

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **William “Junior” Hartlage, Jr.**

Interview Date: 12/07/2017

Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Location: Richmond, Texas.

28 Pages



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*Transcript*

BAUMGARTNER: Today is December 7, 2017. My name is Karl Baumgartner and I am interviewing Mr. Junior Hartlage in Richmond, Texas. His wife, Charlotte, is also with us. This project is being conducted for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project.

What is your full legal name and date of birth?

HARTLAGE: William Hartlage, Jr. I was born January 28, 1934.

BAUMGARTNER: I know that you are known as Junior Hartlage so I am going to refer to you as Junior.

I first heard your name some time ago. I was talking to Irvin Vallet, who I believe was an old friend of yours, and he was complaining about having some problems with his cows. He told me that the best cowman in Fort Bend County was Junior Hartlage. He said that you knew them better, could see and price them better and could buy and sell them better than anyone around. I thought, "If I wanted to learn anything about the cattle industry then you are the person I should talk to."

Junior, where were you born?

HARTLAGE: Right here, in the house down on the corner at Settegast Road and 359, where I got my cattle pens.

BAUMGARTNER: Were you were born at home?

HARTLAGE: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: You've lived here all your life. I guess this is about five miles north of Rosenberg, between Rosenberg and Fulshear. How large was the original homestead?

HARTLAGE: With the back part, about two hundred acres is what my dad bought; I still have a hundred acres here of the estate.

BAUMGARTNER: What were your parents' names?

HARTLAGE: My dad's name was Will and my mother's name was Ivy Mae.

BAUMGARTNER: How long has your family been in Fort Bend County?

HARTLAGE: I do not know what year they bought this place and moved here, to be honest with you.

BAUMGARTNER: Did your grandparents live here?

HARTLAGE: No, they did not live here. I didn't know my grandparents on either side.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did your dad come from?

HARTLAGE: Germany.

BAUMGARTNER: Really? He came over from Germany? So he bought this property then, not your granddad? What about on your wife's side? Does Charlotte have any family here?

HARTLAGE: No, her parents lived in Pearland until they passed away.

#### FOSTER COMMUNITY

BAUMGARTNER: This is the area known as Foster Community. What is Foster Community? How big is it, who lived here?

HARTLAGE: At one time they had a school here. Right down the road was a grocery store, the Rosenbush store, and a post office. It was on FM 359. The post office was inside the store.

BAUMGARTNER: That is the same Rosenbush family who live over on FM723, Rene Lamb's family?

HARTLAGE: Yes, on part of the old Rosenbush property.

BAUMGARTNER: Did Foster Community go up to FM 359? How many people lived around it?

HARTLAGE: Well, the Rosenbushes lived right there at the store. One of the sons lived on the corner of 359 and Winner Foster Road. He got accidentally shot while bird hunting. After he passed away his brother moved and lived there.

BAUMGARTNER: Just up the road from here on FM 359 is a little old white schoolhouse known as the Foster Museum and it has an historical marker sign in front. To provide some background, a little paragraph from the sign read as follows:

The Foster Community began in the fall of 1821 as a permanent campsite settled by Randolph Foster (1790-1887) on what was then one of the largest single land grants in Texas (11,601 acres). The John Foster Grant was deeded by Steven F. Austin. John was one of Austin's "Old Three Hundred" colonists, and Foster family members participated in the Texas War for Independence.

Families began living here almost two hundred years ago, before Texas was settled. When you were growing up, were there other families around with kids your age?

HARTLAGE: Some scattered around. Further down were Frank and Susi Hummel, Jess and Annabelle Stuart, the Briscoe's and George and Bessie Phillips. The Phillips lived right before you get to the store.

BAUMGARTNER: Does Jess Stuart, who runs the YMCA in Rosenberg, still live there?

HARTLAGE: Yes, he is living on the Stuart property.

BAUMGARTNER: You said they had a store here, the Rosenbush's Store. What did it look like?

HARTLAGE: Frame building. It wasn't a little bitty store. I would say that it was the size of some of today's convenience stores.

BAUMGARTNER: What did they sell in it?

HARTLAGE: They sold pretty much anything you needed for a household.

BAUMGARTNER: Did the Rosenbushes own it?

HARTLAGE: Yes. The husband mainly ran it. The wife didn't participate much. They had two sons and one daughter.

BAUMGARTNER: Did the children help run the store?

HARTLAGE: Yes. In the later years, the one son helped. During the year they would buy pecans that people picked and they had a gas pump in the front. If you wanted five gallons you would pump it and put it in your car yourself. I think it would take ten gallons. They had a post office in one corner of the store. Mr. Rosenbush was the postmaster.

BAUMGARTNER: Did the postman come every day?

HARTLAGE: Just about every day as far as I remember.

BAUMGARTNER: They had cars then, it was the forties and the fifties. Were there a lot of horses when you were growing up? You rode them quite a bit?

HARTLAGE: Right.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you say they had an elementary school there? How many grades was it?

HARTLAGE: I believe to the eighth grade.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have siblings?

HARTLAGE: I had two sisters. They have both passed away; they were older than me.

BAUMGARTNER: Where was the school? Which side of Settegast Road?

HARTLAGE: If you turn left off of Settegast Road onto 359, it was on the right across the road from our old home.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember any of the kids you went to grade school with?

HARTLAGE: Oh, yes. In fact, my sister was there; some of the Phillips children and a couple of the Laird children.



