

GOODSILL: He somehow bought enough land there that many of his children had homes.

SCARBOROUGH: Across the street was where my grandmother's mother lived and then, I don't have her in there. But Jennie's mother - was Archietta. Archietta Jones. She was a Davis. No wait a minute. Let me think a minute, now. Archietta was Jones--NO, she married a Jones. Archietta was a Davis. But not the same Davis as my daddy.

GOODSILL: Really! Interesting. Do you know her husband's name.

SCARBOROUGH: Walter Little Jones. He was the grandson of Old 300 Henry Jones, with the George Foundation Jones's.

GOODSILL: Well, I can't wait to see your chart. It will be very interesting. You were telling me that Antone must have been fairly successful if he could buy all this land and build homes or help build homes for many of his children.

SCARBOROUGH: Yeah. Of course, a dollar was BIG money in those days.

GOODSILL: But how did you GET the dollar?

SCARBOROUGH: (laughs) Well, that's right! And I really--I think they were pretty well-off when they came to America, all three of them. Now the older brother, Bernard, had a grocery store in Galveston. I don't know what Joseph did, the middle one.

GOODSILL: You see, that's interesting. Somehow I think people immigrating are going to come without any money. Not true?

SCARBOROUGH: Now, I don't know for sure, but you never did read anything about them being down on their luck, or anything.

GOODSILL: And in order, in one generation, to be able to go from not having anything to having enough to buy real estate and build homes, and support thirteen children, that's quite a bit. So maybe they DID come with some money.

SCARBOROUGH: Maybe so.

GOODSILL: Of course, they probably worked hard, too. And were resourceful.

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, I'm sure they were.

GOODSILL: Did you find that Joe Clyde's ambition came down in your side of the family at all? Were you or your brothers ambitious?

SCARBOROUGH: I guess so. Frank, I guess, did the most. He was--is--a lawyer. Retired.

GOODSILL: Frank Davis is your brother?

SCARBOROUGH: Um hum. Do you know Frank?

GOODSILL: We did a wonderful interview of him!

SCARBOROUGH: Oh really? Well good! Yeah.

GOODSILL: And he lives in Houston.

SCARBOROUGH: Yeah, he lives in Houston. He was the lawyer on the BIG case of Howard Hughes. He was the lawyer on that.

GOODSILL: On settling the estate?

SCARBOROUGH: Yeah.

GOODSILL: He told me he would do an interview on that. I'll have to call him. I'll have to call him because he may give a Wessendorff interview as well. I didn't realize - nice to see the connection.

SCARBOROUGH: (chuckles) Frank was born in 1928, I guess, so he's a good bit younger than Joe Clyde.

GOODSILL: He's a baby! I guess he IS a good bit younger – ten years!

SCARBOROUGH: Frank was a teacher for one year and he thought--he told me that he thought—'I'll never get any where if I continue to teach', so he quit and went to law school. Interesting.

GOODSILL: Well, let's see. Is there anything else I should ask? As you look at the little drawing or as you think about the questions that we've talked about?

SCARBOROUGH: I think you are remarkable, the way you draw and read back. I think it is just great that you all are doing this.

GOODSILL: Well, it's fun. Okay, let me just look quickly at my questions and see if there is anything else I wanted to ask.

Were there any major changes in Fort Bend or Richmond that Joe Clyde was responsible for?

SCARBOROUGH: Not that I know of.

GOODSILL: What is your favorite memory of your mother, Lizzie?

SCARBOROUGH: She was real active in the community and the church, and just a good, sweet lady.

GOODSILL: Was she close with her parents?

SCARBOROUGH: Oh yes.

GOODSILL: What is your favorite memory of your grandfather, T. B.?

SCARBOROUGH: Well, I was nine years old when he died, I guess, and I DO remember him, but not very well. Just being at their home and mostly being at the dinner table.

GOODSILL: Did they have one of those homes you were talking about, that his father had set up?

SCARBOROUGH: Uh huh. But my grandmother died when I was five years old, so it's hard to remember her at all.

GOODSILL: Do you know what they died of?

SCARBOROUGH: I know that T. B. had a heart attack. He just--he'd gotten up and gone downstairs and my aunt, Jeanetta, who was living there with him, found him the next morning, dead. And I think he'd known he'd had a heart [problems]. Jennie was in a hospital in Houston, and I think had had gall bladder surgery, and she died in there.

GOODSILL: Sad. Do you know how Joe G. died? What he died of?

SCARBOROUGH: No, I don't know.

GOODSILL: How about Joe A., his son?

SCARBOROUGH: I remember when Joe died but I don't know what he died from.

GOODSILL: And Joe Clyde? What did he die of?

SCARBOROUGH: Joe Clyde was sick a long time, and I don't really know, but I know he finally just stopped having any treatment or anything.

GOODSILL: As I'm beginning to do the interviews for the Henderson Wessendorff Foundation, if I come up with any other questions, I may call you and ask.

SCARBOROUGH: That would be fine. I'm thinking if I know any more. I'm sure Loise went to the University of Texas but I don't know.

GOODSILL: Do you have a vivid memory of her as a child? Any childhood memories?

SCARBOROUGH: Just her coming out here and being with the Darst family and being 'Baby Loise'.

GOODSILL: Even when she was older, did you call her 'Baby Loise'?

SCARBOROUGH: NO. (chuckles) One of the last times I talked to her, she reminded me that she was 'Baby Loise'.

GOODSILL: (laughing) She was proud of that name!

SCARBOROUGH: I guess so (laughing)

GOODSILL: Great. Well, Virginia, as usual, this was fun, and let's go get your family tree!

SCARBOROUGH: Yeah, let's go do that.