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Interview with
Mrs. Bessie Morris
May 29, 1969

Place of Interview: Taft, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens
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Oral History Collection

Mrs. Bessie Morris

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

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Dr. Stephens: This is an interview with Mrs. Bessie Morris, Route 1, Taft, Texas, May 29, 1969. Mrs. Morris, you've been in this area for some time . . .

Mrs. Morris: Yes, I came here in 1913.

Dr. Stephens: In 1913. Would you tell us then where you came from and the reasons that led you to move to the South Texas area?

Mrs. Morris: Well, I'll probably be . . . you'll probably laugh . . .

Dr. Stephens: No. If you'll hold this, say, up like you would an ice cream cone maybe.

Mrs. Morris: Up that way? Okay (chuckle).

Dr. Stephens: (Chuckle).

Mrs. Morris: I came from Western Kansas after having . . . I came from Iowa to Western Kansas. After having lived there five years we immigrated to Texas and my mother-in-law and two brothers, they were instrumental in getting us here, and my sister-in-law also. And I . . . when I arrived in Portland,

oh, boy, that was awful. I got off the train and it was just brush with little lights standing around over the city and, well, I was homesick right then (chuckle). And I moved just one mile from where I lived . . . just one half a mile from where I live now in a little four-room house. I lived there one year and then moved down on . . . well, I'll call it the back bay . . . I don't know the name. I think that's called the Christi Bay, but I'm not sure. And . . .

Sparks: Of course, that's at Gumhollow, wasn't it?

Morris: What?

Sparks: That's at Gumhollow?

Morris: Yes. I lived at Gumhollow. And there used to be a tank . . . I mean a pond . . . I mean a . . . well, you call it . . . whatever you call it, of water down here. And we lived there for two years and the dam on that . . . that hollow there broke while we were there. And then we moved north of Taft . . . west of Taft, and lived there one year. And then we moved back on this place that we're living on now; I think in 1918 we came here. And have lived here ever since. And . . . Gumhollow, the . . . when I moved down there it had been a

club house and it had had, well, President Taft and Charles Taft both had hunted on Gumhollow. You see, they used to come from the East and hunt down here. They used to be geese and ducks and . . . you know. . . and they would come down in the wintertime.

Stephens: How large was Gumhollow tank when it was full?

Morris: Well, it was quite deep because it went from bluff to bluff down here.

Stephens: And how far does it back up away from the dam?

Morris: Well, it went under the . . . about . . . oh, I don't know; not too far.

Stephens: It covered the road right in here.

Morris: Yes, there was a bridge there. There's always been . . . there's always been that bridge there ever since I came here. And I lived on this place . . . well, for 63 or 66 years, I think it is.

Stephens: You say that you moved to Western Kansas earlier.

Morris: Yes. I came from Iowa to Western Kansas for my health.

Stephens: When was that?

Morris: That was in 1909.

Stephens: 1909. And what purpose for your health?

Morris: Well, I had been sick. I had had typhoid and . . . and they had to tap me for plur . . . my plurisy.

And I was sick two years. And, of course, I was real sick. And they got . . . I went to Western Kansas for my health and felt better there than I ever felt in my life.

Stephens: And then you moved to Southern Texas four years later. Did you come for your health too?

Morris: No. No, I didn't come for my health here. We just thought this was a very rich country.

Stephens: Yes.

Morris: And it was. I tell you you can make money here where you could not make it in Western Kansas.

Stephens: I see. And then how did your relatives persuade you to come?

Morris: Well, his mother kept coming . . . writing, "Clyde, come to Texas. You cannot make anything in Kansas." We had a quarter section of land . . .

Stephens: This was your husband?

Morris: My husband's mother.

Stephens: Well, Clyde.

Morris: Yes, Clyde is my husband. That's right. And so Mother kept saying, "Oh, Clyde, come down here." And I thought money grew on bushes down here. And I had an uncle there that said, "Don't come." And everybody said, "Don't come. Everything has stickers and spears and rattlesnakes." And, oh, I thought my kids were going to get eat up. Well,

I was frightened. I'm telling you I was frightened when I came here. Well, this was all brush here excepting a strip through here, about where you turn if you're going through the pass. There was a schoolhouse on that corner and a house across the street from that and which is still standing. And . . . that is where my children went to school for a number of years. And then they, of course, all graduated from Taft.

Stephens: That was West Portland School . . . grade school.

Morris: That was West Portland Grade School, yes, sir.

Stephens: When was that started?

Morris: Well, it was started . . . I can't remember the years . . . it was . . .

Stephens: Was it about the time that the George H. Paul homeseeker trains came into . . .

Morris: No, it was later than that.

Stephens: Later.

Morris: Yes. Sometime later than that.

Stephens: Just before you came here?

Morris: It wasn't there . . .

Stephens: Oh, it wasn't there when you first came . . .

Morris: Not when I first came here, no. Huh un. About a couple of years, I think, after I came here.

Stephens: Was most of this country already settled when you . . .

Morris: No, not . . . they was not too much farm land . . .

Stephens: So you came out here kind of by yourself then
when you started farming?

Morris: Yes. We had . . . right west of us here there
was a farm that had been cleared off. Nothing
just across the road . . . nothing across the road
here.

Stephens: Yes.

Morris: Just . . . there was about two . . . there was
about five houses, I think, from here to the way
you go to Taft . . . where you turn to go to Taft.

Stephens: And how thick was the brush?

Morris: Oh, it was awful. Just like this across here.
This has just built up since we came here 'cause
it was bare when we came. But it was cleared off
while we were living on the bay . . . they started
to clear that off. Not that place, but the back
of it.

Stephens: Was the mesquite so thick you couldn't get through
it?

Morris: Oh, they had what they called sinderos to go through
it. There was trails through it that you could
go. And that's how you went from Portland and
how this road is laid out. This is a sinderero

going to Rachal. Rachals lived on a bay down there about five or six miles from here.

Sparks: That's Rosita.

Morris: Yes. And they . . . this was the trail that they had going out there and so that's why they put the highway there.

Stephens: Is that a fact now?

Morris: Yes.

Stephens: Very good. Well, the . . . was the brush so thick that a cow couldn't get through it?

Morris: Oh, no, cattle could go through anything. This was open range when we came here. Farms had to be . . .

Stephens: Was this the Taft Ranch or the Rachal Ranch that came up to this area?

Morris: This is the Taft Ranch.

Stephens: And how far over did it extend to the west before the Rachal Ranch started?

Morris: I just don't know exactly how far that the Tafts owned land up here.

Sparks: But they're not . . .

Morris: I know it's up as far as the schoolhouse I'm sure.

Sparks: I'd say beyond that . . .

Morris: Probably so.

Sparks: Over there by the flying . . . we call it . . . is it tasajia they call the flying cactus? There was a bunch of tasajia on our farm out there.

Morris: Well, I don't know what they called the cactus. I always just called . . . they were all cactus to me.

Stephens: Is it the same one that when you hit it it would send the stickers in all directions.

Morris: Well, I don't know. I never got that close to one with stickers. No, I never did see one like that (chuckle).

Stephens: You stayed clear (chuckle).

Morris: Of course, I was a little bit scared of cactuses.

Stephens: How . . . you mentioned then the land was cleared soon after you moved here.

Morris: It started . . . they were starting when we came here.

Stephens: How . . . how did they go about clearing . . .

Morris: Well, the Mexicans grubbed the . . . cut the big trees. There were some pretty good size.

Stephens: You use an axe . . .

Morris: Grubbing hoes and axes. And they would dig up the biggest roots and things. And then they'd go with a great big plows and just break it up. And they'd have to pick up the brush. . . you

know, the roots. And they'd burn them. The Mexicans would burn them. Then when you started to farm the land, you dug up and burned the roots yourself. We had ninety acres over here on the corner and there's where we really did our first farming in Texas.

Stephens: I see.

Morris: I saw my first cotton.

Stephens: Well, now it takes . . . how many years does it take before you finally have the land cleared even after the Mexicans and the tractors have gone through it.

Morris: Well, it doesn't take long.

Stephens: First year, second year.

Morris: Yes, about the first year. Now they . . . I don't know when they plowed that over there because it was plowed when we came here. So I guess . . . but then you could plow and they'd pick up the stuff you know. And then the next year you could farm it.

Stephens: Well, you watched the other land, though. Even though yours had already been plowed you watched the other land being put to the plow.

Morris: Oh, yes. Yes, I saw this being put in. Yes.

Stephens: You still . . . sprouts still came up the first or second year after it had been cleared.

Morris: Not many sprouts would come up. You would . . . but you'd see the big roots. You see these have terrible roots, these mesquite do. And you'd plow them maybe a couple or three years after . . . you'd hit some roots and break your plows and . . .

Stephens: Oh, I see. They'd be dead roots.

Morris: It would be dead but you would hit them. They had to come out.

Stephens: Break your plows?

Morris: Well, it would some times if it was a big enough root. Now, if course, they usually went down, the Mexicans did, to the bottom of those biggest roots, I think.

Stephens: Now, did you use . . . what kind of plows did you first use, walking plows?

Morris: No, we had riding plows . . . we had riding plows.

Stephens: Well, when you hit those roots, would it throw you off the plow?

Morris: Well, no. They were down below the plow. The big plows plowed them below that. See they had great big . . . oh, they're big things that . . . that breaks your land and they tear out those

biggest roots you know. And, well, when you hit a root, of course--I never did. Now I helped plant that and cultivate it the first few years we lived here. I ran one cultivator and he did the planter.

Stephens: Oh, you did? So you worked with the mules. Did you have horses or mules?

Morris: We had both.

Stephens: Both? Which did you think was . . . which kind was best?

Morris: Well, the mules more . . . they could take more than a horse can. But I don't think they're any better workers 'cause I always worked a team.

Stephens: Did it take less feed for one than the other?

Morris: No, I don't think so.

Stephens: Or less care or more care?

Morris: No, I don't think so.

Stephens: About the same?

Morris: I think so.

Sparks: Did you bring your equipment from Western Kansas with you when you immigrated here?

Morris: We brought a planter and . . . when I immigrated here a planter and a cultivator. That was all we could use that we had in Western Kansas. So we

had a sale and sold everything. And we sold . . .
oh, twelve head of horses I'll say and all our
cattle in Western Kansas. But we brought ten head
in the immigrant cars with Clyde. He had ten
horses himself and . . .

Stephens: Oh, he had to come back.

Morris: Yes, he came . . .

Stephens: You came with your children on the . . .

Morris: I came on the train.

Stephens: . . . passenger train.

Morris: Passenger train.

Stephens: What about that immigrant . . . what did you call
it, immigrant . . .

Sparks: Immigrant car.

Stephens: . . . immigrant car? How much could be carried
in there, and how many people and how much did
it cost?

Morris: Well, I just have no idea, now. It was a
passenger train that Mr. Paul would . . . would . . .
you know . . . charter or whatever he did to it,
and fill it; I think several cars. I think he
brought a lot of men. And Mr . . . oh, Virginia
Carroll's uncle . . . he had the hotel down here
and he just put them up at the hotel at Taft and
at Gregory.

Sparks: That's not what he's talking about. What he's talking about is those boxcars . . .

Morris: Oh, those boxcars.

Sparks: . . . that your husband came in.

Morris: Yes, he brought the team . . . ten head of stock and then all our furniture and our plows. And it's a big . . . just a regular car, you know, like you have now.

Stephens: You had a portion of it then; a quarter of it?

Morris: No, we had the whole car . . . he had the whole car. And I think it cost him \$110 for the car.

Stephens: I see.

Morris: And then he rode in that. And he had a stove that he cooked on. And he had his horse, of course, shut off here, and then he had feed in here, too.

Stephens: Oh, he had to bring the feed too . . .

Morris: To feed them to come.

Stephens: How long did it take?

Morris: It took him nearly two weeks on the road.

Stephens: Just which way did he come? I know they didn't have any direct trains from Western Kansas to South Texas. Did he have to go back through Kansas City?

Morris: I just don't believe so. He . . .

Stephens: To Topeka? He came on the Santa Fe, then, probably.

Morris: Yes, he came on the Santa Fe; that's what he came on.

Stephens: Topeka to Oklahoma City.

Morris: Yes, I think so.

Stephens: To Dallas or Fort Worth then?

Morris: Fort Worth. Because I know when I came with the children and this . . . my oldest boy, he was three . . . not quite three years old and my baby girl was just past one. And we had to lay over all day in Fort Worth. We missed our train and had to stay all day in Fort Worth. And, oh, such a trip.

Stephens: Well . . .

Morris: Francis cried for his father all the way down here.

Stephens: What connections then . . . would then one make from, say, Fort Worth to Taft?

Morris: I think he came straight through. He had to unload his horses twice out of that . . .

Stephens: Oh, he did?

Morris: . . . that's the railroad's . . . they make you . . . lay over . . . lay over so many hours with your stock. You have to take them out of the boxcar. That's the railroad makes you do that. Now why I don't know. But . . . and then he was delayed too once. Something the matter with the wheels

on his car. And they just sidetracked his car and left him there.

Stephens: Well, then, do you remember from ForthWorth, did you come down almost to Houston and then get on the Southern Pacific Line?

Sparks: What they called the Sap and Missouri Pacific or the B and A Railroad.

Morris: It . . . they . . . no, they didn't call it . . . they didn't call it that, they called it the Sap Railroad, didn't they? Yes.

Sparks: There was one Sap and one B and A, I think they called it.

Morris: Well, it was the Taft . . . we . . . we changed at Fort Worth and got on that train. That's . . . I had the train . . . to change from Western Kansas . . . I changed at . . . oh, I don't remember the name of that town. And then I went on to Colby. I changed cars and train tracks and went to Colby and . . .

Stephens: Colby, Kansas?

Morris: No, Colby, Kansas was where we came from.

Stephens: Oh.

Morris: We came from Colby, Kansas. And I went on that train to . . . oh, what's the name of that town? I can't think to save my life. And I got off

from that and had to change depots even and got on another road to go to Concordia and visit his people long enough to let me get . . . let him get down here ahead of me.

Stephens: Yes.

Morris: Good thing. If he hadn't I wouldn't have been here . . . have gotten down here (chuckle).

Stephens: (Chuckle) Well, I . . . I was trying to . . . trying to establish just how one would get here when the Santa Fe doesn't come . . . run through this area.

Morris: Well, you . . . it . . . it connects up with . . . seems to me like it was the Missouri Pacific they called it. Something like that. And then we came in here on a train that went through Portland all these years. We had a train in Portland for a good many years after we came here. I can't remember just how long that they . . . but they had a depot right across the track now where that tin building is . . . was where the depot was. And . . . it wasn't long 'til Portland was quite a little town. They cleared it up and . . . in a short time before we came here.

Stephens: It wasn't very large when you came then?

Morris: Oh, no. For years it wasn't very large.

Stephens: Any principal crops you raised when you got here?

Morris: Well, cotton most all . . . the money crop was cotton. And then you just raised enough hegari for your stock.

Stephens: Could you figure on how much . . . how many acres it would take to feed the team?

Morris: Well, he used to have about, I expect, 40 acres of feed after we came on this place, because we . . . we didn't have that much because we only had 90 acres over there. And I expect 30 acres was all he had then. But, of course, we had pasture. We rented pasture. We rented Mr. Baines's land down here. We rented that. And then we had a pasture in the back of our field here. And, of course, he had a sudan patch that he put his cattle in, his milk cows.

Stephens: How many milk cows did you usually keep?

Morris: Well, two or three just. But he had young stock. He kind of raised some stock to sell. And . . . but we always had two milk cows.

Stephens: And you had to have enough . . . had to raise enough feed in the summertime to carry them over the winter.

Morris: Well . . . winter . . . yes, you didn't feed the cattle very much because you can always . . . it never gets cold enough here that you can't pasture.

Stephens: Well, you say that you worked the teams yourself part of the time?

Morris: Yes. Clyde and I worked teams. Now he . . . well, it wasn't . . . let's see . . . he got after we moved on this place he got a tractor then. And, of course, I didn't. . .

Stephens: But in the earlier years, though, what sort of experiences did you have with the teams?

Morris: Oh, it was exciting.

Stephens: . . . as far as working with the teams. Did you like that?

Morris: I . . . I liked it. It was fun for me only it was hard work.

Stephens: Any particular temperament that would be required for a person working with mules or horses? That is a great deal of patience and understanding or it takes a lot of use of the whip or . . .

Morris: Oh, no, you don't whip horses. They go . . . they are pretty . . . now you have to plant. Then you have to row your cotton which is . . . nobody

does that but Texas I think. And you . . .
you . . . I have an old horse that I'd row right
down along the row for the boys and for Clyde, too.
And they'd just stroll . . . the horse would go
. . . just follow that rows. He'd just know
enough to go down those rows. Oh, that was the
easiest job he'd ever done.

Stephens: And how did you and your husband know what
techniques to use in farming?

Morris: We didn't, we had to learn.

Stephens: Did somebody tell you?

Morris: Yes, Mr. Alvoid was . . . he was the head of this
company, I mean this land. And he would show.
But, of course, his brothers had learned ahead of
him, because Earl had been here, I guess three
years before we came.

Stephens: And so it was the experimenting then of Mr. Alvoid
and Taft Ranch people sharing the information
with you that caused it?

Morris: That's right, that's right.

Stephens: Well, did the information they gave you prove to
be satisfactory or did you have to make some
alterations yourself?

Morris: Well, it was just fine. Now I know we planted
the cotton and I was so anxious to see it come up.

I'd never seen cotton in my life before. So every morning I'd go out . . . well, we planted it and I . . . next morning I went out thought maybe it would be up. It wasn't. Third morning I went up and I came back in and I said, "Clyde, we didn't plant cotton." He said, "We didn't?" I said, "No, we didn't." And he says, "Well, how do you know we didn't?" And I said, "Because we planted beans." And cotton comes up on top of the . . . of . . . like a bean does. And then it falls off and the leaves come. And I, of course, knew it was cotton because I'd seen the seeds, but it looks like beans when it comes up. And then . . . I'll tell you the worst thing of getting new land, you have to chop weeds and you have to chop weeds all the whole year till your cotton gets so big you can't get in it.

Stephens: Did you hire Mexicans or did your family do that work?

Morris: Well, he used . . . him and I did . . . the first year we took care of our land ourselves because there wasn't enough of it and we couldn't . . . didn't have enough money.

Stephens: You did the picking, too? Did you pull bolls?

Morris: Oh, no, no. We never picked any cotton.

Stephens: You hired . . .

Morris: I tried it . . . I tried it, yes. The second year I was here I tried it because 1916 was when we had the storming here and blowed our first cotton out. And we only had . . . we only made three bales that year. And so I said to him, "We're just not going to pick that cotton . . . we're not going to pay for picking that cotton cause it costs money." Had to buy sacks for the pickers and everything and there was . . . it was too expensive. So I said, "We're going to pick it." So he agreed with me. He goes and buys two sacks. Cecil was a baby. And we'd leave Francis and Ethel to watch Cecil under the wagon . . . under the buggy and we'd pick. Well, he picked two days and he said, "No money in this for us." And I picked the rest of the week and I didn't cover the bottom of the wagon. Because . . . oh, that's hard work!

Stephens: Yes. Did you pick or pull the bolls?

Morris: No, you picked it then.

Stephens: Picked the cotton bolls.

Morris: We never . . . we never pulled bolls until . . . will, not during Clyde's lifetime. Now the boys did have it . . . they . . . they . . . when my

boys went to farming. See, they took over after Clyde got sick a number of years ago, and they . . . that's when they started pulling. They didn't pull for years.

Stephens: The cotton gin wouldn't handle . . .

Morris: Couldn't handle it.

Stephens: . . . couldn't handle it.

Morris: . . . couldn't handle it. Now they fix it so that they can just do those bolls and they don't . . . don't show . . . you can't tell it.

Stephens: Yes.

Morris: I mean that the gin is fixed for it. Now it has to be specially fixed for that.

Stephens: Yes. What would be the best crop years of your experience?

Morris: Oh, dear. The first years we were here we made lots of cotton. And in the 1919 storm we had picked one little square out here about, oh, about a hundred rows or something . . . half-way . . . half a . . . a fourth of a mile. And we got ten bales off from it. And the storm hit that night and you couldn't tell that there was any cotton in that field nor stalks nor nothing. That was the 1919 storm. And this house went off the

blocks, oh, boy. That was something. Now I was in the '16 storm when I lived on the bay and . . . and there was water that deep in my house. And, of course, I couldn't see it. And I told Clyde's father . . . he had gone to his brother-in-laws and then he didn't come back 'cause the wind got so high. And they told him, "Oh, don't go back yet. She's alright. Her mother and pa's with her," so . . . he didn't come home. And I walked that floor all night long in that water. And I said, "Pa, that's our bay in here." Pa would say, "No, it isn't." And then the house would shake and he'd say, "Oh, well, we're riding on the Omaha and something train." That's what he said (chuckle) to keep me calm because it was just before Cecil Evans was born. And, oh, that was terrible. It blowed our barn over and it blowed our chicken house over, and, oh, it was awful.

Stephens: So it really was the bay up here.

Morris: It was the bay . . . it was the bay because . . .

Sparks: This was 1916.

Morris: '16, that's right. And 1919 you couldn't even tell where the house was. It took the house away. And you couldn't even . . . it washed the banks so bad

that you can't even tell . . . there's still a post down there that was my clothesline post . . . one of them.

Stephens: Did it wash your house away?

Morris: It didn't . . . it just . . . demolished it.

Stephens: Where were you?

Sparks: You were here.

Morris: Oh, I was in this house then.

Stephens: Oh, you were already here. You no longer lived there.

Morris: No. You see we had lived up west of Taft for a year and then moved here. And so it was . . . well, pretty bad.

Stephens: Were you in this house when the storm came?

Morris: That's right. And I was on . . . me standing on that porch when it went off of the blocks. And, of course, I jumped and . . . had Francis and Ethel hold my hand and Francis had Cecil in his arms . . . Clyde had Cecil in his arms. And they had cotton sacks around them. I don't know what happened to my cotton sack. I didn't have it when I got to the brush.

Stephens: Oh, you headed for the brush then?

Morris: We'd set out in the brush . . . we'd set out in

the brush from ten o'clock in the daytime to ten o'clock at night.

Stephens: And raining all the time?

Morris: Well, yes. And . . . but he had put a wagon sheet up against the brush and . . . and had some wood that he had there that . . . to burn that we'd burn for when we had fires. And we sat against that and the rain didn't get us wet. I got wet because I got wet going out there, lost my shoes when we had to stay in the sand out here . . . lost my shoes and never did find them.

Sparks: You hadn't had anything to eat out there?

Morris: No, we had from ten o'clock in the morning to ten at night. The kids began to say they were hungry so that's when . . . you know a storm comes from this direction and then it'll pause and there'll be a calm in there.

Stephens: Comes from . . .

Morris: It comes from . . .

Stephens: . . . far south of Corpus Christi.

Morris: Yes, this way. No, Corpus is over this way. And then it would come back the other direction. That's the way it does. It comes in one direction and comes back the other after that pause in it. Well, we came in when that pause was . . . yes, ten o'clock

at night and we had Mexicans all over the place. Oh, we had them in the barn and we had Mexican houses . . . a lot of Mexican houses then. They're gone now because you don't have much . . . you use machinery all now. And so we came in and went to bed. We said that, well, we fed the Mexicans . . . we had a commissary out here, building. And we had bologna . . . we'd buy big sticks of bologna and crackers and bread. Well, he gave them all the bread . . . handed it out. Of course, I kept enough back for my kids. And gave the bologna and cheese away. We'd buy the cheese by that big deal you know. And we'd buy 100 pounds of sugar and 100 pounds of beans and rice and stuff like that to sell to the Mexicans during . . . during cotton-picking time. And . . . those cotton-picking times aren't funny. You'd . . . you might think they are, but it's terrible. It's not bad now. You don't have to have Mexicans and things, but we used to be . . . have lots of trouble because he'd take all the white people that want to pick . . . no . . . farmers around here's gotten wise. They didn't like them because white people that pick weren't worth very much. They weren't

very good . . . caused lots of trouble. And we had Negroes and Mexicans and white people too. And, oh, we've had more fights.

Sparks: Did you have race trouble there?

Morris: Yes, they used to get in trouble with themselves. Now one time . . . it wasn't the poor Negroes trouble caused because he always planted a strip of cotton that he would use for seeds the next year. And he'd . . . and he'd . . . he counted those rows and told them to pick there. And he says, "Now, no matter what if somebody else is coming on that row, you just go empty your sack and then go over there but don't pick on that because I want that in a wagon for seed." Well, this . . . these colored people were coming down two rows--the last two rows--to the stick, and a white boy had those rows too, but he was going the other way. And he met those colored folks and he was mad. And he said he was going to kill them. And, of course, there was big trouble. He . . . the . . . my daughter, she was weighing cotton that year. She'd got old enough to weigh. That was my job until she got old enough. And so the . . . he, oh, he just cursed. I guess he did everything.

He was terrible. So the poor colored people . . . folks, he did start for the house. And Ethel come running telling her daddy that there was trouble in the field. Well, he always came and got me when there was trouble because I'm the one that would fight (chuckle). He . . . he wouldn't fight. He was real calm and I got . . . when I get mad, I'm mad.

Stephens: (Chuckle).

Morris: So we met that white boy . . . Ethel said, "That white boy out there," (she called him a name) she says, "He told the Negroes he was going to shoot them," and he said . . . she said, "They've left the field and they've gone out in the brush." So Clyde come and said, "Come on, there's trouble in the fields." Well, I saw him and wondered what the trouble was. And I saw that boy coming and he then had the gun and started back. And I jumped and I said, "Stop this car." He stopped the car and I jumped out and I ran and grabbed that gun and I gave it that. And he, of course, turned it loose. And I never gave him that gun back until he left. Clyde told them they could either leave or act like decent people. Well,

they left then. They didn't stay until the cotton-picking was all finished and we were glad because they were not very much help. But, oh, I tell you life was real exciting.

Stephens: Yes. You were telling about going back into the house when the 1919 hurricane hit and the period of calm. And then . . . how long did that calm last?

Morris: Well, I don't know. We all went to sleep.

Stephens: Oh, and then about that time the wind hit again.

Morris: Well, yes. They said . . .

Stephens: What did you think happened?

Morris: Oh, it didn't wake you up, even. Oh, see, after the house went down on the . . . it was . . . it was just as still as it could be. And it also was a one-board house. I don't think you ever saw one. They don't have them any more in Texas even. But they just have one board down like this and then they have batts on the outside to keep it from raining in. And then you paper it or something like that on the inside. Now, this has two by fours in it because we've sheet-rocked it all over. But it's the same house.

Stephens: Yes. Oh, I see, this is the one that got . . .

Morris: Yes, this is the one went off the blocks. It didn't have that thing on it, but . . .

Stephens: When . . . when the wind came back then and the rain you didn't. . .

Morris: You didn't . . . we didn't even know it. But it is . . . it is . . .

Stephens: You must have been pretty tired.

Morris: Oh, we were worn out.

Stephens: And then what about the bodies from Corpus Christi?

Morris: Oh, the next morning they came by and they said, "Clyde, they just . . . Corpus is washed away." And our mother-in-law's house did wash away. And we thought she might be over there because she had been with my sister-in-law and she . . . said she was going home. Well, we weren't sure. And Clyde had brought three loads of pickers home that night on the . . . you know, in his car. And when he came in at twelve o'clock, the car wouldn't go. It just got to where that three is out here and it just stopped. That car wouldn't . . . he couldn't make it go any farther. Well, he started looking around for some place to sleep and everything. And so he . . . but he had gone by his mother's and there was no . . . there was no

. . . she wasn't at home but we didn't know it till the next morning. And, of course, then after they told us about the people, why he said . . . I said, "You go to Lottie's first and see if your mother's up . . . alright, if she's still there." And . . . because she lived up . . . right up that way. So he did, and then he went onto the school house. Well, all the . . . they was carrying the dead people to the school house and they had them lined up like this. Well, they were covered with oil. You couldn't tell whether they were white or not, they were so black. And so he . . . Francis, though, went on with some of the kids that wanted to go. And I said, "Francis, you don't want to go see them." But he said he did. So he went. But he just saw and he turned and come back. He come back a-running from the school house because he didn't like to see that. And they were found . . . and they found after a year . . . after several . . . well, a year or so afterwards. They were down there and somebody was a-knocking the place . . . everything piled up, you know. And, of course, they sold that . . . it was lined with . . . with rubbish, you know, and stuff. And they sold half

a mile of it and you bought that. And that one building right there by the road is made out of that lumber that came across the bay.

Stephens: Oh, is that right?

Morris: That's right.

Stephens: That building right here on your property.

Morris: Yes. Yes.

Stephens: Is that that you just gathered . . .

Morris: He bought . . . yes, Clyde bought a quarter of a mile of rubbish.

Stephens: Oh, you bought it. From whom?

Morris: Well, I don't know who they bought it from. I don't know who got the money for it.

Sparks: I don't either.

Stephens: Buy rubbish!

Morris: Yes.

Sparks: Yes.

Morris: Yes. Somebody . . .

Stephens: And with this building out here with the rubbish. It's still standing.

Morris: Well, we had several buildings that was built with that.

Stephens: Oh?

Morris: Our old shed . . . shop where Clyde used to have

his blacksmith shop. It was built with that, too.

Stephens: What about these Mexican houses? You, being an independent farmer and owning your own land and had to have some help, you would build . . . how many . . . how many families did you figure that it would take for, say, 160 acres of land or what . . . how much did you have?

Morris: We had 160 when we . . . was . . . well, and then he had a place up north of Taft. See . . . we . . . in the meanwhile, we got money enough to buy a quarter section north of Taft which . . .

Stephens: Well, but say right here. How many . . . for 160 acres of farm land . . .

Morris: You'd get all you could because the quicker you got topped the better you were.

Stephens: Well, but then you . . . how many families would you usually have?

Morris: Oh. . . we might have had 75 different families. Sometimes it would be 2 . . .

Stephens: But you wouldn't have that many houses there for them.

Morris: No.

Stephens: How many houses did you usually have?

Morris: Well, I'll tell you. We had . . . let's see, we had . . . two . . . we had a barn out there that

had three bins in it, and then we had another house out there that had one people. Then we had a house out here that held . . . oh, it held . . . well, he had about seven Mexican houses. And some of them . . . one of them had three rooms in it. And the others were just . . . but the families would move in together. Now if the colored people would come and there'd be a big load of them and they would just divide themselves up and they'd maybe take four houses. And it would be all that could ride in a big truck. They'd be . . . you didn't have to have a family house for each family. You couldn't possibly.

Stephens: There were many families in one house, then.

Morris: Yes. You'd . . .

Stephens: And they didn't mind living together?

Morris: They didn't mind living together. No.

Sparks: Sort of a picnic to them, wasn't it?

Morris: Yes, I guess so. Now I . . . the best cotton-picking I ever remember. We had a colored preacher who came from San Antonio and brought his family. He had three daughters and a wife and him. And And they picked cotton and they lived . . . they did have one room by themselves over there. And

. . . no, I'll take it back. They moved in with one old colored lady that had been by herself there. And we never did know what happened to her. She went to Corpus the night . . . the day the storm was coming, and she had some friends over there--no kinfolks but friends. And we never did . . . knew who her friends were and we never . . . they never found her body or as far as we know. But, of course, you couldn't tell they were so . . . and they took all those people and buried them right from that school house down about, oh, a quarter of a mile . . . three-quarters of a mile, down in a big trench. And just put them in there. And then finally, after . . . and then there was a lot over at Odem too that was found at Odem. And, finally, after . . . oh, I don't know how many years . . . two or three years. They came over from Corpus and took boxes and brought blankets--Army blankets--and would take up those bodies and I'm . . . they were surely . . . I mean . . . decomposed terribly, I presume. But, anyway, they took them over there and they're buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in a big row there and they have a great big mark . . . a great big rock there.

Sparks: I didn't know that.

Morris: Yes. It has on there the . . . the deceased or something from the 1919 storm.

Stephens: Where . . . where is this?

Morris: Over in the rock . . . in the (chuckle) . . . the Rose . . . the Rose Hill Cemetery.

Stephens: Oh.

Morris: . . . out this side of Corpus.

Stephens: This side . . . you mean across the bay?

Morris: That's right. In Corpus Christi.

Stephens: Oh, I see. They took the bodies back across.

Morris: Yes, they took them back.

Stephens: How did they get them back across? The causeway was gone.

Morris: Oh, well, that was . . . yes, they had built another . . . they had built another causeway before they moved them back.

Stephens: Oh, I see. They had built another.

Morris: Yes. They built another causeway pretty quick.

Stephens: I see. Well, how much . . . what were the wages paid the Mexican laborers?

Morris: Well, I sued to pay them fifty cents a hundred.

Stephens: Fifty cents a hundred pounds.

Morris: A hundred pounds. To pick cotton.

Stephens: What about chopping cotton?

Morris: Well, it wasn't . . .

Stephens: Was that paid by the hour?

Morris: No, they gave them so much a day. And usually we had a hand and they had a family that would chop with . . . along with Clyde . . . with Clyde's father and me. And I chopped cotton for twenty years or more. That's what John's told me is the matter with me now--too much cotton chopping (chuckle).

Stephens: Oh, I see. I see (chuckle). I don't believe that . . . that might be the reason you're here, getting all that exercise.

Morris: (Chuckle) Too much exercise.

Stephens: Too much. Did the Taft Ranch perform any services for the community?

Morris: No. Well, they had one kind. They had a gathering . . . that's twice, I'll take it. I didn't go to one of them. They had one of them at . . . at La Quinta, but I didn't go--picnic--and then they had a . . .

Stephens: What was this? New Year's Day or Fourth of July or what was it?

Morris: No. I don't think it was any particular. They had just gotten . . . Mr. Green just then had them for a picnic. But Charles Taft came down

once to visit Mr. Green and he had a . . . everybody come to meet Charles Taft and that's the only time I ever went to any of those things. It was just . . . I went to that. But I had a family and, of course, my mother and father-in-law lived with us.

Stephens: Did . . . let's see . . . you knew Joseph F. Green?

Morris: Yes.

Stephens: What sort of relations did the . . . did the non-Taft Ranch people have with them? That is, you weren't working for the ranch and he . . . he was just an outsider then . . . you were . . .

Morris: Well, he . . . we were outsiders. Mr. Alvoid was the one that done that business.

Stephens: You had contact with him?

Morris: That's right. And . . . but . . .

Stephens: Did you buy your land from the ranch?

Morris: No, we bought it from the . . . from the . . .

Stephens: . . . from the Taft Ranch.

Morris: . . . comp . . . when they started to sell that land north of Taft . . . see they started to sell out their land. Oh, I did know what . . . exactly what year we bought that in. I think it was '18, but I'm not positive of the year. But we didn't

get a good place to be honest with you because we waited too long. Clyde had to go back to Kansas and see if he wanted to buy any in Kansas. And he'd already sold our quarter section there and I was mad at him. But we had the . . . get too far out on Chiltipin Creek. Ours is not . . . it has a draw on it.

Stephens: Still have it?

Morris: Yes, I deeded it to my kids after the . . .

Stephens: Is it farming land or grazing land?

Morris: That boy . . . no, that boy farms it.

Stephens: Oh, I see.

Morris: Yes.

Stephens: When you get too far out on the creek it becomes grazing land doesn't it?

Morris: I think so. I think . . . I don't know. I've never been out any farther than our place there. I don't . . .

Stephens: Well, now, Mrs. Morris, you were a young lady, a young mother at this time . . .

Morris: I was twenty-five when I came here . . .

Stephens: And you had, you know, responsibility of a home and a-working on your place. But, what sort of community entertainment did they have for you or . . .

Morris: Well, we had the school house up here and we were always having dinners and . . . at night, suppers at night. We just had dinners most occasions just for a get-together of people. The community here would . . .

Stephens: All on weekends or during the week or . . .

Morris: During the week or anytime. We'd . . . for any little thing we'd have a dinner.

Stephens: Dinner-on-the-ground.

Morris: Yes. And maybe we'd want to buy some things for the school and we'd have a play up there. I remember once we had an oyster supper one night. We served fried beans, oyster soup and fried oysters. Everybody wanted something. I don't know what we were getting. I think we got a piano for the school. And then they . . . of course, they took part of the school house to Taft after they consolidated with Taft. They moved the school buildings up there but they left us the clubhouse. And I've been mad ever since that we didn't hang on to that clubhouse because we were not supposed to lose it, but I couldn't get anybody to go with me and fight and I couldn't fight by myself. And just one man was in . . . one superintendent was

instrumental in getting that thing in Taft, and they never used it. That's what made me mad.

Stephens: Well, did you have any church activities out here at the school?

Morris: We had . . . yes. We had Sunday school out there every Sunday.

Stephens: Every Sunday?

Morris: Yes.

Stephens: Did you have a large community turn-out?

Morris: Pretty good. Just the people here. But then later on, it wasn't very long until I joined the Methodist Church in Taft--most of us did. C.V. Jones lived up here and he was a big Methodist. And, of course, a lot of us went to Taft and joined the--well, some of us--the Methodist . . .

Stephens: Eight miles?

Morris: Yes, we'd go . . .

Stephens: By wagon, that takes a good while doesn't it?

Morris: Oh, we had a car.

Stephens: Had a car by then, huh?

Morris: Yes. We had a car. We had a car when we moved here, an old Model T Ford. We'd bought it from a . . . they had a soldier's camp at Corpus and Clyde bought it at . . . one of the soldiers that

was going to go . . . he was going to be shipped
and he sold it to Clyde. And that old Model T
lasted a long while.

Stephens: Did you . . . was your church attended by women
and children or did any of the men go?

Morris: Oh, the men would go.

Stephens: Large portions of the families?

Morris: Yes, everybody went.

Stephens: Everybody went.

Morris: Yes, everybody . . . it was good to get around
one another. We all were a big family here and . . .

Stephens: Did you have a Sunday showman in the community?

Morris: A what?

Stephens: Well, you know, a mean or . . .

Morris: No. We didn't have . . .

Stephens: Everybody was well-behaved.

Morris: Everybody, yes.

Stephens: Behaved themselves.

Morris: Yes, we didn't have any trouble, only . . . of
course, with the hands in cotton-picking time.
You didn't do anything . . . only picked cotton
and you didn't go to Sunday school or anything else.

Stephens: Well, what about dominoes? Did you have forty-two
parties?

Morris: Used to, here, every weekend.

Stephens: And any card playing or did they frown on card playing in those days.

Morris: They . . . well . . . the men would . . . we had four couples that would meet. We'd meet at one or another's house. And there weren't very many people that played any games but just a few people here. Now, some of them didn't like games but Clyde did. And he used to have four men that would come every week on Friday night or Saturday night and they'd play . . . they'd take a big box of matches and they'd go and play poker. The women would sit in here and talk. And, oh, yes, our . . . we made our own entertainment. We didn't have picture shows and anything like that to go to for years.

Stephens: What did . . . what was . . . now while the men were playing poker what would the women, do, sew and talk?

Morris: No, just talk.

Stephens: Just talk.

Morris: Talk about our neighbors.

Stephens: You really found out a lot of information then?

(Chuckle)

Morris: (Chuckle) We used to have a good time then.

Stephens: Well, any dances?

Morris: Well, we . . .

Stephens: For the younger set, I suppose? But being as you were still young but married then this would limit your activities.

Morris: No, we used to go . . . sometimes we'd have a party and they'd play . . . instead of playing dances, just little games. No dances. Well, they would sometimes, some of them would dance.

Stephens: What about for your children after they started getting up to, say, ten and fifteen years old? What did you do to provide them with entertainment?

Morris: It . . . they . . . just seemed like you didn't have to entertain children in those days. It was . . . they'd have kids come home with them and spend the weekends or something. Or they'd . . . now, for instance, Tommy Demuse, and Earl went down and camped on the isle . . . on little island that down below Jerry Hunt there. They stayed a week out there on that island. Kids would make their own.

Stephens: So it was more of a personal relationship then . . .

Morris: That's right.

Stephens: . . . rather than artificial one that children found?

Morris: That's right. You didn't have television. You didn't even have radios for years. It was just a wild community just like Western Kansas. Now we . . . when we lived in Western Kansas we'd go twenty miles to a dance there. They danced in Western Kansas. I didn't dance, I know; I'm too lazy. I didn't like to, but my husband and Mama did and so they'd go. We'd put the two kids on a feather bed and we'd go twenty miles in the snow to a dance. Oh, boy, those were the days (chuckle). Or something so.

Stephens: Did you have picnics here?

Morris: Yes, we'd . . . we'd have picnics at the school. And I remember one time we went to the . . . down to the river over at Calallen and had a picnic once. Oh, we were always having picnics or something like that. And after we moved to Taft we had a picnic out from Taft in Mr. Whitfield's pasture . . . Mr. Withworth's pasture. And, oh, we had more fun that time. But you just made your entertainment then. You didn't have things like you do now. It was just homemade things.

Stephens: I see.