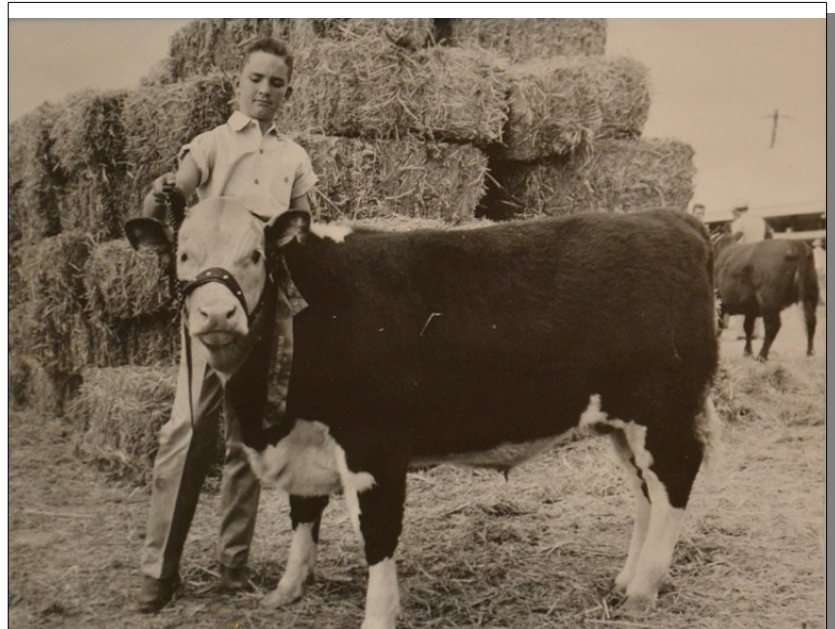
*The Old Foster Community Museum on FM 359 was later converted from an old, historic school house into a beautiful, modern museum.*



HARTLAGE: The schoolteacher was Leona Zich. She was from Guy. When weather was bad she would stay at our place until the weather got to where she could go back and forth.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a good distance away and dirt roads. Wow! She would have to stay overnight?

HARTLAGE: This picture on top was my Grand Champion Steer when I was sixteen (1950). The Fairgrounds were in town on Highway 90 where Fiesta is now. That year the Fair Association said they were going to make the Grand Champion steer bring in \$1,000. But before the County Fair it rained and it rained and it rained and water was so deep nobody went to the fair. They had the auction and no one was there.



*In 1950 Junior Hartlage's Grand Champion Steer was awarded after the county fair ended due to inclement weather. But he received a nice check for his efforts.*

They told me to wait about three or four months. Do you remember Noel Yarling? He was an important booster with the Fair and the 4H kids. He worked with a whole lot of business people and raised enough money. They sent me the check.

BAUMGARTNER: That is good. That is the old days.

HARTLAGE: That is a reason I liked the old days. Mr. Yarling started out selling insurance for Farm Bureau. They had an office right where Pickett and Hudgins Drug Store used to be in downtown Rosenberg. It is right across from the train depot.

They had a room rented upstairs, and that is where he did Farm Bureau Insurance and his wife would help you out with your income tax. We were not sharp enough to fill out our income tax return and she would do that.

BAUMGARTNER: Was the Grand Champion Steer at the fair a high school activity?

HARTLAGE: Future Farmers of America. (FFA) I am sure it was FFA, not 4-H. You started out in 4-H and in older grades you moved up to FFA.

BAUMGARTNER: Those were major school activities in those days. Is there a good participation in it now?

HARTLAGE: Oh, yeah.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you go to school with the Brisco or any of the Rosenbush children?

HARTLAGE: No, they were older.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you know Mason Briscoe?

HARTLAGE: Oh, yes. I knew them all, real well. Mason, Sr. lived right down the road from here.

BAUMGARTNER: Is Mason the one who owned the feed store in Rosenberg?

HARTLAGE: His uncle. He lived right down here on the left, past where we live. His daddy, Mason, and his uncle went through our place to their home. FM 723 wasn't open yet past FM 359. Until it was extended they traveled through the Stuart's to get home. There were three cattle guards that you crossed to get to their houses. At one time Settegast Road was called Spring Green Road.

BAUMGARTNER: I have seen that name on a little church towards the end of Settegast Road.

HARTLAGE: Yes, Spring Green Church is on the road. At one time this road was Spring Green and eventually they changed the name to Settegast Road. It went up to FM 723 and took a left, and went up a little ways. Mr. Settegast owned a pretty big spread there off FM 723.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, that is how it became named Settegast Road?

HARTLAGE: He used to bring his kids down here to the stop sign to catch the school bus. The school bus did not cut through there up to his place.

Mr. Andrew Briscoe was Mason's daddy and he got to be County Commissioner. When he became Commissioner he opened up that area where they lived and made FM 723 go on up all the way up to the stop sign where it tied back to Settegast Ranch Road.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the interviews for Frank Briscoe on this web site at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=37311> and Mason Briscoe at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=37309>

BAUMGARTNER: Andy Briscoe, was he the lawyer in Rosenberg?

HARTLAGE: That was his son, Andrew Briscoe. The commissioner was the father. His children were Andrew, Bill, Mason, and another son whose name I am trying to remember. The daughter was Amelia; she married Balke Mahler.

Commissioner Briscoe made a pretty good deal. The Rosenbushes had land on FM 723 where one son built a home. The Rosenbushes owned the property at the four way stop up to where the big nursery is on the corner. That was Rosenbush land. They farmed it. The last few years, I leased from them for cows. They were on the east side of FM 723 and the Briscoe's on the west side.

BAUMGARTNER: There were so many Briscoe's, Andy, William, Mason, the same names kept popping up; what did the Briscoe's do? Were they in farming or ranching?

HARTLAGE: Andrew Briscoe, had some cows and he did some farming on FM 723 going to Rosenberg. They pretty well owned all of the land on the west side. Some of it was the Huntington's; she was a Briscoe. She had land and of course they farmed her land. I think there was another sister that owned some land. That section there went all the way to Baker Road on the north side of Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, FM 723 used to be called Old Briscoe Road.

HARTLAGE: When you are going go to town just before you get to Baker Road you will see a bunch of Black Angus bulls in there. Those are Briscoe bulls; they are still leasing some of that land.

BAUMGARTNER: Who is doing that?

HARTLAGE: Mason III.

