

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
70

Interview with
Mrs. Fred H. Ferguson
March 13, 1970

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Hattie Belle McKinney Ferguson
(Signature) (Mrs. Fred H.)

Date: July 3, 1971

Copyright ©2016

**THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
IN THE CITY OF DENTON, TEXAS**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the Director of the Oral History Program or the University Archivist, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas 76203

Oral History Collection
Mrs. Hattie Bell McKamey

Interviewer: Dr. A. Stephens

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas Date: March 13, 1970

Dr. Stephens: This interview is with Mrs. Hattie Bell McKamey, 823 South Water, Executive House, Apartment 3-E, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78401, March 13, 1970.

Mrs. McKamey, would you tell us when your folks first came to this area and what the country looked like as they've described it to you.

Mrs. McKamey: My father and my mother both came in 1872. My father had just graduated from the University of Virginia, and he came to Victoria, Texas, to tutor the Proctor children. He came by stage-coach to Texas from Virginia. He said it was a rather barren country. But he . . . you have to realize this was in reconstruction days, and his family's plantation had been wiped out by Sherman's March to the Sea. And so his family moved into Richmond, and there was really very little for a young man to do at that time, and this was his reason for coming. He was particu-

larly interested in education. And when Mr. Proctor wrote to the University of Virginia for a recommendation for a teacher for his children, they recommended my father. And he was then twenty-three years old. I think that's right. My mother came by boat from Massachusetts and landed with her parents. She was three years old. And they landed at Fulton, Texas, where her father had been employed by the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company to work in the beef canning industry, which they had established there. The reason they came was that my mother's father owned a box factory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which burned to the ground. His finances were wiped out so he thought he would try and make his way in a new country. He answered an ad of the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company, and that's how he happened to come and bring his family. My mother says that she had . . . my mother said to me that she had very many interesting recollections about the Fulton area. And when I took her over there to visit, she would point out different landmarks that were there when she lived there as a child. She used to play under the

steps of the old Fulton mansion, which is still there and which, I'm sorry to say, had not been kept up or restored. But this was one of the things she liked to tell about. Her father worked for a while for the beef canning industry in Fulton, and it failed. At that time they simply had not learned how to preserve beef satisfactorily. The cannery closed, and they bought a small farm in Gonzales, Texas. My mother then went into San Antonio and lived with her brother who lived there and went to school in San Antonio. My mother also became a teacher, and that's how she happened to meet my father.

Stephens: What sort of ad was that that they ran? For technicians to operate the packing house?

McKamey: My father . . . my grandfather had no knowledge of that type of work so evidently it was for unskilled labor actually. But both of these people told me . . . both my mother and my father told me that their families wanted them to reach out into this new territory. It fascinated them, and they felt that there was a new life here for them. I think it's worth noting at this point that for some reason the Proctors lived in Indiana because my father lived there and went

through the Indianola storm of 1875. He was one of the few survivors. And it was interesting to me that after many years, they organized the survivors of the Indianola storm, and they met every year. And my father . . . I think perhaps that's the one trip that he took each year of his . . . as long as he lived to go back and meet with his old friends, the survivors of the storm. My father's full name was Thomas Marshall Colston, C-O-L-S-T-O-N. His grandmother was a sister of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall, and that's where the name Marshall came from. His grandmother was Elizabeth Marshall.

Mrs. Sparks: Well, it's interesting . . . you have told me how your father escaped from Indianola, and I think this is a very interesting story.

McKamey: The houses in Indianola were built from shell based concrete, a mixture of shell and concrete. There seemed to be very little wood available. If it was available, perhaps it was too hard to cut. At any rate, Father said their houses were of that type of construction. And when the tidal wave came in, he was in an upper story of one of these houses, and it collapsed on him.

And he had every bit of his clothing torn off of him. He was stark naked and all of his skin was scratched terribly by this dastardly shell-concrete concoction that they built their houses of. Now he said he was so ill and so destitute that he barely remembered being carried on a flat car . . . being transported on a flat car . . . on a railroad flat car from the Indianola territory . . . Port Lavaca territory over to Victoria. And it was after that that he established permanent residence in Victoria. The Proctors . . . after a while people were clamoring for education for their children. And, of course, you and I know there were no public schools and very few teachers in Texas at that . . . in South Texas at that time. So all the neighbors were clamoring for education for their children. And the Proctors finally consented to let my father take private pupils along with their children to teach. And I remember he told me he received \$3 a month apiece for each of his other students that he taught, and with the Proctors he received room and board and a small pay. There just wasn't much money then. But Father loved the education business, and he continued on with it. He organized

the public schools in Cuero, in Wimar, in Flatonia and Lapley and Kingsville. He went to Kingsville in 1904. The reason he happened to go to Kingsville was that he had become friends in Cuero with Robert J. Kleberg, Sr., who became the son-in-law of Henrietta M. King. And it was through Mr. . . . his friendship with Mr. Kleberg that Henrietta King persuaded Kingsville to ask my father to come in and organize a public school there. He came in 1904.

Stephens: Is that the same year that the city was built, the railroad came through? Was this the . . . all of which was part of the occasion . . .

McKamey: I don't . . .

Stephens: . . . of the city's growth and development all in the same year.

McKamey: I don't remember the exact date. I do know that Mrs. King gave the first land for a school to be built in Kingsville, and that's where the old highschool is still there at the end of Main Street. And this school was built after my father and mother had been there several years. They both taught in the school. The architecture of that old school building is interesting. It's a combination of the Alamo and two missions in

San Antonio, the front part of the building.

Had you heard that?

Sparks: Well, I hadn't heard it, but I can see what you're talking about.

McKamey: I think that's very interesting. And when I was a freshman in high school, that school burned to the ground, but they preserved that front of the architecture because they thought it was interesting, that this is what the people wanted, a reminder of the Alamo and the two other missions in San Antonio, San Jose and I've forgotten the other . . .

Stephens: Concepcion?

McKamey: . . . what the other one is.

Stephens: Concepcion?

McKamey: Yes, Concepcion is the other.

Sparks: Well, where you . . . where did your father and mother meet when they were teachers . . .

McKamey: In Cuero. Mother graduated from high school in San Antonio, and there was very little college education to be had in those days so Mother took examinations and studied to become a teacher. And her first place to teach was in Brackettville. And then after Brackettville she moved to Cuero where she met my father. They came to Kingsville

then in 1904. It was in Cuero that Edwin Flato went to live with my parents and go to school. You'll be talking with him later. Father worked very hard as a teacher, and he had very progressive ideas. One of his ideas that I get through all . . . everything that he wrote and everything that he said was "Education for the masses. Education for the Latin American people." And finally a school . . . because of his interest in this and because people knew this, a school was built in the Latin American section of Kingsville, and it is the Thomas Marshall Colston Elementary School because of his early interest and extreme effort to help educate these people. He saw it at so early a date that it impressed me. They had school first in a funny, little two-room building, and Father and one other teacher held forth in that. And I have his school bell which I've been told is quite valuable, and it's solid bronze. He would stand outside the door of the school building where the children playing out on the playground and ring this bell by hand--it's a small bell--and say, "Come to books. Come to books." And that always amused me because I think it's an interesting

expression. Quite Victorian sounding isn't it? But this is the story of how my mother and father met. And Mother also taught in the school in Kingsville. And after the public school was . . . had been going a few years, then Mrs. King gave the land for the new school which was all housed in one building there at the end of Main Street. She gave the land, and I think perhaps she provided a great deal of the money to build the building. And Father remained superintendent of the schools until he was sixty years old. You know, nowadays they retire people at sixty-five. But when he was sixty, the school board decided that he was too old to teach anymore, so he actually was fired. And he started a new business after he was sixty years old, the insurance business and Retail Merchants Association in Kingsville. He also worked for an abstract company which gave him a real good background for the history of the country. He would have been a good one to interview, but he died at age eighty-one in 1932. So, he is not available for interview.

Stephens: Mrs. McKamey, can you tell us about the social events and entertainment of the days of your

youth in Kingsville.

McKamey:

I was born in 1911, and Kingsville was still in its infancy when I grew up there. My earliest recollections are of a bleakness in the land and great pride in the fact that my father and mother had been able to build a house of their own. There were very few nice homes at that time in the town, and we were very proud of ours. We did not have a bathroom as such. We did not have electricity. We cooked with wood and, by the way, I want to tell you I finally learned how to make a wood fire because my sister and I took turnabout every morning building the fire in the wood stove for Mother to start breakfast. And for a good many times every time it was my time to build the fire it went out, and I had a terrible time learning how to build a fire, but I finally did. We heated with wood stove, too, and Mother also cooked with wood. When we finally had enough money to buy a bathtub, it was put into a little room right in the middle of the house, and there was great celebration because we had a bathtub. And water was finally piped into it; we didn't have to carry the water in there, and then the water from the bathtub was piped into the yard

to water the trees. We had fig trees, and Mother had orange trees. We had a garden. We had cows. Our only mode of transportation was a horse and buggy. We had chickens. Subsistence was pretty much each to his own in those days. We baked our own bread. Mother baked bread. There was very little to buy. But one of my earliest recollections is that at Christmas time we always had apples and oranges. The only fresh vegetables that we had were from our own garden. There were a few staples that were brought in on the train but very little vegetables and fruits. And once in a while a train load of bananas would come through, and the merchants would buy great bunches of bananas. My father always bought bananas by the bunch, never by the dozen, or by the pound. He would come home and say to Mother, "Hattie, the banana train came through today, and I've brought a bunch of bananas," which were hung in the bathroom closet to ripen. They ripened very nicely in a dark, cool place. I remember farming because the man across the street from us, who, by the way, was Edwin Flato's brother, Mr. Rudy Flato, had a farm and he used to take us as children out to the farm, and I remember a good

bit about it. I do remember mule-drawn walking plows. I remember the rows of cotton that stretched for acres and acres and acres, and I thought as a child, "How did they ever get from one end of the row to the other?" With one row plow driven by a mule . . . driven by a man, pulled by a mule. But farming was going on, and all of the farmers, of course, planted vegetables, too. But mostly they were sold locally. They were not shipped out at all, not in my early years at all. Now, for entertainment, as you know, a town that young just simply was . . . and it was off the beaten track. There were no traveling entertainers of any kind, except I can remember that every once in a while, a tent show came; and when I was older, the circus came. But other than that, we had to make our own entertainment. And the town organized a band, and we had a bandstand in the middle of the park--a nice round one. As we all picture the old fashioned bandstand--and the band was made up of people of the town, directed by one of our citizens. Everybody was unpaid; they bought their own uniforms, finally, and every Thursday night we had a band concert. There were no benches. I remember that children and adults

alike sat on the ground all around the bandstand to listen to the music, and how we loved it. The other thing I remember about entertainment was we always went to see the trains come in, and especially, we loved to go when the homeseeker trains came in--it was a great event. And Father would say to my mother, "Hattie, the homeseeker train will be through at such and such time today. Bring the children down, and let's watch." Because the Casa Rich- ardo Hotel was owned by the railroad, the train stopped there for people to eat, and mealtime, of course, the times they stopped, were either at noontime, or in the evening, but mostly, I remember in the evenings. And a little Mexican man with a triangle, which he beat on with a metal piece of pipe, would stand out in front of the hotel and beat on this triangle to attract the attention of the homeseekers who piled off the trains to come in and get a good hot meal. There were not any eating facilities on the trains, as I remember. They went from place to place and ate wherever they landed with their people. We all used to watch the trains come in, and Mr. Harry Murry (?) was one of the earliest pioneers

in engineering, and I can remember when the train would come pulling into the station. Father would stand with me, and I would wave at Mr. Murry (?) as he drove that big steam engine into the station bring his trains in. Of course, there were regular trains who . . . that were going back and forth, but the ones that I remember the best were the homeseeker trains because it was a big event. When you're in an isolated community, and you have to make your own fun, you find all sorts of ways of doing it. One of the other things that we did, we had a place that was upstairs over a hardware store, and it had . . . it was just a big vacant room, and they put a stage in one end of it, and called it the Kingsville Opera House. We had home talent plays where we went to be entertained, because there was no other way of being entertained. Everybody in town went to everything, and there was a great deal of togetherness. I remember the togetherness in school, certainly in church, and in the community. My father and mother helped to establish the Episcopal Church in Kingsville, too.

Sparks: And you used to play the organ.

McKamey: Yes. We had a little pump organ, the kind with

bellows, and by the time it was my time to play it, the bellows had holes in them, and I had to pump twice as hard to make the air hold in the bellows for the organ to play. I can remember when I was twelve years old, my father said to me, "There is no one to play the organ at Sunday School, so it's up to you to do it." "Why, I've never played an organ," said I. "Well, you can just learn," said he. "We need an organist, and there's nobody else to play." So that's how I started playing the organ, and I've progressed to playing for church, and I used to tell the Bishop when he came that that organ was ruining my legs because I had to pump the bellows so hard to keep the air in them. Wish I had that organ now.

Ray, is this _____ today of any value to you?

Stephens: Yes. Yes indeed, this is . . .

McKamey: You see, I don't know . . .

Stephens: Oh, but you do know, too . . .

McKamey: . . . but I . . . I don't know what I know that you wanna' know. Another thing that I remember about my childhood was, of course, there was . . . it was terribly, terribly dusty, and we

had lots of wind. We had wind from the south and wind from the north and there was always that terrible, terrible dust.

Stephens: Was this by season? North in winter, south in summer?

McKamey: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. But we would have died without that south breeze because it was so hot. But . . . and Kingsville is still a very hot place. But one of the things I remember is that when the . . . on Saturday when the cowboys would get their pay on the ranches and most especially the King Ranch, they would ride to town on their horses and we . . . if we would be downtown or sometimes they would go by our house because our house was on the path that they could have traveled to town, and such dust as they raised when they would come riding into town. And they'd come yipee-yi-yaing just exactly as you would think cowboys would do.

Stephens: Mexicans?

McKamey: Uh-huh. These were the Mexican vaqueros who worked for the King Ranch. And I remember their leather chaps and the . . . and I remember always they wore the same kind of hats that the master wore. They all rolled their hats exactly the same way that the head of the ranch rolled his.

As I say, a chile remembers these things. And we had very, very little refrigeration then. There was a Negro ice cream man who used to come by. And unless we got ice and made our own ice cream, we had none. And, of course, as a child I'd . . . just the idea of bought ice cream was fascinating, and Mother . . . I remember Mother used to take a bowl out to . . . when I insisted on having ice cream, Mother would take a bowl out to the wagon that he was rolling around then, and he would measure out the ice cream in a bowl for us to have. And as a child I learned that this was the process you went through to get ice cream so I would get a bowl, and I would run out and stop him, and Mother would be very furious at me because she didn't always want that ice cream. I thought all you had to do was take the bowl out there and fill it up. (Chuckle) They were primitive times, you know it?

Sparks: Well, how about your refrigeration? I think that's interesting. Did you . . . did you have all the time or did they bring ice in, say, once or twice a week or . . .

McKamey: They taught . . . they brought ice in on the

train in the big refrigerator cars and then they transferred it to the ice house which was right on the railroad. The old ice house . . . the remains of it are still there and . . . now see I'm just now learning that I remember this.

Stephens: Good. Where did they make the ice? It was on the Missouri-Pacific and they had a factory somewhere.

McKamey: They had a . . . they had an ice . . . ice plant somewhere, but at first they did not make the ice there. Later on they did. They got the equipment to make it, but in the very beginning all they had there was a building which they called the ice house. And they'd bring it in on the train, transfer it in these big 300 pound blocks into the ice house, and then we had . . . the ice man would bring it around in a refrigerator deal just like the ice . . . insulated wagon thing.

Stephens: Do you remember why the Missouri-Pacific built their ice houses in Kingsville? The ice plants in Kingsville?

McKamey: To . . . that's where they re-iced the refrigerator cars when they needed. That's when . . . this was why we had that ice house there. Do

you think I'm right. Did you learn this?

Stephens: Yes.

McKamey: I know I wasn't sure, you see. This is my own recollection.

Stephens: That's fine. You're doing well.

McKamey: I just want you to be sure and document me.

Stephens: Oh, you're doing all right. Now, I was wondering here, too, your recollections of this time, they made . . . the man made the ice routes.

McKamey: He made the ice routes.

Stephens: And he put it in the ice box.

McKamey: Yes. And the ice boxes were rather primitive, too, and the ice, you know, dripped from the ice compartment into the . . . into a pan underneath the refrigerator. And that was very valuable water because it was pure water. And I remember that my mother used it for her best pot plants and her ferns. And it was my job to empty the ice pan . . . the pan under the ice box, and if I let it run over, I always got a good scolding because they didn't want to waste any of that drip. It was my job to trim the wick of the lamps and also to polish the lamp shades.

Stephens: How often did you have to do that?

McKamey: About twice a week . . . I cleaned the shades,

and once a week I trimmed the wick.

Stephens: They required trimming once a week?

McKamey: Yes, because we used them every night. That was our only way of light. Of course, there were no telephones. The railroad had communication, but we didn't at first.

Stephens: Now, you lived in town so you didn't have the loneliness that people in the country had, but don't you think that from your comparison today and then that this is an individual matter, that people can be lonely in a crowd, or they can be contented . . .

McKamey: Indeed they can.

Stephens: . . . can be lonely to themselves or contented to themselves.

McKamey: The people . . .

Stephens: But this is still a factor, though, in that time, the distance . . .

McKamey: Yes. The distance . . .

Stephens: . . . and the lack of communication with folks back home. Did this have . . . do you remember your mother saying anything about that? Was this a barrier to her . . .

McKamey: Oh, yes.

Stephens: . . . feelings of living out there?

- McKamey: Neither my mother or my father ever were able to go back to their homes. Mother never went back to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Father never went back to Virginia. He never saw his mother again after he left as a young man.
- Stephens: Did you ever hear him comment on this?
- McKamey: This was a great sadness in their lives, but since they were both scholars, they were both letter writers. And I have just finished disposing of many, many, many letters that they both received from their families back home.
- Stephens: How did you dispose of them?
- McKamey: I burned them. I read these letters, and they were . . . they were really not particularly valuable for what you like to have them for, really.
- Stephens: I see. Now, Mrs. McKamey, would you describe the background of your husband's folks in this area?
- McKamey: In 1937, I married Kenneth Grayson McKamey, the son of Tunnell Abcomb McKamey and Lilliam McConco McKamey of Gregory, Texas. Kenneth's grandfather, whose name was J. S. M. McKamey, was a pioneer in agriculture in this area. It interests me particularly because my parents were pioneers

in education, and Kenneth's parents and grandparents were pioneers in agriculture. As you perhaps gathered from your interview about my parents, I don't have a very definite recollection of agriculture because my background was definitely school business. But Kenneth's background was entirely agriculture, and his father owned a store also. But the main consideration I think . . . in considering their life I would say the main thing there was agriculture. His grandfather brought his family from Tennessee to Texas, here again, seeking a new life in this new territory. And they came by way of the Indian Territory, which the . . . and this is the way they spoke of Oklahoma. "We came by way of the Indian Territory." I remember that very well. And Kenneth's grandfather taught school a while in the Indian Territory on the way down. You know, we think of going places. We get in the car. We get on a plane. We get . . . we used to get on a train and go places in a hurry. But their mode of travel was quite slow and sometimes they had to pause along the way to make a little money, gather in some new provisions to keep moving to the new territory.

And Grandfather McKamey . . . or rather this would be . . . well, shall we call him Great Grandfather McKamey was the one who taught.

Stephens: J. S. M.

McKamey: Yes, J. S. M. McKamey was the one who taught the Indians to make a little money to come a little farther into Texas. And he brought his family to Gregory, Texas, in 1890 to purchase land. And I have noted from his autobiography . . . by the way, he's one of the few people who took the time to write anything down. I have observed that these pioneers, my mother and father, too, were all so busy living and existing and struggling that they didn't really take time to write things down. But J. S. M. McKamey did so. And I noticed that he noted in his autobiography that land was purchased for \$10 and \$20 an acre. He bought it from the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company, and for some reason or other it was \$10 an acre on one side of the road and \$20 an acre on the other side, and we have never been able to ascertain why. It was land that had been formerly used only for ranching. It was covered with chaparral, all types of . . . of brush and mesquite. And the land had to be

cleared by hand. They had no power driven anything, just manpower. And, of course, Kenneth wasn't there, and I wasn't there, and I'm telling you these things from what I have gleaned of the family history through the older ones in the family and also from this autobiography. Very, very difficult land to clear, but they were determined to do it. And this man, J. S. M. McKamey, and his two sons, John and T. A., I feel had a great deal to do with the progress of agriculture in the Coastal Bend because Mr. J. S. M. McKamey was the first dry land farmer in the Coastal Bend area. They did not think it could be done, and he had a vision. He had a dream that if he kept turning the land, it would then hold the moisture better and . . . and in dry land in turning the land, it seemed that it would . . . it seemed to me that it would dry out, but the thing that he found out was that it made it hold the moisture. And this is a very important thing to this particular Coastal Bend area because sometimes we have a dry year, and we have to know how to treat our crops in a dry year. And when we have a wet year, we treat our crops differently. But it all started way

back there. And as . . . as in my own childhood, Kenneth said he could remember very well, and Kenneth's father--whom I shall call Dad because he was Dad . . .

Stephens: That was T. A. McKamey?

McKamey: . . . that was T. A. McKamey--had told me how they got up at daybreak, really before daybreak, in order to feed the mules and get them harnessed and ready to get into the fields as soon as they could see. They had no light but God's light. When I see these big machines going through the fields, during the harvest time particularly, I always think about the fact that they can start early and continue late if the weather permits. But these people had no light and no mechanization of any kind. I think they're just a great part of our history, and I think we owe them a debt of gratitude. I have felt this way about Kenneth's father, T. A. He grew up in a time that was very difficult. I think you might be interested to know that although he brought his family here in 1890, he realized there was no education for them, and he wanted education for his family, so he moved to Waco where he opened a general store and where his children would have a chance to go to

school. And then he came back to Gregory in 1900. See, he stayed away, oh, I guess eight or nine years.

Sparks: Well, someone took care of his land, didn't they, during that time?

McKamey: Yes. I . . . they had renters or sharecroppers of some sort. There was not much to be made on it because it was so hard to clear, very difficult to clear, and they cleared just a few acres at a time.

Stephens: They didn't go for the swale land then which was already cleared.

McKamey: They don't . . . they really . . . that family didn't like swale.

Stephens: I guess they reasoned that if it wouldn't grow brush it won't grow anything. Is that right?

McKamey: That's right. That's right. And we always in the family I've been very conscious of, oh, it's the swale piece you're talking about because in a wet year you don't make one thing off the swale and in a dry year it's helpful. This is why on a big farm you have a better chance to make a living than on a small farm. The . . . the land itself averages out for you.

Sparks: This store . . . Mr. J. S. M. McKamey had a

general store I remember.

McKamey: Yes, and he helped to start the bank, too, in Gregory.

Sparks: But when he had the general store, do you . . . have you heard anything about how he conducted his business? Of course, in those days it usually was credit.

McKamey: Oh, yes. They had to extend credit because people simply didn't have cash, and they also did a great deal of trading. You know, a man would come in with a mule, and he would need some provisions, and they did a great deal of trading in those early days. And Grandmother McKamey, whose name was Sara, was the bookkeeper for the store. Everything was in barrels, large containers. There were . . . I've heard them speak a great deal of the store and, of course, bolts of material. And women used to buy the material by the bolt rather than by the yard, which I thought was interesting. And Kenneth said he remembered as a child that he helped in the store. He liked to help in the candy department. It was all bulk candy. And when his father wasn't looking, he helped himself. He enjoyed helping in the candy department. Everything was bulk--barrels of pickles, barrels of

flour. And the farmers bought their flour and their corn meal and their provisions in those large containers, big boxes of everything.

Stephens: Well, why don't you tell about the trend in agriculture that you'd seen in your lifetime.

McKamey: It's been . . . my life span as a farmer's wife has been such a short one compared to this family into which I married that I really don't feel very qualified to say anything about my lifetime except that I have seen a great many changes. I would like to tell you this little story. We had in our home a visitor from Guatemala. And my husband was showing him pictures that he made of farming twenty-five years ago. My husband bought one of the first movie cameras that we ever saw mainly because he wanted to take pictures of the farming that was going on. And after he finished showing these pictures that were made mostly twenty-five years ago, this boy . . . this young man from Guatemala said, "We are today in Guatemala where you were twenty-five years ago." And this interested us, the old time tractors. I didn't realize, you see, what a difference has gone on, and there have been great strides in the farming industry just as there have been in

all areas of life in the past twenty-five years. The strides in farming have not been quite as radical as putting a man on the moon, but twenty-five years ago we had no conception of that either. Dad, Kenneth's father, was the one whom I felt had seen the greatest changes because life was so primitive and so hard in those early days, and I could see why he found it very difficult to accept all the mechanization which is going on now because he did his entirely with hands, and by hands I mean his hands and other men's hands. And other men's hands who worked for him were mostly the brown hands of the Latin Americans. And he used to go on the train down to Laredo and bring Mexicans in from Mexico to come and help harvest the crops. They'd bring them on the train.

Sparks: On box cars or something.

McKamey: Uh-huh. In box cars.

Stephens: Box cars. Lock them in?

McKamey: Well, I suppose the doors had to be locked or they'd fall out.

Sparks: Hattie Bell, I always felt the McKameys had quite a, what, patron system or something. I think you might say something because they had so many

houses and they all . . . they always took care of their own even after they couldn't work.

McKamey:

They . . . there are people now living on our farm who were born there, and their fathers and grandfathers before them worked for the McKamey farm. The McKamey farm had always operated on what we called a cash basis. And I suppose you might say we . . . we've been caretakers because we have taken care of our own. And when they needed . . . when a boy ran away with a girl and the father came to Kenneth in the middle of the night and says, "My daughter has not come home, yet. She has been stolen out," then that was Kenneth's signal to get up and start hunting for this couple to get them to a priest or a Justice of the Peace or somebody who would marry them. It was the custom for the boys to steal the girls out because the parents were so very strict with girls that this was the only way they had of really getting a wife, and this is the expression they used. They stole the girl out. Then we would have to see that they would be married properly by the priest so that they would be accepted back into their families. And we had so many people living on our farm during

the early years of our marriage that I saw a great deal of this go on. The number is dwindling each year by the year because we have progressed from a one-row, mule-driven, mule-drawn, man-driven plow to a huge six-row tractor which does the work of many, many men. And so the number of our employees has gotten fewer and fewer and fewer, and naturally these people have to be educated to operate this machinery and to take care of it so it's a form of education in itself.

Stephens: What type of quarters did you provide for the workers?

McKamey: They had wooden houses. In the last few years we've experimented with the type houses they built on the King Ranch. We went over and inspected their houses, and they were very satisfied with their type. They were concrete blocks, and the last houses we built were concrete blocks. But the early houses were wooden houses, and most of them are now being torn down because we simply do not have the need for them. They used to come during the harvest season, and they had to have a place to stay so we housed them in every possible place, all the different houses, in all

barns. They used to just beg for a little place to set up housekeeping in the corner of the barn. And people would say nowadays that that was discrimination, but these people . . . this was their summer vacation to come cotton picking and come and help with the grain. And they'd bring their families and live like gypsies and thoroughly enjoy it, and they made good money. And when they needed to go to the doctor, we took them to the doctor.

Stephens: What size homes did they have early in this experience?

McKamey: On the farm?

Stephens: Yes.

McKamey: I would say the smallest house had three rooms, and then some of the larger houses had more rooms.

Stephens: What type homes are you providing now?

McKamey: Depends on the size of the family. The woman who worked for me . . . her husband is employed by us, and they live on our farm. They have thirteen children. Naturally, we were not financially able to provide a home of our own big enough to accommodate thirteen children. So their home, you might say, was not . . . has not been adequate, but they live in the largest

house out there which has about six rooms.

Stephens: What about wages for the workers? You've seen this change over the years.

McKamey: We used to pay them by the week . . . so much a week, and then they received their house, wood, and water, and if they needed to go to the doctor, we paid their doctor bill, and then they paid us back when the harvest season came because they made more money during the harvest season. Now our workers on our farm punch a time clock just like they do in all industries, and they work a certain number of hours. We are required to pay them a certain amount. We are still furnishing houses. But there will come a day in the not too far off future when they will have to provide their own houses. Mrs. Sparks said that she felt that we had run a patron type of organization, and we did because we did look after our own. And there is a great love and a great rapport that exists between us and our people, but it's fast disappearing because when they come and work by the hour, and they punch a time clock, and you don't know what is going in their family, then you are no longer . . . you no longer have the rapport with them

that you had before. This we regret. If you had been here for my father-in-law's funeral, you would have seen his casket carried by ten stalwart Mexican men, and these are men most of whom were born on our land, our farm, who have worked on it all their lives, and who loved the patron.

Stephens: What is the hourly wage now?

McKamey: I am not sure what it is. I would hesitate to say, but we pay what is called the minimum wage.

Sparks: I think it's interesting in connection with this story that when your daughter married, Martha, that you had a special party for your employees which . . . who were mostly Mexican.

McKamey: Oh, yes.

Sparks: Tell them about that because this is a . . .

McKamey: This is a disappearing thing, too, and we regret it, and they regret it. But I suppose it has to come with progress. But my daughter married five years ago, and there was a question. All of these people loved her and had seen her grow up from the time she was born. They wanted to come to her wedding. There was not room for them to come because the church just wouldn't accommodate everybody. Then there was a question

about who would come to the wedding if we allowed some to come. And we finally came up with the idea of giving a wedding party for our employees at our gin, which is a family owned corporation. And I had wedding cake piñatas made in Mexico, brought them back, and we hung them from the rafters in the . . . where the sucker is at the gin. We set up tables. We had two animals barbecued. We had all the food in the world cooked, and we even had a big wedding cake made which we put at the end of the table with a little bride and groom on top of it. And after they had their barbecue supper, we had a dance on the gin platform with a Mexican orchestra, and we all danced.

Stephens: Played Las Mañanitas?

McKamey: Si. We played . . . they played all sorts of music, these Mexicans. And one of the soloists was a boy who was born on our farm. There were . . . there were just all around us. So this was actually as far as they were concerned this was Martita's wedding because that's what they called her. Her name is Martha, and they all called her Martita. And they felt very, very honored that they had a celebration all their own.

Stephens: Did you used to give them June 24 off from work, St. John's Day?

McKamey: I don't know about June 24. They always had Good Friday and Ash Wednesday, but I don't know about June 24. Don't remember that.

Stephens: You never had any colored workers.

McKamey: No. They don't mix. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday because I would say that almost 100 per cent of our people are Roman Catholic.

Sparks: How about, when he turns it on, I think is real interesting to ask you what . . . coming from a family of educators coming . . . being a farmer's wife, what your adjustments were and I want you to tell about how poor Kenneth and all the others were and about your Easter hat because I think that's the cutest story. You can ask her when you married a farmer what were your adjustments?

Stephens: What was the life of being a farmer's wife?

Sparks: Yeah. Well, you had it off?

Stephens: Uh-huh.

McKamey: I didn't realize it was on.

Stephens: I just now turned it on.

McKamey: Well, it was quite a change for me because in my life we had very little money. And if we wanted to do something, we sacrificed doing one

thing to get to do another. This did not seem to be the philosophy of the family into which I married. If you had money in your pocket, you spent it. And if you didn't have the money, you just didn't spend the money. And it was very hard for me to realize that beginning . . . after Christmas . . . they loved to celebrate Christmas, and by the way I would like to say that they celebrated Christmas on the McKamey farm in a very interesting way. They made their rounds on Christmas Eve and gave every child a quarter. And to this very good day they're doing the same thing. They always killed fresh meat, both beef and hog--they no longer have hogs, now they give all beef--so that every family had a goodly portion of meat. These people would rather have meat for presents than anything else. We found that out many years ago. And . . . but anyway after Christmas was celebrated beginning on January 1 the financial condition of the McKameys and all of the farmers that I ever knew absolutely deteriorated to nothing. They were the poorest people that I ever saw, and they talked so poor that I was terrified for fear before the crop was harvested that I would really

be sent to the poor house. You cannot imagine my consternation when I would say, "We need thus and so for the house." I was told, "You can buy it when the crop comes in, not before." You just buy the things you absolutely have to have and nothing else. But, of course, during the last few years if a car broke down or a tractor broke down, they were replaced. And we always had a joke in our family that we were always going to the poor house in a new car. It seemed to me that no matter how we went to the poor house, we were going, and it seemed to me that we would probably go either riding in a new truck or in a new car. It was so strange to me because these people were much more prosperous people than my people. My people were . . . were really quite poor in income, but the income came in regularly whereas in the farm . . . in the farmer's life the income comes in at harvest time, and he feels rich. We had one man who was a tenant farmer on our land, a Mexican man, who lived . . . who was born and who died there. And one year he was so rich he bought seven cars, and he didn't even know how to drive one of them. That's the truth.

Sparks:

I've heard you tell that story before.

McKamey: So after Christmas, it was a sad time until the harvest came. But there was a little bit of a breather after the seed was in the ground. Somehow you could breathe just a little easier when the seed was in the ground because then your faith could be a little stronger because hope was stronger. But there was one thing I found out, and that was if I wanted an Easter hat, I surely had better buy it before Christmas because there was no money for an Easter hat after Christmas.

Stephens: (Chuckle)

Sparks: I think that's . . . 1919.

Stephens: Would you tell us about the hurricane in 1916 and then the one in 1919?

McKamey: Well, you see, I was born in 1911 so in 1916 I was only five and in 1919 I was eight. I remember the 1919 one better than I do the first one. The second one was more destructive, and because as I told you before our house was a good sturdy house, it was full of people because there were many people who were living in very flimsy houses at that time. And the communication that we got came through the railroad, you see. This was the information that we got. The general

offices were in Kingsville for the Missouri-Pacific line. This was a life line for Kingsville, the Missouri-Pacific. As well as being the Missouri-Pacific line, it was Kingsville's life line. The farming community developed. The college was established. The Navy built an airbase there, but the real life line of the community came through the railroad, but back to the storm. I can remember that my father had to walk from the courthouse, home, and that was quite a distance, and the wind was so strong by the time it had gotten from the courthouse into the town, because at that time it was quite a way from the courthouse to the school. That was the way the town was built with the courthouse at one end and the school at the other. This is symbolic, you know, and I didn't realize this until I went to Williamsburg. I had to go to Williamsburg to realize the symbolism of this--with law on one side of the town, and education on the other, and the churches in between.

Stephens: I hadn't even thought of that, had you?

McKamey: But . . . he . . . the wind was so strong that he could hardly walk, and he had to crawl part of the way home. And then, he spent his time

with Mother boarding up windows because by that time they knew that it was going to be a blow, and it was a much harder blow than the . . . for us than the '16 one. And I can remember that our house was full of people. They brought their own bedding because we didn't have enough bedding for them, and they were . . . there were pallets, we had four . . . we had wall to wall pallets in our house during that storm, and it . . . it withstood the storm beautifully, which showed that it had been a well-constructed house, and I can remember that my parents were very proud that their house withstood the storm. I also can remember mopping water because in any kind of a storm you're going to mop water, but . . . there was scarcely a shingle off, and the house across the street from us completely collapsed. It was a terrifying experience, really, and, of course, we didn't know right away what had happened to Corpus Christi. We knew that they were having a bad storm just as we were, but we were isolated, and we felt very fortunate that we only got wind and rain, and they had the tidal wave, which we were always told, did a great deal more damage than the wind and the rain.

Sparks: But . . . the . . .

McKamey: I couldn't remember that the wind broke the trees and split the trees terribly. A mesquite is a brittle type of tree, and it can stand a . . . a good bit of wind, but if it gets too much wind, it splits, and our native trees in Kingsville were mesquite.

Sparks: You were . . . this one little thing or two things before our time runs out. You grew up with the Kings and went to school with one of the younger Kings, didn't you?

McKamey: The . . . not the Kings, but the Klebergs . . .

Sparks: Klebergs, uh-huh.

McKamey: . . . and my mother taught some of the children in the family. The chauffeurs would bring them into our house. This was long after Mother quit teaching school. She consented to be their tutor and taught them privately at our house, and I can remember the chauffeur bringing in the children every morning for Mother to teach. And as a little special benefit, he always brought a nice can of fresh milk from the King Ranch Dairy, and during the hunting season, he always brought beautifully cleaned game of all kinds that Mrs. Kleberg would send my mother because Mother was

was actually doing them the favor to teach these young children. My mother and Mrs. Robert J. Kleberg, Sr., were very good friends, and I can remember on one occasion Mrs. Kleberg called Mother; that was after we had a telephone, of course. And she said, "Would you be so kind as to come out and show my cook how to make an angel food cake?" because my mother was considered to be one of the best cooks in town, and she was the first caterist that Kingsville ever had. When I was young, my . . . I was a second family . . . my brothers and sisters were ten, fourteen, and fifteen years older than I, and so when I was little, my mother supplemented our income by doing catering. And she didn't do it as they do it nowadays, but she would make homemade ice cream, homemade cakes and cookies and pies for special occasions. And I can remember that she . . . they sent the chauffeur in, and she went in fine style to the King Ranch to show the cook how to make an angel food cake.

Sparks: Do you realize it's . . .

Stephens: Hattie Bell, you've always been connected with the land in your adult life. This is an important consideration with all people that have

roots in the soil. I want to get your impression of what does land ownership mean to you?

McKamey:

I have to begin with my husband because he was the one that brought me to the land, although it was very much a part of me living in the midst of the King Ranch as I did. Ranching was the main thing I heard. Land was always important. Land was so important that you would sacrifice most anything to keep it. And the slogan in our family has always been "Don't give up the land." No matter what happens to you, don't give up the land. Land means a great deal more than just ground. I think we draw strength from the land. I know that I, being a gardener and loving growing things, derive a certain amount of strength, of poise, of health, well, happiness, contentment. All of the things really that are most important in my life have come from land. And it's not just the money that is made from the land. The land just became a part of me, and I became a part of it. And I'm very, very happy to say that my children feel the same way, and my son, who is twenty-seven years old, is now the fourth generation on this land, and he has come into it with the same feeling that we have had in the

past that somehow this land is very important to us not just as a way of earning a living but as a way of life. It has a strength-giving force to it that I have felt very strongly in my life. It has given me a spiritual strength and a feeling of being closer to God, the creator and preserver of all mankind.