

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Willie Ann Frels McColloch**

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Transcript

POLLICOFF: Willie Ann, when and where were you born?

McCOLLOCH: I was born in Glen Flora in Wharton County. It's a little town. My dad, Earl Bernard Frels, Sr., was running a cotton gin there. My mother, Alice Mae Schmidt Frels, grew up there. She married my daddy in 1928. I was born n July 29, 1929. We lived there until I was a freshman in high school. I went to Wharton High School one year and then we moved and I graduated from Ganado High School. From Ganado High School I went to T. S. C. W. which is now T. W. U. I got a chemistry degree as a chemical librarian. When I graduated I went back home. Mother had major surgery and I stayed there that year to take care of her. The following year my daddy walked in and said, "We need a math teacher and you're going to teach math this year." I laughed because I always said that I wouldn't teach!" I got a temporary teaching certificate for the two years that I taught there.

POLLICOFF: What year was that?

McCOLLOCH: I graduated in 1946 from Ganado High School. Then I went to T. W. U. four years. I graduated there in 1950. Then I went back home. I taught algebra there two years. I met and married Tom McColloch. We moved to Richmond. When I got to Richmond I was going to teach when I found out I was already pregnant with my oldest, my son, so I canceled that job. A year later we had a daughter, Tanna. They called me from Needville High School. James Boone was out there. He said, "I need a librarian desperately." His wife had been librarian out there for all that time. He was retiring and she wanted to move to Richmond. I said, "I'm going to stay until you get somebody, because I've got small children at home I need to raise. After the third year I finally told him, "You have to find somebody." I wrote him a letter of resignation in April. I then stayed home about two years. Franklin Herndon from Lamar called saying, "We need a librarian desperately as our librarian is sick". I went to Mr. Traylor and talked to him. He said, "You know that we want Mrs. Bond to have the job back if she gets to where she feels okay." I said, "Okay, that's fine with me. I really don't want to work yet." I wanted to stay at home and raise my children. Well, Mrs. Bond never did come back. I stayed there twenty-seven years.

POLLICOFF: (laughing) Best temporary job ever.

McCOLLOCH: Yea, I didn't apply. I had three jobs and didn't apply for any of them.

POLLOCOFF: That's great. You have given me your story in a nutshell. Let me ask more questions. You were born in Glen Flora on July 29, 1929? Were you born in a hospital?

McCOLLOCH: No at home. The house is still standing.

POLLICOFF: Where was that house?

McCOLLOCH: When you go to Glen Flora from Wharton you cross the first railroad crossing. There is a little short block and then another block. Turn right and go two blocks and turn left. It's the third house from the corner on the right. The school was right across the street. I went to school even before I was school age. I always had recess when they did.

POLLICOFF: (laughing) So you joined them for recess.

McCOLLOCH: I laugh. My mother said, "Yeah, and you got all the childhood diseases before you started school."

POLLICOFF: (laughing) Tell me about your parents. How did your parents get here?

McCOLLOCH: My dad was born in Gillett, Karnes Co. My granddad, my dad and his brother built gins or made plans. They looked over building them and to make sure that they were correct. I don't exactly know when the grandparents moved to Glen Flora. They had lived in Frelsburg. They moved to Glen Flora. Grandpa and my dad ran the gin with a younger brother. My grandad was William Henry Frels. My grandmother was Annie Wilhelmina Weigel Frels. My dad was born in Gillett, Karnes Co. My granddad was born in Frelsburg, Colorado County. They ran a gin until I went through Wharton High School my freshman year. World War Two had started by then and my dad was working part time with his brother-in-law out of El Campo running heavy equipment. They needed someone over in Ganado to run a trucking concern and build roads for oil companies so we moved to Ganado and that's where I graduated from high school.

POLLOCOFF: What about your mother? Was she from this area?

McCOLLOCH: My mother was born in Columbus, Colorado Co. Her mother and dad were both dead by the time she was six. Her dad was Charles Louis Schmidt. Her mother was Susan Halyard Schmidt. There were three girls. The oldest sister wanted a dishwasher (snicker). Mother said, "My feelings were hurt." Of course, she was joking.

Mother moved to Glen Flora, Wharton County to live with them until she was married. Her sister and husband were Augusta Schmidt Wearden and Will Wearden. Mother graduated from Wharton High School. After she graduated from high school she and my dad were married.

POLLICOFF: How did they meet?

McCOLLOCH: You know, I don't know. Glen Flora is a small town. I know that after she was married she did book keeping for the gin. It may be that she started that after she got out of high school. Mother never did go beyond high school but she was smart. She had pretty hand writing so they may have hired her.

POLLICOFF: So they got married and stayed in the area.

McCOLLOCH: Yes, they moved two houses down from my aunt. They bought this house and it is still standing.

POLLICOFF: How many kids were in the family?

McCOLLOCH: My mother's dad was married and had five children. That wife died and he married a woman who had been married before who had three children. Then they had four more. There's yours, mine and ours. Dad was one of four children. He had two sisters; Nora Frels Ryan and Viola Frels Wendel. He had a younger brother: Herbert Frels.

POLLICOFF: They needed it back then for help on the farm. They raised cotton, too, in addition to designing gins?

McCOLLOCH: Mother's dad farmed cotton. My dad bought a farm in Colorado County. He leased it to somebody who raised cotton. One man who leased the farm ran a truck farm. He raised carrots, onions and beets and other vegetables to haul to the Houston Farmer's Market. Mother's dad was a farmer. I guess her mother was a house keeper. I didn't know either of them because they were dead by the time mama was six. Then my dad's folks: Grandpa was born in Frelsburg and I think Grandmom must have been born in Alleyton in Colorado County.

POLLICOFF: Right, it's just before you turn off for Eagle Lake.

McCOLLOCH: Yes, you're right. She was one of thirteen children. Oh gosh, I didn't know many of them. I knew Grandmother and I knew Grandpa vaguely. He died when I was in the third grade. Grandma lived long enough to see me married.

She worried because there was an old maid or one bachelor in every generation. She kept asking, "When are you going to get married?"

POLLICOFF: She didn't want you to be the last. Do you have sisters and brothers?

McCOLLOCH: I have one younger brother. He's gone now, too. His name was Earl Bernard Frels, Jr. He was born February 19, 1931. So there was little difference in our ages. I grew up on a block where I had an aunt and uncle who lived on the corner. Their parents lived in the house next door and we lived in the next house. A County Judge lived in the next house. The aunt that raised my mother lived in the next house. So we had cousins on that street. One cousin ended up being a Monsignor in the Catholic Church. We played everything: tennis, basketball, baseball, etc.

POLLICOFF: Guess he was the bachelor of the family.

McCOLLOCH: Yea. He was one of five children. I know Glen and I worked. During World War Two they had metal drives. The post office had a little two wheel cart that we borrowed to go all over town to pick up metal. We, also, watched for airplanes. They had a little booth where you called in to report what planes that you saw. We did that too.

POLLICOFF: How old were you?

McCOLLOCH: I was about ten or eleven. They also added the twelfth grade during that time. They gave us standardized tests. If we passed those tests with high enough scores we got to skip a grade. So I skipped the seventh grade. I finished grade twelve but I had to skip the seventh grade. I was sixteen the summer after I graduated from high school. I was twenty the summer after I graduated from college. We went to El Paso. Daddy by then was Mayor of Ganado. They wanted to see these people about buying some land. This woman had fallen heir to it and they needed the land to expand Ganado. So we went to El Paso. We were out there and the guy who ran the Tourist Court where we stayed asked, "Why aren't you in school?" I said, "I'm out of school." "Naw ,you're not." I said, "Yes, I graduated from college this past June." He said, "You're not that old." But I was. I was twenty the summer after I graduated from college.

POLLICOFF: You married Tom in 1953?

McCOLLOCH: Yes, he was rice farming out here. He didn't own any of the land. He leased it from George Ranch and farmed out in that area. His family moved to Richmond in 1935. He was born in Ganado and then they moved to Bellaire.

I know Mrs. McColloch used to talk about Rice farming in the city of Bellaire. He went to school in Bellaire for awhile. He started out at Lostprong in Wharton County. It's a little bitty community.

POLLICOFF: That's where he was born?

McCOLLOCH: Yes, then they moved to Bellaire and in 1935 they moved to Richmond. He graduated from Richmond High School in 1942.

POLLICOFF: So you guys didn't know each other until after you moved back?

McCOLLOCH: Yes, and no. His Uncle, Hugh McColloch, lived in Ganado and he came over and stayed with those aunts and uncles. I met him several times.

POLLICOFF: Ganado was not a big community?

McCOLLOCH: No, it was not big! He knew some of the people that I knew. We ran around together but I didn't date him until 1952, maybe. A boy that I dated in high school had been in the army and came home. He had a date with a girl that he thought he was going to marry. He called me and said, "I need you to do something for me. I want you to go with Tom and meet us. He wants to go along with me and my date and I don't want him to go alone." I said, "I'm not going. I'm tired. I have been teaching all day and need to grade papers." He said, "I'll do anything for you if you'll just go". So I went. The funny thing was we were supposed to meet him over at a square dance place. I thought, "He doesn't square dance", but I didn't say anything about it. I thought that the girl had talked him into it. So we went over and waited and we waited. After an hour Tom said, "They're not coming." So we just we went off to a picture show. I dated him and we got engaged at Christmas.

POLLICOFF: So they completely abandoned you?

McCOLLOCH: Yes, and Tom was so mad. I said, "Don't be mad, that's Jack". He just behaves that way." (laughing). We were married and moved to Richmond into a little frame house on the lot where I'm living now. The house had belonged to Miss Tilly Harper. She was an old maid telephone worker of some sort. I think a director. The house had a living room, two bedrooms, a dining room, a little odd shaped hall, a kitchen, and a screen porch front and back. There wasn't a level floor in there! I used to swear my children were going to walk lopsided because if you put a marble on the floor it would roll from one end to the other.

We stayed there until 1960 when we built our house on the lot directly behind the old house. The property belonged to my mother and father-in-law. When my father-in-law found out that we were going build he said, "Give me a dollar." I asked, "What do you want a dollar for?" "I'm selling you that place." We got the place for a whole dollar and we built the house and had the other house moved off. I have lived on the same lot in two different houses for 59 years.

POLLICOFF: Tell me again what your father and grandfather did?

McCOLLOCH: My father ran a cotton gin and worked with a heavy equipment company. He ended up with drag lines and bulldozers and things like that. They dug ponds for people, farmers. When they built the radar station at Danevang, Wharton County, he leveled and laid it out for them. He did whatever needed to be done with heavy equipment. My grandfather, to the best of my knowledge, never did anything but build or run cotton gins.

POLLICOFF: What about your mother and grandmother?

McCOLLOCH: My mother was a housewife and I guess her mother, too. I never knew her.

POLLICOFF: You said that your mother was really smart.

McCOLLOCH: Oh, yes. She graduated from Wharton High School in 1927. She laughs that she taught a bunch of those big old guys that became prominent in Wharton politics. She had to help them pass algebra.

POLLICOFF: She knew them when (laughing). And your grandmother too.

McCOLLOCH: My grandmother was a housewife. She could sew and she could crochet and she could cook. You'd ask her, "Grandma give me the recipe for that." "Well you put a pinch of this and a handful of that." I said, "Grandma I can't cook that way!" (chuckling). She was a good cook. My mom was a wonderful cook, too, and so was my mother-in-law.

POLLICOFF: You talked a little bit of childhood. If you could describe a typical day when you were growing up, say elementary age, tell me what it was like?

McCOLLOCH: I'd get up and go to school and, of course, stayed there until we were out of school. Then Glen and I would go over and play basketball or tennis. Glen's father had a little aluminum boat that we would roll on logs down to Caney Creek and go fishing.

My uncle ran a gristmill. He ground cornmeal for the women in the neighborhood. He had a colored man we called Jimmy Wearden because that's my uncles last name. He'd ride this horse and buggy to the houses and then tie the reins around the buggy brake. He'd go deliver the cornmeal to the housewives. Of course, in those days black people didn't go to the front door. He had to go around to the back of the house. So while he was at the back we'd steal his buggy. Uncle Ed would get mad at us and he'd put us to work filling up and sewing closed corn sacks after they were filled.

POLLICOFF: When you took the boat, what were you fishing for?

McCOLLOCH: Anything we could catch. We never caught anything. We would buy little hooks, maybe an inch long and put them on. Of course, if there were any fish of any size those hooks wouldn't have held them. We went out and did it anyway.

POLLICOFF : Did you have worms for bait or anything?

McCOLLOCH: What ever we could find. What scared the grownups was that right behind Caney Creek about fifty yards behind the house was the Colorado River. Often the bank would slough off. They were afraid we would get on that tank and fall in.

POLLICOFF: Did you have permission to be down there?

McCOLLOCH: No! Of course not. In fact I got many a spanking for going down there.
(laughing)

POLLICOFF: Do you remember times when the river got real high?

McCOLLOCH: The river flooded one time. It was on my birthday and the water lacked about an inch of getting into our house. It was probably 1936 or 1937. Glen rowed the boat over to our house and brought me a birthday present.

POLLICOFF: (laughing) What was the present?

McCOLLOCH: It was a little rosary in a little bitty glass case maybe an inch or inch and a fourth long and maybe three quarters of an inch wide.

POLLICOFF: Do you still have it?

McCOLLOCH: Yes. (smiling)

POLLICOFF: Did you have a garden or anything?

McCOLLOCH: We did out in Glen Flora. Daddy had a couple of colored men that worked for him plowing the garden and milking the cow. One would say, "Mr. Earl, don't send me over there to do that. I hate that work. Let me do something else." (chuckling) Mama would plant and can a lot of food.

POLLICOFF: What kind of stuff did you grow?

McCOLLOCH: String beans. Daddy liked radishes. She raised cucumbers and made pickles. They had corn and one year they had strawberries but that didn't work too well. It was too much work and I think that they just let them go. She'd make Mustang grape jelly, peach preserves and any fruit that she could get hold of.

POLLICOFF: You said that she was a really good cook. What kinds of things did she make?

McCOLLOCH: Angel Food Caked.

POLLICOFF: That was her best, huh?

COLLOCH: It was her best, ah ha. Oh she made salmon patties that we loved.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about your elementary schooling.

McCOLLOCH: Elementary was in Glen Flora. That school is gone now. Its been torn down. In Ganado there were twenty-two kids in my graduation class and I don't think there are but four or five of us left. I went to a class reunion a year ago. I was one of two out of my class that were there.

POLLICOFF: You moved to Richmond in 1953 after you got married. Tell me, as a young wife and husband what were you all doing? What did your husband do?

McCOLLOCH: My husband was in rice farming. I had two children about a year and a half apart. Bobby was born in 1954 and Tanna was born in 1956. I stayed at home, kept house and sewed. I made most of my clothes and most of Tanna's clothes when she was growing up. I made some of Bobby's boys clothes. Boy's things are harder to make. I mostly made his shirts.

POLLICOFF: All his button holes and plackets and collars? (chuckling)

McCOLLOCH: Yea, exactly. Bobby was in Cub Scouts. I had a den for awhile. I was a den mother. We had eight kids. Eventually Jacob Blasdel who was in charge of the Scouts called me and said, "I have a boy that needs to get in the Scouts and I need to talk to you about it." It was Arthur Guerrero, who was Spanish. We didn't have a Spanish group. "I know that you have eight which is suppose to be the limit but would you take Arthur because no one else will take him? He's a nice, little ole kid." I said OK. So I had Arthur that made nine kids. They came over to the house after they got out of class. We built bird houses and drove nails in boards just to learn how to use a hammer. We'd look at birds and different things. I spent three years at that. I was working at Needville and driving out there. They got me to sponsor the Pep Squad so I had to go back out on Friday nights and go to the ball games. I made their first Blue Jay Mascot for them.

POLLICOFF: You did? So you're quite the seamstress!

McCOLLOCH: Yes, and before I went to work I'd been doing ceramics over at Ganado. I made a five foot tile plaque and it won the championship award at Gulf Coast Ceramic Show. I quit that when I went back to work. (laughing)

POLLICOFF: There are only so many hours in the day. When you went to work, who took care of your children?

McCOLLOCH: My mother-in-law lived right across the street and always had ladies keeping the kids.

POLLICOFF: Your kids went with you for all of your extra curricular activities at school?

McCOLLOCH: Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. If I went to ball games they went. I got so tickled one year. They needed a little girl for their home coming at Needville and Louis Ludwig came up to me and said, "Will your daughter do it? I said, "Yeah, but do you think that's right? The people out here might want their children." He said, "That's why I want you to do it because you're the sponsor of the Pep Squad and if I start picking out kids here, I'm going to be in trouble. (chuckling)

POLLICOFF: (laughing) So Tanna had a good time.

McCOLLOCH: Yes, and she had a real pretty dress. Formal long length in shades of lavender and purple. She thought that was fun.

POLLICOFF: So she got to ride the float! Tell me again about the mascot.

McCOLLOCH: A blue jay was already their mascot. While I was sponsoring the Pep Squad, Louis Ludwig said, "We needed a mascot costume. Do you think that you can make one?" I said, "I can try." We used it the whole time I was out there.

POLLICOFF: How big was it and what did you use to make it?

McCOLLOCH: Cotton cloth and I used hat stiffening for the head, crown and everything. Of course I made the wings over the arms and we had a boy about 5'10" or so and we made it to fit him.

POLLICOFF: Is that right? You had a lot going on trying to raise your family and also working at school. Were you in other organizations?

McCOLLOCH: Well, my daughter was taking dancing so I helped with the dancing costumes. When we were in Cub Scouts I rode the fair float two years. One year I took the cheerleaders from Needville in a convertible and rode in the Fair Parade. When my daughter was in Camp Fire Girls I helped work with them some. When I was in Ganado, I sponsored the yearbook and set up their high school Library. They were in a new building and needed the library set up. I helped publish yearbooks.

POLLICOFF: Tell me more about your husband.

McCOLLOCH: He was a rice farmer. He graduated from Richmond High School in 1942. He played the trumpet in the Richmond band. We'd go hunting and fishing together. Lots of times we'd go out to his folks place at Caney Creek with the kids and go fishing. We taught them to water ski out there.

POLLICOFF: Was it always fresh water fishing or did you go out on the coast?

McCOLLOCH: It was salt water. We went to Matagorda County, Sargent. Bobby played Little League Baseball and I kept score for them for awhile. I learned how to keep score properly. Whatever the kids were in was pretty much what I stayed involved with. When Tanna got to high school, she took drama and I made her costumes and helped build stage sets. I made a caterpillar for Alice in Wonderland and I made a Cheshire cat costume. I can't remember the play but there was a devil that came up on a platform and jumps up. The devil needed a red tuxedo so I made him a red tuxedo.

POLLICOFF: That sounds great. What are your children doing now?

McCOLLOCH: My daughter is working for SYSCO, a food distribution company. She has three boys and they're all grown now, too. My son went to East Texas State and got a degree in computer science and he was working for Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District. He wrote their warehouse maintenance program and their tax system. One day he walked in and said, "I'm tired of that. There is so much politics in it. I'm going to law school." So he started looking for a law school. He was going to apply to several other schools but St. Mary's sent him a letter saying he had been accepted. He said, "If they want me that bad I'm going." So he went to San Antonio and he stayed there and finished his degree. Legal Aide hired him as a law student to do their grunt work. He worked there all the time that he was in college and they paid him ten dollars an hour and he could work when he could work. When he graduated they said we may have a job for you. He went to work with them and has been there ever since.

POLLICOFF: Is that right? Good for him! And your daughter?

McCOLLOCH: She married Gary Lukas from Rosenberg. She graduated from Lamar and then went to University of Houston. She didn't finish her degree because the kids started coming along. They had three: Matt, Jon and Noah.

POLLICOFF: That's great, so her kids are all grown and out?

McCOLLOCH: Matthew is the oldest. Jonathon graduated from A&M. He is working for Chem Pro. He's just recently been made manager of a plant in Sweeney. Noah is the youngest one. He is in the Air Force Reserve. He is flying drones. He's at Ellington Air Force Base in Houston.

POLLICOFF: What are the major changes that you have seen in the area?

McCOLLOCH: Building, housing developments, the land that my husband was farming now has a housing settlement on it out toward Thompsons. He farmed some other land out there too that he leased. Some has been sold and houses are built out there.

POLLICOFF: What would be the best changes?

McCOLLOCH: We've got a nice library and we've got people coming to the community that are bringing culture that we didn't have. When I was at Lamar High School, they said they were going to build another high school and we all laughed and asked who were they going to put in it? Now we have built two more.

POLLICOFF: It's amazing.

McCOLLOCH: Yes, I think when you have larger schools you have the opportunity to do more things with more kids. When you had a smaller school like when I was in high school, I was a cheer leader. I was on the volleyball team. I was on the softball team because there weren't that many kids. We had to use them all, whether they were good or not.

POLLICOFF: The growth adds to diversity?

McCOLLOCH: It does. I think it's good and I missed different ethnic groups because you learn about each culture.

POLLICOFF: In your days as a librarian how have you seen the educational system change?

McCOLLOCH: One thing is the coming of the computers. In fact we put Lamar High School on the bar code. I think it was one of the first libraries in this county. The county library wasn't even on the bar code then. I had to learn how to use computers. I had never used a computer. I laughed when one teacher said, "I want to know what you know about computers." I said, "Where's the on button?" I gradually learned things. A lot of the kids learned photography and one of the kids who took photography under Rex Smith is now doing pictures for the Houston Chronicle. He got a livelihood out of that. Then Lamar added vocational courses like cosmetology, auto body, auto mechanics, small engine mechanics and nursing. Some of these courses they have done away with. I think that's a shame because not all kids are meant to go to college. These courses train them for a good profession and they can make a good living. They had a horticulture school out there at Terry. I don't know whether they still do or not.

POLLICOFF: Just being able to come to the computer and access information?

McCOLLOCH: It's amazing what you can find out. You used to have to go to the library and find encyclopedias or books. I'd get so tickled when a kid would come in and say, "How do you do this or what about that?" I would say, "I don't know but lets look it up." And they would say, "Boy are you dumb!" "Yea, but I know where to look." There was one kid that was failing algebra and he'd come in every day for study hall. I had taught algebra before so I worked with him and he finally passed.

POLLICOFF: (laughing) Do you keep up with any of the kids that you used to work with?

McCOLLOCH: I see them every so often. We had one little boy, Juan Garcia, who we called Taco because he worked at Taco Bell. I chaperoned thespian groups to their international meetings and we took this little boy with us one year when we flew to Toronto, Canada. Do you remember when Air Canada was striking? We had twenty kids. They said they could put two kids here, two kids there. "You don't understand. We are responsible for those kids and we have to be with them. We can't just leave them. Now if you want to put one sponsor and so many kids that's fine." They couldn't do that so they gave us a chartered bus. It was the last chartered bus licensed to go across the border into the United States. They took us to Muncie where we had the meeting.

When we got to the border the bus driver said, "When get there don't say a word, just answer the questions the border patrol asks because they are going to get on this bus. They got to Juan, or Taco like we called him. They asked, "Where are you from?" He said, "Choogar Land." I said, "That's in Texas, Sugar Land." They said if you didn't answer them right they'd make you unload that bus and they'd go through all the luggage. The guy laughed and he let us through.

POLLICOFF: Kids are great, just great. If you had to describe one of your most vivid memories of living in the area, one of your favorite memories, what would it be?

McCOLLOCH: Oh, gosh, probably watching them build my house. They built it in six weeks from start to finish. I was working out at Needville. James Elliott built it and asked if he could sub-contract things. I said, "Only if you plan to stand behind them." I'd come in and walk over to look at the house and he said, "Are you going to do this every day?" I said, "Yep."

But he did a good job. It was finished in 1960. It's red brick, it's got three bed rooms, two bathrooms, two dens, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and a utility room.

POLLICOFF: That's quite a bit bigger than that last house.

McCOLLOCH: A little bit and the floors are level (chuckling).



POLLICOFF: Those marbles roll straight now (laughing)?

POLLICOFF: Any other memories that you would like to share?

McCOLLOCH: Taking our grand kids to Del Rio fishing on Amistad Lake. We taught all three of them how to fish.

POLLICOFF: Oh that's beautiful over there.

McCOLLOCH: It is. We took the oldest grandson first. We were looking for Stripe Bass and the guide hooked one first thing. He handed the rod to my grandson and he reeled it in. He caught our limit. There was a state limit on the number of bass each person could catch. We never caught another fish. He sat there and just giggled about it. We liked Amistad Lake. It was clean and clear and its on the Rio Grande. You could see the Mexican and American Eagle on the Dam. It was a lot of fun.

I have enjoyed living in Fort Bend County. When I first moved here I didn't know a soul. I gradually met people either through work or my father and mother-in-law. I met Freddie "Tombstone" Davis. We went to a bridge party at Bonnie and Tommy Greenwalds. The first partner that I drew was Tombstone. He said, "I play for low. I don't get cards and I just play for low." Sure enough we played. It ended up that both of us were low (laughing). I enjoyed that.

Tom had an uncle who had a lot of land in Ganado, Jackson County. We'd go out there and hunt. I never did shoot anything and I don't remember him ever shooting anything there. Then he would go hunting with my dad. One year he went to New Mexico, north of the Racetrack there at Ruidoso and on Vemejo Ranch. He shot an elk there and the following summer we went there.

They have thirteen lakes. It takes you six and a half hours to drive around that place. Gorgeous, they had blue squirrels and blue birds and we caught rainbow trout. They had bear and buffalo. Ted Turner bought it after the woman's husband died. She inherited it but she couldn't pay the inheritance tax. Ted Turner is making it an animal preserve.

POLLICOFF: I am going to take you back to when you first married in 1953. Did you have other friends?

McCOLLOCH: The Greenwalds, Jack and Billie Wendt, Sara Roiz and Alma and Joe Slawinski. Alma taught drama. I got to working with her and Joe. Joe helped us build some of the sets. He was good.

Oh gosh, we knew Bailey and Elsie Phillips who were actually kin to my husband, Tom. Tom Phillips was choir director at Lamar Junior High School for so long. He's a cousin of my husband, Tom, too..

POLLICOFF: Were you involved in the Fort Bend County Fair?

McCOLLOCH: With the kids that rode in the parade. One year the Cub Scouts had an exhibit over there. One year I had some ceramic stuff that I took over there. I remember when it was where the light company is now. They moved the Fair Grounds out to Highway 36. I remember people telling us that the fair grounds at the light company was a prisoner of war camp for a while during World War II. A lot of people don't remember that. I learned a lot when we did the sesquicentennial celebration. We built a big screen on the football field. I took colored slides. They did a back projection on a screen. They built the frame and I put the cloth together for the screen that they put up there. Then I collected the history of Fort Bend County as best I could through books. I took pictures for those slide projectors and worked with them. One year when I was out at Needville, I helped with the youth fair. One of my kids who worked in the library painted the sign that they put up on the road. I went out there to judge the hand work that the girls had done.

POLLICOFF: You were quite a seamstress then. Sounds like more than you admit to.

McCOLLOCH: Well, (both break into laughter.), I never found anything that I wanted to do that I couldn't do.

POLLICOFF: You don't do quilts and things like that?

McCOLLOCH: No, I never did. I have a quilt that my mother made for me that says one two buckle my shoe, three four... I've got one that the old grandmother that lived between me and the cousin made for me. She must have made it about 1937.

POLLICOFF: How about Christmas or Thanksgiving? Describe that.

McCOLLOCH: Usually my mother wanted us all over at her house or we'd take turns and end up at Tom's folks. One year we ate over at his aunt's house in Ganado. The family always got together on Christmas and sometimes on Thanksgiving, but Christmas was the main thing. They wanted everybody together and that was good.

POLLICOFF: Anything else that I haven't touched on that you'd like to talk about?

McCOLLOCH: Well, I have enjoyed working with the Historical Commission. I have learned a lot about Fort Bend County looking for cemeteries. When I retired in 1990 from Lamar, I did volunteer work at the county library. One of the things they were doing was going out to cemeteries and copying the names off the stones. Then they put them in a database.

I helped with that and then got involved with the Historical Commission with Bob Crosser. We'd go out and find these cemeteries. I laugh about one I remember the most. We went to Lola V. Harris off of Highway 6 over close to Arcola. It had rained and there was water standing, weeds and vines. John Walker, who is very tall, six foot or over, with long legs started stomping through because he knew where it was. Virginia Scarborough and I were with him. We were behind him and Bob Crosser was behind us. Bob always takes a machete. I don't know why we didn't put him in front, but he was in the back (laughing). Virginia and I both slipped and fell in the mud (laughing).



NOTE: In 2010 Willie McColloch and Virginia Scarborough (center, l-r), pictured above with FBC Historical Commission Chairman Bert Bliel (l) and County Judge Robert Hebert (r) were awarded the Fort Bend County Historical Commission HERITAGE Award for their work on Fort Bend Cemeteries and county death records.

We finally found the marker though it was knocked over! We drove all over the county. I saw roads that I had never seen before and met people out there sometimes. I enjoyed that.

POLLICOFF: One of the best parts is preserving all that for posterity.

McCOLLOCH: I think it is. Virginia Scarborough and I went out after we finished up the cemeteries and took pictures of all the churches that we could find. We got a list from the central appraisal district and we got a list from the paper and from the phone book. We combined them all. Some of them were no longer there and some of them built new buildings and moved. We took pictures and got global positioning of all of those. We wanted to have histories so we'd approach people and they would say, "Yeah we will get you the history." We got one. We'd never hear from any of them.

Virginia Scarborough and I have gone through all the death records at the County Clerks Office from the beginning through 1986 right now. We looked for burial or deaths that we had missed doing the cemeteries.

POLLICOFF: So you have got a few years to go.

McCOLLOCH: I think that they will probably stop us soon because the records have to be 75 years old before they are made public.

POLLICOFF: That's fantastic! You have been lovely. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Interview ends.