BAUMGARTNER: I used to talk to him when he had the feed store with his dad. He is a good guy.

HARTLAGE: The original Mason lived right across the road from me, and Mason II, who ran the feed store, built a house there, too.



BAUMGARTNER: In the old days who lived on Settegast Road?

HARTLAGE: Two Briscoe's lived on it; somebody else lived here but I cannot recall his name. That is pretty much it. There was nobody else.

BAUMGARTNER: 20-25 years ago when the Old Briscoe Road Grocery was open on FM 723, run by Terry and Harriet Geick, did you go there in the mornings and meet up with the group?

HARTLAGE: I didn't get in the coffee group. Morning was a bad time for me because we were doing chores. My neighbors would go and they would fill me in on everything that was going on.

BAUMGARTNER: So when you grew up in Foster Community there was a grocery store and a post office and a small community with a number of families. What did people do for a living?

HARTLAGE: Pretty much farming and ranching. The Lairds lived down off of Winner Foster Road. He was a vegetable farmer and he would take his crops to the Farmers Market in Houston. He did a little corn and cotton farming. Every week he would take a load of vegetables. Mostly it was vegetables; that was their income deal.

The Phillips had a dairy for several years. They had some beef cows, but primarily what they did was garden, chickens, and eggs. They made their living off of what they could raise.

BAUMGARTNER: To whom did they sell?

HARTLAGE: She would send butter and eggs to Rosenberg. He would take it in on Saturday, sell it, then he would buy what she had to have for the house and bring it back.

## GROWING UP

BAUMGARTNER: When you were growing up, what kind of chores did you have to do?

HARTLAGE: When I was real young in the morning I would feed the chickens. We had hogs and I fed them and milk cows. We milked cows all the time.

BAUMGARTNER: You had milk cows?

HARTLAGE: One or two milk cows and sometimes my mother would milk them and sometimes I milked them. At one time we had a pretty good crop of sheep. We also had a lot of chickens and turkeys.

BAUMGARTNER: Domestic turkeys?

HARTLAGE: I can remember when the turkeys would hide and go across the road. We would pick the turkey eggs and put them in an incubator to hatch.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they have any wild turkeys around here in those days?

HARTLAGE: I don't remember that.

BAUMGARTNER: When you were a little boy, like six, seven, ten years old, what did kids do then? Did you hunt and fish and do things like that?

HARTLAGE: Yes, we would go to the river and to Jones Creek. We would catch a lot of catfish when they were pumping out of the river.

BAUMGARTNER: They were pumping out of the Brazos into Jones Creek way back then? I didn't know that. Did you ever swim in the Brazos?

HARTLAGE: A little bit. I swam a whole lot in Jones Creek. I was a little scared of the Brazos.

BAUMGARTNER: You said you hunted a little bit when you were a little boy; what would you hunt?

HARTLAGE: We hunted mostly ducks. Sometimes quail a little bit and we hunted doves sometimes during dove season.

BAUMGARTNER: I miss the quail. I grew up with bobwhites in Oklahoma and there used to be plenty around here by Foster Farms.

HARTLAGE: At one time we had quite few of them right here on our place. It would be nothing to jump a covey. I don't think there are that many in South Texas like there were.

BAUMGARTNER: You don't see any geese anymore either.

HARTLAGE: I have seen a few snow geese this year but last year I never did see any snows. I saw a pretty good bunch the last few days over off of FM 529 and FM 359. In the old days all those ducks would come off that Katy Prairie and rice fields. In that rice is where you got the ducks. Now there are no rice fields. Mostly around here they would come in at night and land on ponds. During the daytime early in the morning they would leave and go back to the rice fields.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess the Katy Prairie used to be covered with ducks.

HARTLAGE: A lot of ducks and Brahma cattle, white Brahma cows. We did fish on the Brazos. My dad had a place right on the Brazos. He had it for years and then he sold it.

BAUMGARTNER: Did he run cows on it?

HARTLAGE: Never ran cows. He tried to farm it.

BAUMGARTNER: Where was that?

HARTLAGE: It is down here between here and Winner Foster Road about six or seven miles from here at the river. Back in behind Foster Farms.

BAUMGARTNER: Down at the river where the Stratmans and the Moss' live?

HARTLAGE: That was where his place was, joining into the Artie and John Stratman' property. One year he even put goats there. Spanish goats to clean the brush up.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, yes, they say goats will eat anything.

HARTLAGE: He built one of those fences with the squares in it. After the goats got through cleaning the brush they started sticking their heads through the fence and then they couldn't get their heads out. I had to check them every day; some would be hung up there and I had to get them out.

BAUMGARTNER: How do you get them out?

HARTLAGE: You just have to grab them and get them out. We finally cut their horns off so they would not get hung up.

BAUMGARTNER: Goats are a pain, aren't they?

HARTLAGE: Yes! Now they are something you have to take care of!

BAUMGARTNER: Did the Brazos flood much in those times?

HARTLAGE: In 1941 it was right up to the road here at FM 359. One of the Stratman's came here in a boat. He came across the fields and he said when he got to a fence, he would just raise his motor up, go over the fence in the water, come across and come on.

He came up here and my dad took him to Clodine for supplies. There was a little grocery store there, and you could not get to Rosenberg because the Brazos was flooded and cut you off. Clodine was about 15 miles away. It was the closest store. Dad took him there and they got supplies and brought him back here and put him back on his boat to go back to the river. Their houses were on the high bank of the river.

BAUMGARTNER: Hurricane Harvey hammered it last year; even the homes on the high side had four to five feet of water. Now that was a Stratman boy.

HARTLAGE: The one that came over in the boat was Vernon. He was a bachelor, never married. My dad let them bring their cattle and put them on his place. At that time they did not have very many cattle. Later on I used to haul cattle for the Stratmans.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess they had enough warning to see if the river was really going to come out.

