

An Oral History Tape Transcription
Of
Baytown Oral Histories
With
Compere: Jean
Lecturer: Wanda Orton
Of
A Lesson on Texas Heroes in the Baytown area
April 29th 1980
Transcribed by: Lynnette Sargis

(Tape 1 of 2)

Baytown Oral Histories

An Oral History Lesson on Texas heroes in the Baytown area

Compere: Jean

Lecturer: Wanda Orton

Date of Lesson: April 29th 1980

Jean: ...and something of interest in our community, um, from the museum. Tonight, I don't think our speaker needs any introduction; I think everyone knows her. Wanda, she to me is an endless supply of coffee at the *Baytown Sun*. But Wanda is a native Baytonian, she's a 6th generation Texan, and, uh, she does a lot of good research for the museum, and we're very proud to have Wanda tonight to share with us some of the things she has researched on the big board of the Bayshore.

WO: Thank you, Jean.

[Clapping.]

WO: Were there any important people living in the Baytown area back in the 1800's, I mean real heroes of Texas history? I'm glad you asked that. I have this for all home folks, two presidents of the Republic of Texas, two secretaries of state of the Republic of Texas, ex-governor of Tennessee, ex-governor of the state of Texas, governor of Texas, congressman from Texas, congressmen from Tennessee. Let's see, uh, minister of finance from Mexico. Uh, two ambassadors to France. Just, just one ambassador to England -- I'm sorry we fell down on that one -- and, uh, let's see, the founder of the, one of the founders, of the University of Texas. The chairman of the board of regents at the University of Texas, and, uh, the founder of the University of Texas Medici-, medical school at Galveston, founder of Prairie View A&M University and, um, you know as far as war games go we had, well we had a high-ranking official in the Confederate Army here. Not to mention the commander of the Texas Army who became the world's most famous hero of the battle of San Jacinto, and we had uh a veteran of the U. S.-Mexican war, and we had a veteran of the Battle of the Cherokees even, and, you know, the list goes on and on. Uh, sounds like a long list of people for the national hall of fame, a pretty big crowd. Actually we're talking about four, though. We're talking about four men who lived in the Baytown area back in the 1800's, before and after the Texas Revolution. And they lived on our bay, on our waterway spanning from the Zavala Point to Cedar Point, with Lynchburg and Evergreen in-between. Uh another geographic strip might be from Channelview to Beach City with Goose Creek, and Lakewood and Lynchburg in-between. Uh geographically, in that order, we're speaking of: Lorenzo De Zavala at Zavala Point. Now Zavala Point is located in the Channelview area. They say if you get on the Battleship Texas and look straight across the water, that's where Zavala's home site was. Uh, Lorenzo De Zavala was the first Vice President of the Republic of Texas.

Uh, over here in the Lynchburg-Lakewood area -- and I'm so glad to throw in Lakewood, because that brings us inside of our city limits -- uh, David G. Burnet lived. Uh, we think mostly of uh Lynchburg in connection with Burnet. But we have found, uh, this old abstract here from the county courthouse records showing that -- you know where Slapout Gully is? Or Spring Bayou is a more aesthetic name for it? Um, you know the county park in Lynchburg is where Old Burnet's home site was. Well, he skipped over Slapout Gully, he took in Lakewood too. So he belongs to us also. So we have David G. Burnet living on Burnet Bay and, uh, the Lynchburg-Lakewood area, and Dr. Ashbel Smith, he lived on Evergreen Road.

See, his plantation was named Evergreen, hence the name: Evergreen Road there. That's on Tabb's Bay. Uh if you go down to the, if you're not uh familiar with Baytown, go down to the end of Lee Drive. Over to your right is the Goose Creek Oilfield and over to the left is Evergreen Road and on that bluff there is where uh the great Dr. Ashbel Smith lived.

And at Cedar Point lived you-know-who: Sam Houston. Now Huntsville claims to have, uh, Sam Houston. You know, that's where he died, in that funny-looking steamboat house that he just rented; he didn't even own that house. But Cedar Point was where he owned property continuously throughout his marriage, after he married Margaret. Uh, Cedar Point was the home that they always came back to. You know, Sam Houston was a rambling man; he was a restless soul, and he owned four different homes, actually, at one time. But Cedar Point was the place that he loved to go best and Ralph Wooster told me this once: he-, Ralph is a, uh, history teacher at Lamar Texas, Lamar University -- excuse me -- uh, and a renowned authority on Sam Houston and, and Ralph told me that uh Cedar Point definitely was Sam Houston's favorite place. And so I think we should take great pride in having all these famous, wonderful people who lived right here in the Baytown area.

And we've just come across something that's real exciting, too. You know, when you think of the flag, you think of the Lone Star of Texas, and that's it. Well, did you know that the original Lone Star of, uh, Texas in the flags was designed right here in Baytown? This is what it looked like. [Rustling in background.] This is before it got, you know, the other colors, and that's from dear, old William Scott. Now, we're not doing a program about William Scott tonight, I guess we could, because William Scott was very important, too. Uh, this was the flag of the Lynchburg Volunteers, and in all references to William Scott it kind of hacks us to say, to read, that, uh, you know, "William Scott, near Lynchburg." We wish they'd say, "William Scott of Baytown Texas," uh, but at that time, uh, Lynchburg, I guess, was the nearest settlement known as such.

Anyway, this was the, the flag of the Lynchburg Volunteers, and that's our Lone Star. So we can claim the first Lone Star of Texas right here. When Scott lived at Point Pleasant -- that was the name of his very "pleasant" home, located just right, just right over there. Go down Bayway Drive, look over to your left where the Exxon docks are and then just before you get to Bay Villa, that's where Point Pleasant was. And, uh, William Scott's son George Scott, uh, was renowned in a, uh, certain capture of a Mexican vessel, uh -- you know, with all these families living on the water, I think they were pretty sea-worthy, and so he showed his talents in that endeavor in capturing a, a Mexican vessel called the *Correro*.

Now, this is the first official flag of the Republic of Texas, and this is De Zavala's flag; Vice President Lorenzo De Zavala designed this flag.

[Speaking to audience members]: I'm sorry? De Zavala. Did ya'll see the picture of William Scott's flag?

[Continuing speech:] And then going downstream from Channelview, we find good old Lynchburg-Lakewood area residents' flag, and this is David G. Burnet's flag.

Well, so much for flags. Let's talk about these men, our good old home folks here. Um, first upstream, De Zavala. Uh, in 1836, he was in Texas attending the Washington-on-the-Brazos convention. He was a delegate to that convention from the municipality of Harrisburg. That was that area back then. And he was elected vice president of the new Republic of Texas by unanimous vote. Now, Burnet was elected president but -- poor thing -- he had to run for his office. He, uh, it was a close vote, and, uh, he was not voted in unanimous-, unanimously as De Zavala was. Um, De Zavala gave up a very plush, comfortable existence in France, actually, to come back to fight the good fight for Texas. What was he doing in France? Well, he happened to be the minister to France from Mexico. Remember those two ambassadors I mentioned while ago? I was referring to Lorenzo De Zavala, minister to France from Mexico, and also I was referring to Ashbel Smith, who was the minister to France and to England, uh, from Texas.

But Lorenzo De Zavala, if he were living today, I guess he'd probably be described as a um, a wild-eyed liberal. Uh, he really was a radical in, in this sense that he intensely believed in freedom and democracy and the rights of the individual, and he believed in that so strongly that he was willing to, to give up hi-, the easy life in France to come back here. He came back in 1835, actually, and we can credit him with a lot of the, uh, preliminary work that went on before the, uh, revolution actually began. Uh, De Zavala went from town to town drumming up support for the revolution. And believe you me, when De Zavala spoke, they listened. Here was a high, very high-ranking official in the government of Mexico. A very intellectual, aristocratic man. Very impressive gentleman. A former best friend of one and Antonio López de Santa Anna. They grew up together in the Yucatán, in Mexico. They fought together and Zavala thought that they believed in the same things. Um, the name of De Zavala is the first to appear on the 1824 Constitution in Mexico, and you think, "Well, so what, you know, Constitution of Mexico." Well, that was significant not only to Mexico, but to Texas as well because the settlers in Texas were convinced after that co-, constitution was ratified that they, uh, you know, would live under democratic conditions. And they felt that way until Santa Anna proved otherwise. He overthrew, uh, those ideals much to De Zavala's dismay. Uh, but De Zavala had been very active in Mexico, as I mentioned, he had been minister of the Treasury. Uh, he had been a member of the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico. You'd name it, and he did it, he just was fabulous and very, very active in Mexico. Now when he came back to Texas, he had, he'd been married twice actually. He had, um, married in Mexico; he had three children, and one of those children was Lorenzo De Zavala, Jr., who also, uh, became a very important, uh, person in Texas history. And his second wife was one Emily West from New York City. Now I'm sure a man who -- if you've lived here very long, know the Higginbotham family. The late Floyd Higginbotham owned the Higginbotham Motor Company -- you know, right around here on Market Street in Old Baytown. Now Higgy was a grandson of De Zavala, a great-grandson, pardon me. Um, he was, uh, descended directly from Ricardo De Zavala. Now Ricardo De Zavala was just an infant when they came here in 1836; he was just, uh, well I think, one year old. I believe he'd born in New York City in 1835, and so the Zavala family settled here in Texas, and they bought this property over here in the

Channelview area, and they, uh, remained there until, you know, things got pretty heated just before the battle of San Jacinto. I'm sure you've heard of the Runaway Scrape and that's exactly what it was. People were running away, and I do believe if I lived here back then, I probably would have run too.

Because it was after the fall of the Alamo. It was after the terrible massacre at Goliad and after all, the Mexican army was very strong. They had good equipment and the soldiers were well-trained and there was really every reason to believe that, uh, the Mexican war, uh, would be lost, and the Mexican Army would prevail. So after the convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos, uh, the cabinet was relocated to Harrisburg. And, uh, they came down Harrisburg, and then they left again because, you know, here comes the Mexican Army. And meanwhile Zavala had to do something about his family so you know where they went to first, when they were fleeing from Santa Anna? Uh over here at the Exxon docks. They--;

[Audience member speaks inaudibly]

WO: [Laughs.] They did. Uh, at Point Pleasant, along with, uh, a lady named Emily Perry who -- you probably never read her name in history-- but she was the sister of the great Stephen F. Austin. Emily Perry was there, and Mrs. Zavala, and the little kids were there, and so Mrs. Zavala, though, had buried some treasures, some valuables on their land over there in Channelview, and she was determined to get them, to retrieve them, uh, before they left. See, their plan was to, uh, after they got here at the Exxon docks, they were gonna, uh, catch a boat and go to New Orleans. That's how they were going to escape from the war. So Mrs. Zavala got in this rowboat and she left the Exxon docks, and she was going up the stream fast as she could to, to get back to her land, and here comes Old Man Lynch. Uh, Old Man Lynch -- I'm referring to Nathaniel Lynch of the Lynchburg Ferry, he's the one that, that charged these high prices for people to go across the Lynchburg Ferry when they were fleeing for their lives, and, uh -- but Burnet stopped that, by the way. Uh, anyway, here comes the Lynch family in a rowboat coming downstream, and they tell Mrs. Zavala, "Forget it," you know, to get back to, uh, Point Pleasant as fast as she can, so she did. And so, it-; uh, soon after that, Mrs. Zavala and the kids and whoever else was in that party, uh, got on a wagon and they rode to Goose Creek. So they got to the mouth of Goose Creek, and they got on this schooner and they, they sailed away to Galveston. Meanwhile, De Zavala, you know the cabinet was relocated again, so he, he went to Galveston, where the temporary capitol of Texas was being set up.

But what about Burnet and his family? Well, there were no plans for the Burnets to go to New Orleans. Knowing how poor Burnet was, he probably didn't have, you know, the wherewithal to get to New Orleans. So he was going to, uh, do it the hard way, and take his family with him to Galveston. And there's a real exciting chase story in that. Uh, they went to Morgan's Point, uh, you know, about where Barbour's Cut is? Where all those big cargo-containing ships come in now? Uh, there were no big ships in; they were all just little-bitty things, so they got to Morgan's Point, and there was this steamboat out in the water they had to reach to sail to Galveston. And they got into the skiff and, uh, no sooner got in the skiff trying to get to the steam boat when, you know, Mexicans are coming, here they come, and, uh, David G. Burnet, uh, he must have had a death wish or something, I don't know. But he stood up, you know -- big as life -- in this small skiff, like, you know, "Shoot me if you can!" And Mrs. Burnet was nearly as bad; she was real

hard-headed, too. And she said “They will not get me, if I have to jump in this water with a child under each arm and drown before the Mexican Army is going to get me.” Well, what happened? There they were, all exposed and the Mexican Army, you know, just right after ‘em. We can, uh, give all the credit to a certain Colonel Juan Almonte; that’s spelled A-L-M-O-N-T-E, if you ever go around the battleground, you’ll probably see this marker every now and then uh that says this is uh Juan Almonte’s camp where the worst carnage of the battle of San Jacinto occurred. Okay, Juan Almonte said, “Cease fire. You’re not gonna shoot at that boat because a woman is in that boat.” So that’s what saved the life of, uh, David G. Bu-, David G. Burnet and his family.

Okay, the Mexican Army, after they did not shoot the President of Texas, um, had to do something, so they burned the town down. They burned down Morgan’s Point. By the way, the owner of Morgan’s Point, the man who settled that area is one, uh, Captain James Morgan, and he was real busy in Galveston at the time, tending to a lot of army business and he wasn’t there to protect anything; he couldn’t have done anything anyway. They burned it down, and, of course, Morgan’s Point -- I might throw in the, uh, the Yellow Rose of Texas story. That’s where Santa Anna, uh, found this beautiful slave, and her name was Emily, uh, Emily Morgan. And, uh, Emily went on with Santa Anna to the Battle of San Jacinto.

But anyway, after they burned the town down, after Santa Anna found his beautiful slave girl, they were going, uh, hot-trotting it over to San Jacinto. You know that’s where they were going to meet up with, with old Sam. Well, the story goes that Juan Almonte looked over here at the Exxon docks, saw the, uh, Point Pleasant home and said, “That’s my prize.” You know, after we win the war, that’s gonna be where I’m gonna be, and I want that house. Uh, but I’ve read a little bit further about that, and actually that’s misleading. That sounds like he saw Point Pleasant for the first time. Actually no, he was well acquainted with Point Pleasant, because Juan Almonte used to come down here all the time on official visits for the government of Mexico, on inspection trips, and he would stay at Point Pleasant and, uh, he was wined and dined with the, the William Scott family, and actually, they were good friends.

But all friendship aside, he really did want that house, real bad. And I’ve often thought, what if the Mexican Army had won that battle? And what if Juan Almonte did take over the Exxon docks, uh, the William Scott home? We might have different street names here. We have two streets over in Goose Creek named William Street and Scott Street. That’s for the William Scott survey, ‘cause, by golly, William Scott owned this town. He was one of the earliest settlers. So what if we, uh, had a Juan Street and an Almonte Street? You know, if he had displaced William Scott?

By the way, William Street often is, is spelled and mispronounced as “Williams,” uh, with a “S.” In fact, I didn’t know any better until one day I asked good old B. B. Williams if he, if William Street was --; I said, “Is that named after you, B. B.?” And he said, “No,” and I really thought that could be feasible, cause B. B. was a developer of that area, and he explained to me, “No, that is the, the William Scott, uh, Survey.” Hence, the street names of William and Scott.

And while I was working on this program the other night, uh, Deacon called, and we were talking about different names of streets and schools here, and Deacon pointed out the fact that here in Baytown, we have streets named after these, after three of these people we’re talking about tonight. We have a Houston Street and uh, oh do we have Burnet Streets, you know.

Burnet, Burnet, Burnet even, and then after you get through with the Lakewood Burneting, you get over to Burnet Street in Lynchburg, uh, and of course we have Ashbel Street. That's named after Ashbel Smith. Uh, we don't have a, uh, De Zavala Street, but Channelview does, right nearby. And I'm proud to say we have all the schools here, you know, represented by those four men, Sam Houston and Ashbel Smith and De Zavala and Burnet. So I think that's very good and fitting that we do have these men remembered thusly.

Okay, have we got to the battle of San Jacinto yet? There was a story, another story I was gonna tell about a Mexican officer I told you about -- Juan Almonte. And I'll tell you about another one who had, uh, kind of an indirect connection with the Baytown area. Uh, that's General Castrillón. Have you ever heard of Castrillón? Uh, if you'll go over to the battleground and look at the uh Zavala, De Zavala plaque, you know this memorial area? Look on the names that they list there of all the people who were buried at De Zavala Cemetery, and you might be surprised to find out that one of them was a high-ranking officer in the Mexican Army. That's General Castrillón. Castrillón hated Santa Anna's guts. He just despised him, and he, he told him so. He, he thought he was dumb; he thought he was awful, and he said so in his presence all the time. And I guess Santa Anna never did anything about it because Castrillón was such a valuable officer. But also Castrillón was a very dear friend of our Lorenzo De Zavala.

Well, this is what happened during the battle of San Jacinto with General Castrillón. He was at this cannon that was quickly put out of service by the Texas soldiers. And the other Mexican soldiers who were with him, they either fled or they were killed, you know, right on the spot. So it ended up with General Castrillón staying right there, all by himself, by this gun that wouldn't shoot and, you know, here comes the, the Texans - bang, bang, bang -- the soldiers, right at him. Well, it so happened, though, right upon the scene Thomas J. Rusk entered. Now Thomas J. Rusk was the Secretary of War, and you would think they would obey the orders of the Secretary of War, but they didn't. Uh, Rusk said, "Cease fire." But they just kept on coming and Castrillón stood there, I-; sounds like Burnet standing up in his boat -- but anyway, he, he stood there and he said, "I have fought forty battles in my life, and I've never run away from any of them, and I'm not going to run away now."

So they mowed him down. No matter what Rusk said, they killed him right there. So several days after the battle of San Jacinto, when De Zavala was able to return to the area, the first thing he wanted to know was, you know, was Castrillón alive? And when he was told that he was killed, um -- I hate to tell ya'll, you probably read this before anyway -- but you know, after the Battle of San Jacinto, they did not remove the bodies; they were all over the place. Much to the chagrin of the owner of the property by the way, one Peggy Cor-, McCormick. They said she was a hot-headed Irish lady who, who cussed and raved and uh you know she said get those bodies off her property. Anyways, a lot of the bodies were still there, and they were decomposing and such, and, uh, it was a terrible sight. De Zavala searched all over for General Castrillón's body, and he found the body, and, of course, it was half-naked and decom-, and decomposed, and De Zavala picked him up and he carried him over to the, the waterway there, you know, Buffalo Bayou, and took him in the boat, the body, in the boat and took him to the family cemetery, and that's why Castrillón is buried in the, uh, De Zavala family cemetery.

Uh, you must know, too, that when they relocated the cemetery, the De Zavala cemetery, it was not possible to relocate the graves. Uh, Zavala's land suffered from a well-known Baytown plight called subsidence. Throughout the many years, the, uh, Zavala property has just sunk into the sea, and so they recovered as many markers, grave markers, tombstones that they could, and they put them over at the battleground, and then put up some new, ah, memorial plaques there.

Uh, Zavala's home, after the war was fought, was used as hospital for both the Texas and the, uh, Mexican soldiers. And we might add, too, that we had a hospital going right here in Baytown, Texas, uh, at Memorial Stadium, in fact. That's where Doctor Harvey Whiting practiced medicine. Now, Harvey Whiting -- you won't find his name on any list of, uh, surgeon generals or anything like that because he was a Quaker; he did not believe in war. Um, but he was a very kind man and, and like William Scott, he was an early settler here who had a league of land. We have, just like we have the William Scott Survey, we have the Harvey Whiting Survey; we have Harvey Street and Whiting Street.

Okay. Uh, Dr. Whiting treated, uh, the Mexican and the Texas soldiers right here in the heart of Baytown, and I think it's, it's very interesting to note that, uh, