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Interview with
SETH MASSEY
April 8, 1986

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewers: Adelene Martin

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Oral History Collection

Seth Massey

Interviewer: Adelene Martin

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Mrs. Martin: This is an interview with Mr. Seth Massey. Mr. Massey we're going to tape your thoughts on Cascade Plunge and Jerigan Pool, and we're going to use this for our [Texas] Sesquicentennial book. Then after we finish, we'd like to put this tape in the Denton County Museum. Is that all right with you?

Mr. Massey: Yes, sure.

Mrs. Martin: All right. Now, first of all, tell us about Cascade Plunge. Where was it?

Mr. Massey: Back in about 1927 or 1928, they built it, and it had a boarded wall on the front, and it was right directly across from the Morrison Mill tanks. It was about, oh, I'd say, seventy-five feet long and plenty wide, probably thirty-five

feet wide. It had tall [high] diving boards. It had shade over on the sides. It was shaded mostly on the south side. It had a lot of swimmers. I remember a bunch of us used to go in there, such as Bill Williams and Merle Willis.

I used to go with [date] Ann Sheridan. I took Ann in 1930 or 1931 down to the swimming pageant. She won first place as Miss Denton and went down to Fort Worth and won first place. The next thing I knew, she had gone to California. Her name was not Ann Sheridan at the time. They changed it Ann, but her real first name was Clara Lou Sheridan, a sister to the owner of the Sheridan Garage that used to be down on the corner across from the old Southern Hotel.

Martin: Now, who owned this pool? Did the city own it?

Massey: No, Mrs. Hardy was the one that operated it. That's been years ago, and it's pretty hard for me to remember that far back (chuckle). I'd say that it closed out around 1937 or 1938.

I remember that the old Willis Grocery Store used to be up on the corner, just on the corner of East Prairie and...I guess that was old Bois d'Arc Street back in those days. A lot of people don't remember Bois d'Arc Street, but Bois d'Arc is the one that runs

directly in front of the food stores down there and runs into carried into Hickory Street at Travelstead Auto Supply. Oh, I could just keep talking here.

Martin: Well, you go right ahead.

Massey: What all do you want me to tell? Something about the old Gentry and Jernigan Swimming Pool?

Martin: Yes. Now, be sure and tell how you would jump off the high board. Where was the pool?

Massey: Well, it was on Inman Street right parallel...Inman runs parallel to the railroad track way on up close to the freeway. It was, oh, about three hundred yards after you crossed the railroad tracks and turned to the right. It sure did have a lot of swimmers. I have an idea that that was around 1925 to 1935, 1926 to 1935, or something like that.

The Gentry and Jernigan Swimming Pool was just a big, long, ol' swimming pool. It had a tower that you climbed up, oh, about fifteen to eighteen foot high, I'd say. You'd crawl up the ladder, and you'd get on an ol' bag, and it had a trolley that ran down to the end of the water about three feet deep. You'd get on that platform and cross your legs around this bag and hold on to this rope; and then you'd kick off,

off of the platform, and down you'd go. You'd hit the water. Of course, the water would stop you.

Oh, I could just keep talking about a whole bunch of things. There was a lot of people who went out there. I think that it more or less knocked the Cascade Plunge Pool out of business.

Martin: Why? Because it was bigger?

Massey: Well, it was larger, and there was more people going there. The railroad track used to kind of cut across the nursery up there.

Martin: How much did it cost to swim?

Massey: Back then? Oh, they charged us a quarter.

Martin: And you could stay all afternoon?

Massey: Oh, heck, yes. You could stay all day for the quarter.

Martin: Did they have a concession stand? Where you could buy a cold drink?

Massey: Oh, I don't remember for sure whether they did or not.

Martin: Well, you told me something about you almost drowned.

Massey: Oh, that was in the old Cascade Plunge. I was in deep water, and I wasn't a very good swimmer, but I swam with an inner tube; and somebody jerked it out from under me and, heck, I went under a time or two. I hollered, "Help!" Somebody helped me out. It's a wonder that I didn't drown. I didn't know that I was

going to live to be seventy-three with tumors
(chuckle).

All right I could just keep talking old times
here.

Martin: Well, what else can you remember?

Massey: Well, I how about me telling you about how I got the
Massey and Hoffer Service Station.

Martin: All right.

Massey: It was on West Hickory Street. It was the first
filling station out there, right behind the old
Brook's Dairy on the corner of...Brook's Dairy and
Brook's Pharmacy were on the corner of Avenue A and
Hickory Street. There is a car wash there right now
and an old filling station. We used to be the Marathon
dealer out there. Also, we were the first Nash [brand
of automobile] dealer in Denton. We had the two large
Marathon tanks out in the back. If lightning had ever
struck one of them, it would have burnt the whole west
end of town, including all the buildings there. The
old Gross house was right around the corner on Avenue
A, and then the Bradley house is on down the street
a just little farther. That's way back. That was 1929.

Martin: Can you remember anything about the first cars that
came to Denton?

Massey: Oh, man! I'll tell you what. I just wish had some of the old cars that I used to own. I used to have a Pierce Arrow convertible and Cadillac convertibles. I also had a Durant. I used to own a Durant.

Martin: I never heard of that one.

Massey: Well, a lot of people haven't heard of the Durant. I had a Willys--the old Willys car. I've been around. I'm an ex-Ford dealer in Sanger [Texas]. I'm the last Ford dealer out of Sanger. I lost my highway [frontage] and wasn't able to build out on the [new] highway, so I just closed it out.

Martin: What do you remember about the cars?

Massey: About all the cars?

Martin: Yes, because they were competing with the horse and buggy, right?

Massey: Oh, yes. Well, back in those days anti-freeze hadn't even come out, you know. Oh, you could use alcohol. Grain alcohol would boil over. Then you could use coal oil in the old radiators on those little [Ford] Model Ts. We cranked [used a hand crank starter], you know. My brother was cranking one one day, and the crank kicked him and broke his arm. Of course, way back in those days, you know, the gasoline tank for the Model

T Ford was right up in the middle of the front windshield.

Martin: And you used unleaded gas, right?

Massey: Unleaded? Shoot! They had ethyl gasoline then, and they didn't call it unleaded then. That's kind of a new name. It was just plain, old regular gasoline.

Martin: Wasn't it white gas?

Massey: Yes, just plain, old white gas. It was a little yellow, you know.

Martin: And it sold for how much? About fifteen cents a gallon.

Massey: We sold it for...I had a special every time the college was open there. I'd sell it for twelve to fifteen cents a gallon. My special was...there were three of us boys, and we'd take a bunch of circulars and put them under the windshield wiper on the cars and say: "You buy a full tank, and we'll give you a tank." (Chuckle) "Buy one tank, and we'll give you ten gallons," maybe it was. Ten gallons free. "Buy one tank, and the next fill-up, you get ten gallons free." So, prices were way on down there.

They talk about these farmers way back. Well, we used to own a farm. I married in 1934 while I was running a filling station right there where the

Carroll Courts Building is. I had a filling station right there on the corner. I sold gasoline there for nineteen cents a gallon. "Peanut" Smith used to work for me. You know, everybody knows "Peanut" Smith, nearly--Robert Lee Smith. He used to work for me. I called him about two months ago. I said, "'Peanut,' what [schedule] was I paying on a week to work for me? Five or six days a week?" He says, "I'll never forget it." He says, "You was paying me \$37. You raised me from \$35 to \$37 a week." (Chuckle)

Martin: And this was what back in the 1920s?

Massey: No, this was in 1936 when I owned the filling station on the corner where the Carroll Courts Building is located.

I'll never forget that first old fire truck. I had my car parked over there in front of the Linwood Roberson Nursery, which is on the corner of...it was Center Street then. I rode the new ladder truck. We had a new ladder truck--front and rear wheel drive. The man on the front turned his steering all right, but they came around that narrow street there--it was only twenty-five feet wide, I guess--and the back man never could straighten it up quick enough. The front man drove it all right, but the back never did [steer]

his [end] quick enough. He hit my tire and fender. Back in those days, J. L. Roberts was the mayor at the time. The guy in the fire truck just knocked my left front fender off. Heck, I talked to the mayor, and he said, "Well, you can't sue the city!" I said, "Well, I didn't want to sue 'em. I'd just like 'em to pay for it." He said, "Oh, no, they won't." That was the fire truck. They won't pay for it."

There was a little 1935 Ford that I used to race. I could just talk to you all day long about Denton, you know.

Martin: Now, you were born here in Denton.

Massey: No. No, I was eight years old when I came here. I've been here for sixty-five years. I came here in October from Pilot Point [Texas]. We moved from Trent [Taylor County], Texas, because out there it hadn't rained in two years. Trent's right the other side of Merkel [Taylor County], and Merkle's right there the other side of Abilene [Texas], you know. Right nineteen miles before you get to Sweetwater [Texas]. I was born out there, three-quarters of a mile from the old [railroad] depot, out in the country. I was the ninth child. Back in those days, you know, we had big families--kind of like Dolly Parton. She said that

there's twelve in her family. I know that she's done a lot better [financially] than I have (chuckle).

Martin: Well, she has a voice to sing. I guess maybe that's it. What do you remember about the Depression? What were you doing during the Depression? Did you have your service station or farm?

Massey: Ol' Jerry [Hoffer] and I had the filling station on Hickory Street. It was the first filling station out there. Drew Calhoun and Sam...I can just remember his first name.

Martin: Laney?

Massey: Sam Laney. We were the three competitors, and, boy, did we do business with each other! What all would you like me to tell you about, now?

Martin: How did the Depression affect you?

Massey: Well, it was pretty bad. I bought some of the...I spent \$25 on five acres of land in East Texas. I got rich off of it. Daddy said, "Anytime you can double your money, just take up on it." I sold it for \$50 after I bought it for \$25. Boy, I mean to tell you what. That was when the oil boom hit there [reference to the discovery of oil by Columbus Marion "Dad" Joiner in October, 1930, in Rusk County, Texas].

Martin: How did people react here in Denton? You know, the banks started closing, and money was scarce [during the Great Depression].

Massey: Oh, yes. We had the _____ National Bank close over there. At the time, I was a newspaper boy. I was one of the first *Denton Record-Chronicle* sales boys. I used to deliver papers. So, I learned the names of nearly everybody in town when I was carrying the *Denton Record-Chronicle*. That was in 1926 and 1927, back before I went to work at the, this job at the filling station for \$1.00 a day.

Martin: I bet that was quite a bit of money.

Massey: Yes! Heck, yes! I bought that oil stock. It was surprising. I'd work at the ol' Dreamland Theater up on the west side of the square. We'd go to that. I'd take my girlfriend up there and spend fifty cents each. You'd have to have ten cents for a nickel popcorn and a nickel soda pop. Boy, I mean, we'd go every Saturday night and spend my day's salary.

Martin: Do you remember the people here in Denton really suffering because of the Depression?

Massey: No, no. I don't remember it being too bad. We had a big family, but we had plenty to eat, you know. I

don't know that anybody here in Denton...not like it is today. Heck, fire!

Like I started to say a little while ago, I farmed down there right north of Argyle [Texas]. I was farming it in 1934, when I got married, and we didn't ask for any form of relief and all that. We used an old tractor, and I bought nineteen-cents-a-gallon gasoline, and I sold oats for nineteen cents a bushel. Now, how could they get by on that? It's kind of like the oil crisis when oil just jumped from \$6.00 a barrel, and they thought it was going up to \$60. But it went as high as \$40. Now they can't get by on twice that much.

Martin: You went to school here in Denton.

Massey: Oh, yes.

Martin: Did you go to the old school?

Massey: Calhoun? Yes, sure.

Martin: You went to Calhoun? Okay. Where did you go to elementary school? Stonewall Jackson?

Massey: No, it was Sam Houston. We'd have our fire alarms [fire drills], you know, and they rang the old bell, and all the kids would have to run outside. Oh, heck, it was great.

Martin: That's when they had the lower grades on the first floor and the fifth, sixth, and...

Massey: We didn't have but one story then. At old Sam Houston, all I remember is it had just one floor, didn't it?

Martin: No, it had two.

Massey: It might have had two stories.

Martin: Yes, it did.

Massey: I guess you're right.

Martin: My children went there.

Massey: Yes, the old school.

Martin: The one they tore down. Did you ever ride the streetcar when it was operating here?

Massey: Oh, heck, yes! Yes, I remember the streetcars. You'd ride that to Dallas [Texas] and back. Down and back for \$1.00.

Martin: Now, that was the Interurban.

Massey: Yes, the Interurban streetcars.

Martin: Well, I'm saying...

Massey: Streetcars took out here [began to serve Denton] in about 1921. Do you know where their headquarters was?

Martin: Was it the old T&P [Texas and Pacific Railroad] depot? Wasn't that where they started from?

Massey: TWU [Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas] golf course. That was the old streetcar...the streetcar

went up and down Hickory Street. I was here when they took the rails out of Hickory Street.

Martin: Oh, you were? Can you remember when Brook's Dairy was there on Locust Street and the ice house was across the street?

Massey: Mahan Grocery used to be right across the street from there. Sure, that was way on up. That was way on up in the 1940s.

Martin: See, we came in the 1940s.

Massey: That was in around 1940, 1941.

Martin: Who owned that ice house?

Massey: J.B. Martin Lumber Company was right across the street from me.

Martin: That's right. It was.

Massey: Frank Mahan owned the ice delivery house.

Martin: And the Ju-Cy Pig [restaurant] went in?

Massey: Ju-Cy Pig was right directly north...

Martin: Behind it?

Massey: No, north, just 150 feet north of Brook's Dairy.

Martin: Okay, okay.

Martin: When you came, do you remember anything else about-- I'm not sure on the date--Quakertown? The Negroes lived out in, what is now, City Park.

Massey: Oh, man!

Martin: You can remember that?

Massey: The blacks? I remember when they had homes out along Commerce Street. They had several home along Commerce Street, and they had a whole bunch of houses down where the City Park is now located. The city bought them out--paid them a good price--and they went down on East Hickory, mostly. They started "Blacktown" down there.

Martin: Do you remember why the city bought them out? I've heard different stories about why.

Massey: Oh, they wanted to make a park out that.

Martin: It had nothing to do with the TWU girls walking to town?

Massey: No.

Martin: Because that's one of the stories that I've heard.

Massey: That was CIA [College of Industrial Arts, now TWU] then.

Martin: Oh, I know it was CIA. The legislature didn't ask Denton to buy out the blacks and move them out?

Massey: No, I wouldn't think so. They just wanted to get them all together down, I guess, east of the railroad tracks. They paid them pretty well for their property.

Martin: Well, I understand that they even had a store, a little grocery store, and...

Massey: Yes, they had a little ol' grocery store down there, made out of wood. It was right down pretty well close to Commerce, as well as I remember. Do you remember when they had a bandstand down there?

Martin: In the park? Yes, I can remember that. Isn't it still there?

Massey: I wouldn't think so.

Martin: I think that they rebuilt it.

Massey: I never go down that way anymore. Well, you can't go down that way. Down to the library is as far as you can go, and I've never looked across over there.

Martin: Well, I just really appreciate this. I really do.

Massey: Well, we'll have to get together sometime.

[End of interview]