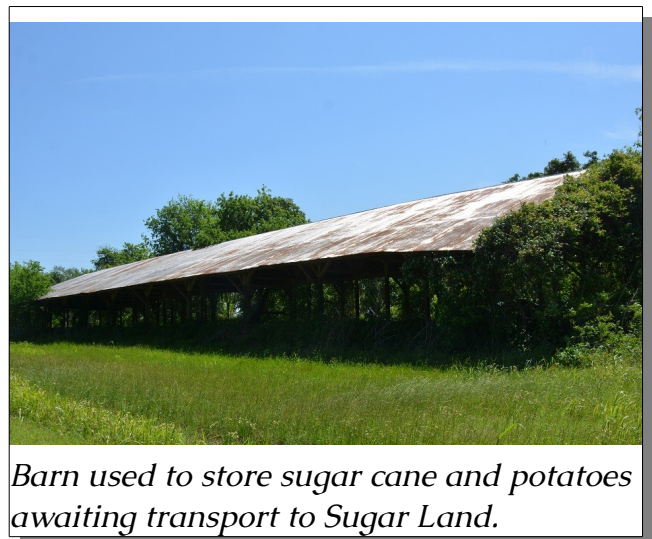
HARTLAGE: Right. They did not have all those levees back then. Now it can flood big time on you, too quick.

BAUMGARTNER: When you were growing up, did they quit growing sugar cane in this area?

HARTLAGE: They had already quit before my time. They had raised it over here on Foster Farms, and potatoes too. They had a big barn where they stored it in the barn.

BAUMGARTNER: Someone told me they used to have a train coming out to this way.

HARTLAGE: Sugar Land Industries built a train track to come out to Foster Farms and pick up sugar cane and potatoes. The train was run by Foster Farms.



*Barn used to store sugar cane and potatoes awaiting transport to Sugar Land.*

Sugar Land Industries built a train track to come out to Foster Farms and pick up sugar cane and deliver it to Sugar Land. It was stored in the barn prior to delivery

#### AFTER THEY CLOSED FOSTER SCHOOL

BAUMGARTNER: Foster Community had a post office and school and was on the map. What happened to it?

HARTLAGE: I guess as time went by the roads kept getting better and they did away with the post office, and closed the school.

BAUMGARTNER: So where did you go after Foster school?

HARTLAGE: When the school closed they sent everybody to Richmond. We caught the bus. It came out of Fulshear and went on to Richmond. It went around by Schultz's Store and looped around and crossed over the Brazos at the Richmond Bridge.

BAUMGARTNER: What was Schultz Store like?

HARTLAGE: It was just an old country store that had all kinds of stuff. It might have been a little bigger than Rosenbush.

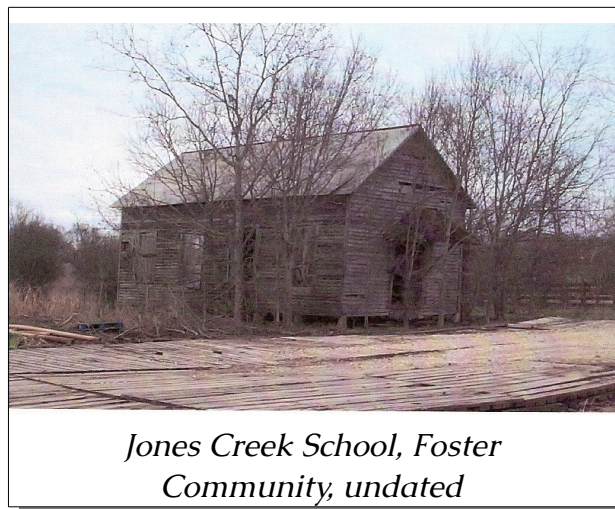
BAUMGARTNER: Who ran it?

HARTLAGE: William Schultz, ran the store and his wife Edna taught school at the Mexican school.

BAUMGARTNER: They had a separate Mexican school?

HARTLAGE: At one time they had a white school, a Mexican school, and a colored school, Jones Creek School, three of them. Mrs. Schultz could speak Spanish.

BAUMGARTNER: Was she Hispanic?



*Jones Creek School, Foster Community, undated*

HARTLAGE: No, but working in that store and waiting on people she learned it. Later on her son, Clayton, and I went to school together. He was older than me and worked weekends in the store and he could rattle it off pretty good. He still lives in Richmond. All the people that came there to buy liked him to wait on them. His daddy was kind of gripey (chuckles).

BAUMGARTNER: Did the bus stop there and go into Richmond?

HARTLAGE: They would come through here and pick up everybody and go by the store then the bus took a right off FM 359 and looped back around close to the river. They did that until that river kept washing out and finally they had to move the road.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there any type of integration in the schools in those days?

HARTLAGE: No, later on.

BAUMGARTNER: Were the blacks and the Hispanics much into farming or ranching?

HARTLAGE: Most of them did a lot of farming. At one time Foster Farms had about eighteen Hispanic families that lived there, farming cotton and corn and what have you. Each one of them had a barn to keep his crops in according to how many acres he farmed. He would get two mules, four mules, six mules or whatever. They were sharecroppers. They farmed the land and split the crop with the landowners. Sugarland Industries would give them a voucher to buy their supplies in Schultz’s Store. They had to go to Schultz’s Store. When Sugarland Industries sold out to Mr. Schultz they made some kind of deal with him that the people would have to spend half of their money with him and the other half they could go to Rosenberg to spend. Mr. Schultz told them that he could not buy that store unless he had that business to keep him going.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Vouchers, or Company scrip, is a substitute for government-issued legal tender or currency issued by a company to pay its employees. It can only be exchanged in company stores owned by the employers. Imperial Sugar and other area companies recruited and maintained their work forces using a traditional Southern racial strategy of separate housing and occupational segregation, complete with ethnic churches, separate graveyards, company stores, and scrip rather than currency.

– *Race Law Stories by Rachel Moran, Devon Carbado, published by West Atlantic.*

BAUMGARTNER: What about the black community? I have read that in other parts of the county, down around Thompsons and the George Ranch, there were many black cowboys. Was that a common thing?



HARTLAGE: Yes, pretty common. All through this Spring Green area there were a lot of colored people who owned twenty acres or thirty acres or forty acres. They farmed and would have two or three cows. As times got better, people started buying them out and a lot of the young ones left and went to California.

BAUMGARTNER: It probably was like lots of communities around here, the taxes have gotten so high nobody can stay there.

HARTLAGE: There were a lot of black people in the Fulshear and Simonton area. Most of them owned a little property and it finally got bought up.

BAUMGARTNER: They were doing okay when you grew up?

HARTLAGE: Yeah.

BAUMGARTNER: So how old were you when they moved you to Richmond and shut the school down? Do you remember what grade you were in?

HARTLAGE: Probably ten or twelve years old; that would be my guess.

BAUMGARTNER: So you went to elementary school in Richmond for a while and then you went to Rosenberg?

HARTLAGE: I went to Jane Long Elementary for a little bit, then to Richmond High School. Then I went over to Rosenberg to the Old Rosenberg High. That was right where the Dollar Store is now. I went to Lamar Consolidated the first year when it was still under construction.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember what schools you liked better? Did you like it more out in the country or did you like it more in the city?

HARTLAGE: You get what you get. When I was in school in Richmond we had kids coming down there from as far away as around Damon and that area.

BAUMGARTNER: That is a pretty good bus ride, maybe 25 miles.

HARTLAGE: We were still in Richmond. I was probably a freshman, eight, ninth or tenth grade.

BAUMGARTNER: That was about 1950?

HARTLAGE: Right around 1950. I know we went there for football practice and we would go for the whole week and just stay there. The school was not completed yet, construction was still going on but they did open it up for classes when school started.

BAUMGARTNER: They wanted you to stay up there for football practice?

HARTLAGE: Yes. I played a little and then I had a health problem and the doctor told me he did not want me to play.

BAUMGARTNER: Were they organized in football; they played other schools?

HARTLAGE: Yes. I believe the coach at that time was Goforth. I was doing good, but then I had some kind of bleeding problem. They didn't know what it was and the doctor did not like football. He was old fashioned and said it was too hard on the body. They used it as a good excuse to stop me from playing.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember who your doctor was?

HARTLAGE: Dr. Ben Knolle.

BAUMGARTNER: What I remember most about Dr. Knolle is that you would go into his office and he would look you over and give you a shot or whatever then he would walk over to the side of his little room and spit into the bucket. [both laughing]. Chewing tobacco.

HARTLAGE: I did a lot of business with him, cows and stuff around the farm.

BAUMGARTNER: He had his office there on Highway 36. I used to go to him when I first came to Rosenberg.

HARTLAGE: In that old house. He sent me to a specialist in Houston about that bleeding deal. It just quit and I never knew what it was, a ruptured vessel or something. Every once in a while it would happen again, and over the years it finally quit.

BAUMGARTNER: No news is good news. Did you worry about getting drafted in those days? Korean War?

HARTLAGE: I could have but I didn't. I was a little younger than some of my friends. Three of them were going to get drafted so they all joined the Navy. I took them to Houston so they could join up. They were about two years older than me. I never did get a deferment or anything to keep me from going but it all ended before my turn came up.

## STARTING A CAREER

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get started in the cow business? You got out of high school and then what happened?

HARTLAGE: My dad had the cows and he would let me run a few, a certain number. Of course, I wanted to get more and more but he limited me to how many I could get. We would take them to the stockyards in Houston. During the fall it is like a late crop and those you usually wean off of the cows. We would feed them here right at the Settegast Road corner. I would go over to the feed mill in Richmond and haul cotton seed hulls and cotton seed and bring it back here. We would gin ear corn and we would mix it all up and feed it to them.

My dad and I were selling a lot of the calves we raised to the Rosenberg meat markets. We sold to Duran's Store way back then. It was right before the railroad tracks. As soon as you cross over the tracks going into town where they just recently remodeled. Duran's was a grocery store and meat market then. If you wanted to get waited on, you better be there before noon on the weekends because right after noon the Houston people would come out. They would drive from Houston to buy the meat. All the meat was cut with a knife and saw and there would be two or three animals butchered.

BAUMGARTNER: Would the Durans come out to your place to pick up the calves? How did that work; did you help them?

HARTLAGE: We just put them where they could get them and they did the slaughtering themselves.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you shoot the calves?

HARTLAGE: They have to shoot it. Eventually after that they opened up a killing plant right up there by Jackson High School and we would take them there. They would slaughter them there and they would deliver to the different stores here in town.

BAUMGARTNER: Did any other store come out here and butcher them?

HARTLAGE: No, Duran's was the only one. That is still when people were picking cotton by hand. There were no machines. All those cotton pickers would move into Rosenberg and they would camp out right where the railroad depot is now, to the east of the depot. There used to be a big parking lot and two or three acres. They would come in with their wagons and they would camp there and they would go to different farms and pick cotton.

BAUMGARTNER: They were mostly Hispanic?

HARTLAGE: Hispanics picked the cotton. When they started picking they would get money and that is when the stores in town would make money. They would sell them new blue jeans, shirts, shoes and they would buy a lot of meat. You would be surprised. They ate good. I don't know where they came from. A lot of them work for certain people and if they liked you the next year they would try to come back and work for you again.

BAUMGARTNER: What were the different ways you could make money in the cattle business?

HARTLAGE: Way back then, primarily it was the cow-calf operation. The cow has calves and you make your money selling the calves. You did not have the feedlot operations then to fatten them up. Over the years they started the commercial feed yards for animals that were not ready for slaughter right away.

BAUMGARTNER: So initially they did not have feedlots in this area?

HARTLAGE: Not here. Some were scattered around. Sealy had a big feedlot.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that connected to Port City Stockyard?

HARTLAGE: It wasn't far from there but it was a different group and not connected. Later on Ansel's Grain Company put in a feed yard over past Fairchilds. They built a feed yard and they fed cattle. That was Diz Ansel's family; he and his brother ran it. They had the grain at the feed mill and they would mix their grain and rations and haul it out there.

I sometimes bought cattle and put them in their yard and they would feed them for me. I sold the cattle they were feeding. When they got them fattened up I would sell them to the packers in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: What is a packer?

HARTLAGE: He is the guy that buys the animal, slaughters it and sells it to the grocery store.

BAUMGARTNER: He is the middle man. What are packers like; are they good guys? Are they hard guys to work with?

HARTLAGE: They are good. Back at one time in the 50's they would buy all the calves right off of the cows. They would feed the younger slaughter animals. They had a trade for anything. They had a market for the good ones, the bad ones, and some you just cut up, boil it, and make stew. They would distribute them to the stores. Houston had a booming business. There were seven pretty big packing plants at one time right there in the Houston area.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess all of those places had good refrigeration then?

HARTLAGE: Good refrigeration and refrigerated trucks. Weingarten back then was a big chain in Houston. Weingarten had a lot of stores. Certain time of the year you would have an abundance of real good, fat calves, Weingarten would always come out to the sale and, man, they would sell them.

#### FIRST OUTSIDE JOB

BAUMGARTNER: What was your first full time job working for someone else?

HARTLAGE: Working for the stockyards in Houston when I was probably twenty.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get that job?

HARTLAGE: I was hauling cattle down to the stockyards for people around here. I was just hauling. I did not have a job at the stockyards. Two guys that worked for two different commission companies were going to start their own business and they hired me.

BAUMGARTNER: What is a commission company?

HARTLAGE: The stockyard had about seven commission companies. They own the stockyards and if you brought your cattle in, the stockyards would have people check them in and they would ask you what commission company you would want to sell your cattle to. You would tell them and the commission company would sell them and pay you for them. They kept a certain percentage and the yardage went to the stockyards.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your job?

HARTLAGE: These guys were starting up a new business. We would sort the cattle up, sell them, weigh them, for the customer.

BAUMGARTNER: You probably learned a lot in those days.

HARTLAGE: That was a learning deal. The local people started getting me to haul their animals. They did not like to go into Houston because of the traffic. I would tell them to call me two weeks ahead to get on the list. I would take a load when I went in to work, on the side in addition to working at the stockyards. Sometimes after work I would come out and haul more loads in the evening.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were some of the local people that you would do that for?

HARTLAGE: All of the people who were out in this area at that time. The Rosenbushes. Carl Bentley out of Fulshear; he just passed away. I hauled many a truckload for the Harris's. Jack Wendt, a big subdivision between Fulshear and Simonton is where they had all their cattle.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the interview for Jack Wendt on this web site at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30464>

BAUMGARTNER: I thought Jack's holdings were closer to Kendleton.

HARTLAGE: They were, but they also had all this stuff down here in Fulshear. At one time they probably ran four hundred cows. If he just had what I could haul, I would get that load, I had to get him a big truck.

Did you know Jack Wendt very well?

BAUMGARTNER: Not real well but I really enjoyed talking to him. He was a very nice man, had traveled around the world in connection with the rice industry.

HARTLAGE: I have done a lot of business with him.

HARTLAGE, CHARLOTTE: He is a good guy, too.

HARTLAGE: When I was going to high school in Richmond, his wife, Billie, was a teacher there. She was a Harris from over in Fulshear. Jack would call me regular. I wouldn't say every week, to check to see what the cow market was doing and what direction we needed to go.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the interviews for Billie Wendt on this web site at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30614>, <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30616>, and <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30618>,



BAUMGARTNER: I didn't know he did cows. I thought he was mostly a rice farmer.

HARTLAGE: He had a lot of cows. Rice was the big thing and he made a lot of money out of rice farming, but the cow deal was a big thing, too.

There is a guy with a place off of Winner Foster who was working for Uncle Ben's Rice in Houston, started working for them when he was twelve or fourteen years old. Blue Ribbon was owned by the Richmond Rice company and Jack was big with it. They offered this guy a job to go to work for them and they would give him a little piece of the action if he could turn it around. That guy turned that thing around and there is no telling how much money he made. Jack told me one day that there is no man worth that much money.

BAUMGARTNER: Who was this guy?

HARTLAGE: His name was Ed McWilliams. He had a place that I was taking care of for him. He got a deer lease out in Junction, in West Texas. He told me about the third weekend of the season, "If you want to go, take a couple of guys and we will go out there and hunt." We started going ever year.

We were out there hunting, and they had set up a camp house, prefabbed it, hauled it in there on a bob tail truck and set it up. The first year it only had a kitchen and sleeping quarters. The next year they had built extra, separate sleeping quarters. I asked him one day, "How can you afford all this money for the lease plus what you are spending out here?" He was the one who turned Blue Ribbon around. He knew how to get things done. About the second week of the season he took all the "graders," the men who placed a dollar grade on the rice. He took them hunting. Graders stick one of those gauges in a sample of rice and grade it. All they have to do is give it a better grade and all this stuff is paid for.

Did you ever deal with Hilmar Moore?

HARTLAGE: Yes, sir. Did not really do much business with him, just at the stockyard when he would bring his cattle there.

BAUMGARTNER: He passed away a few years ago.

HARTLAGE: If he told you something, it was that way and it didn't take him too long to make up his mind. One day I took him down around Texas City, because one of those oilfield outfits had a set of registered Santa Gertrudis cattle. He was representing the George Ranch and considering buying them.

We looked the cattle over and he said that everything was fine, the price was right and everything was good. If they will deliver them to Richmond we got a deal. The guy that he was talking to didn't quite understand that Hilmar had already made up his mind and what he was saying. I said, "All he is asking you do is pay the trucking from here over to Richmond." The guy said, "Oh, okay." I was buying some cattle from him one time and a guy by the name of Paul Henry was running cattle for the George Ranch. The lawyers told Paul Henry to sell 'x' number of dollars of cattle by a certain date. Paul Henry said he did not have anything to sell. He had already sold all the old stuff and everything he had was the good stuff. They said that is not what we said: sell \$30,000 or \$40,000 worth of cattle by such and such date. He didn't do it so he lost his job.

Then Hilmar took over. He called the people I worked for and said, "I got to sell some cows if you have some customers who want some good cows." We went and looked. Hilmar would let you ride in the pasture and pick-em and give me the price and take what you want. I needed so many for myself, and I filled up four customers with what little deals they needed. Another guy was there looking at the Brahma cattle and they kept hewing and hawing back and forth and Hilmar told them, "It is getting kind of late in the day so y'all are going to have to make up your mind because I am going to let my hands go in a little bit. You are going to have to tell us yes or no. If you want them that is fine and if you don't then that is fine." That was Hilmar; it did not take him all day to make up his mind [both laughing].

EDITOR'S NOTE: Hilmar Guenther Moore was the longest serving mayor in the history of the United States. On September 22, 1949, he was appointed to fill an unexpired term as the Mayor of Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas. After that, he won 32 consecutive elections, and served a total of 63 years as Mayor. Hilmar Guenther Moore died on December 4, 2012, at the age of 92.



HARTLAGE, CHARLOTTE: I have known him for years and, like you said, he was a character.

HARTLAGE: Way back there I used to haul for Mr. Hallmark, in Richmond. I hauled for Jacob Blaisdell forever. He had cows, sheep, whatever, right there on Edgewood Drive. I had a truck and trailer. I would go by and pick them up.

BAUMGARTNER: They would pay you by the head?

HARTLAGE: Somewhat or whatever. I would take them to the stockyards. They would sell. Some would go to the packers and some to the feed yards. At one time they had a guy there who would buy a lot of calves and they would go to Iowa. He would put them together and put them on a train to Sioux City, Iowa.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow, that is a long ways. I wonder how long that took.

HARTLAGE: A long ways. I don't know, but his buyers gave him plenty of money to buy them. When they had good ones, he had the money.

BAUMGARTNER: What kind of cattle?

HARTLAGE: The ones that went to Iowa had to be the pure-bred Herefords, Angus, and Angus Hereford cross. The ones with hair that could withstand the cold weather.

BAUMGARTNER: Cold weather. What cows down here would not hold up with the cold weather?

HARTLAGE: The Brahma crosses. Too much Brahma, they cannot withstand the cold.

BAUMGARTNER: You didn't mention Longhorns. What did they do with Longhorns?

HARTLAGE: They used a lot of the Longhorns as yearlings. They would use them for roping steers and stuff like that. There are still a lot of Longhorns out there, but they are thinning them out.

BAUMGARTNER: Why do they want to thin them?

HARTLAGE: Beef-wise there is just not enough beef there. They are just thin bodies and you don't get any good cuts out of them.

#### GOING OUT ON HIS OWN

BAUMGARTNER: You were working for the landowners and you were helping the Rosenbushes handle their cows. What would you do?

HARTLAGE: For the Rosenbushes, whatever they needed. In the spring we would get them up and give them whatever shots they had to have to protect them from anthrax and the calves from black leg, castrate the bull calves, those type of deals.

BAUMGARTNER: If you wouldn't do it, who does stuff like that?

HARTLAGE: There are some guys around that do it by the day.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there much ethnic participation with the Hispanics in the cow business then?

HARTLAGE: Not too much. Some of them were good cowboys and some of them were involved. Mr. Mason Briscoe, the older one, not the one that had the feed store, he had a place over here behind where he lived and he had a couple of cabins where he kept one or two at all times working for him. He would get them from the prison when they would be on parole. They would live there and work for him.

BAUMGARTNER: A pretty good deal for both.

HARTLAGE: He had one guy who was as good a hand as ever! He stayed with Mr. Briscoe a long time, even after the parole thing got over with.

BAUMGARTNER: So you went out on your own and started leasing property and raising cows. How big a property and who would you lease it from?

HARTLAGE: Most of the good places I got, I had worked their cattle for them and helped them, like the Rosenbushes. I helped them and when the older people had passed and when one son was still in the business, I bought his cattle out and he leased me the place. That is how I got most of the places. I think the Rosenbushes had about five hundred acres.

Later I leased the old Sartartia Dairy on Highway 90 near Sugar Land. I told him, "When you get tired of fooling with your cattle, I would like to have it." My dad sold that property by the Brazos River and bought a place off of Morton Road that my siblings and I wound up inheriting. We kept it a while, but the home builders wanted it and we decided to sell. Instead of selling my share I traded it for another property.

For tax reasons I put in the sales agreement that I would have enough time to buy another place in exchange for the property and I ended up buying a place up in Chapel Hill in Washington County. It is in a river bottom, and it has flooded the last two years there. The first flood the river was up pretty good, and I had steers swimming. This year when Hurricane Harvey hit, the river was down and when we got that big rain up there, it got to be flooding a foot. But within a day it moved on; so it was no big deal. It killed us down here, out by Valley Lodge, toward Simonton. We had to move the cows out both years.

BAUMGARTNER: What do you do with them?

HARTLAGE: I just added them to another place that wasn't going to flood in East Columbia. We left the cows right on the edge of the river and they had just enough ground to stay out of the water, but not enough to furnish them feed. So we ended up hauling in a lot of round bales in there to them. This last flood, Harvey, flooded both East Columbia and West Columbia.

BAUMGARTNER: Are you still leasing property and have cows scattered around, and go to weekly sales?

HARTLAGE: Oh, yes. Monday I go to Flatonia, Tuesday El Campo, Wednesday Wharton, I don't go anywhere Thursday, and Friday, I go to Brenham. Last Saturday I went to Navasota.

BAUMGARTNER: Man you must be awful busy, aren't you? What does momma say? [both Junior and Charlotte laughing] It sounds like you are still keeping your nose to the grindstone.

When did you two get married?

HARTLAGE: We got married a long time ago. Charlotte was born in 1941 and we got married December 27, 1974. Both of us were married previously. Charlotte had a girl and a boy and I had a girl and two boys. Some live over in Woods Edge just a couple miles from here. One of my boys lives in Needville, and the other one is in South Carolina. My daughter lives close to San Antonio. She has been working for insurance companies for a long time. She is 61 or 62 and they diagnosed her a couple months ago with Alzheimers. She had to give up her job.

#### INDUSTRY CHANGES TODAY

BAUMGARTNER: What are some of the biggest changes in the cow business now compared to when you were a young man?

HARTLAGE: I guess the big difference is that everything winds up in a feed yard. What made it for the feed lot operators is a consistent supply. Whether the weather is bad or good, cold or hot, or whatever, the cows get fed and the packer knows that he can get all he needs every day. The weights and the grades and all that are consistent.

In the old days for three or four months out of the year buyers could get all the good quality they wanted, but the other several months maybe they could get a supply maybe they couldn't. Feed lots is what changed it. Back then animals went to slaughter anywhere from 400 to 650 pounds. Now everything is a 1,000 pounds to 1,400 pounds because of feed lots. You bring them in and fatten them up.

BAUMGARTNER: If someone came along and wanted to go into the cow business, is it realistic? Let's say he gets twenty heifers and a bull and thinks he is going to be a cow man. Is it possible to make it?

HARTLAGE: Not easy. It won't be easy.

BAUMGARTNER: He would have to find land?

HARTAGE: Anybody that gets out and bids enough to lease some of these places...what they will charge and what you have to pay for replacement females and everything you put into it...it will be a long, tough road.

BAUMGARTNER: A replacement female is....?

HARTLAGE: One to put on a pasture and raise calves off of.

BAUMGARTNER: What are some of the risks in the cow business? I mean you got floods, fires...

HARTLAGE: ...ice storms in the winter time.

BAUMGARTNER: It is December now and if it gets to freezing here tonight like it's supposed to, is that going to damage someone's calves?

HARTLAGE: Yes, it is going to knock them back. They have to have protection and if you get consistent conditions like that, you are going to need to have supplemental feed. Hay, in some kind of good ratio. These cattle we picked up this morning, they came in and we have to give them some shots to keep them.

Coming out of the auctions they will get sick, pneumonia and stuff like that. They pick it up. Same thing as a kid, they go to somewhere and get infected. Like all of these Brahmas. I don't know if you notice all these Brahmas here at my house. They stay here. This is where we feed them because it is too cold; they cannot go to the Panhandle.



BAUMGARTNER: How much have expenses gone up? You used to be able to buy a truck for so much money, and fence wire, and hire you a cowboy, and so forth.

HARTLAGE: It has all gone up. I don't know percentage-wise. I just traded in a truck. The engine was knocking on my old truck. I took it to the diesel mechanic and he said, "\$13,000 to fix it but my advice is to sell it."

BAUMGARTNER: I am sure that expenses over the years have gone way up but what about cattle prices, how have they done?

HARTLAGE: It fluctuates a lot. Feeding is a pretty high-risk business unless you can hedge them on the markets. But usually when you hedge them and lock them in ahead of time you do it on a small amount of profit. You are not going to make a good profit.

BAUMGARTNER: We talked a little bit about prices and you said they go up and down.

HARTLAGE: Right. I don't remember the year but I can remember Sealy one day the sale started and they ran some steers in. They were just feeder steers and they were not ready to slaughter and ordinarily they would be sold to go somewhere to a feed lot and feed them out. None of the feeder buyers bid. The market just cratered so bad no one would bid on them. Finally when they backed the price down cheap enough the packers bought them for slaughter; even though they weren't that fat. I think the calves that one year were twelve or fourteen cents. Now \$1.20 is normal.

BAUMGARTNER: Can you really get hurt in some years when the price falls for whatever reason?

HARTLAGE: Oh, yes. Everything will be going real good and they will be moving the product and needing cattle. Packers are making money, everybody is doing good and you get some bad news that they bombed somebody or done this or that and the futures market drops pretty hard and you can get caught.

We used to handle all their calves off of Cinco Ranch and haul them to the stockyard. Cinco and another guy right next to them named Pete Finley, he had a lot of cattle, too. He was one of the old time ranchers and now all of that is in houses.

BAUMGARTNER: It is amazing how much it has changed. You drive around in Cinco Ranch now and it looks like it has been there forty years. Big old shade trees, concrete streets lined with big houses.

HARTLAGE: I used to do a lot of cows within five miles of here. I leased land over at Woods Edge at one time from Josephine Abercrombie. Then they started developing, so I cross-fenced it and kept half of it. Then they were subdividing the last half of it. They told me they had bought a place on Pool Hill Road at Fulshear and they would let me have it; so I moved the cows over there. I have dealt with them my whole life. Over the years, I leased from Jimmy Banahan over on FM 723. My nephew, Tommy Holmes, and I had it for several years and a guy bought it and planted all those pecan trees on it.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you ever have anybody in your life that was a particular influence on your life?

HARTLAGE: Yes. Over the years there was some you watched and seen what they done. They did it right, and they were doing good. You got to make changes if you have to.

BAUMGARTNER: Junior, which do you think is better, 2017 or fifty years ago? Do you think we had it better then or people got it better today?

HARTLAGE: They probably got it better today but I liked it better than. I don't like covering all the good land up with houses. I liked it better when they were farming it and producing on the land.

BAUMGARTNER: I've enjoyed talking to you. It's been fun. You've done a good job producing on the land.

Interview Ends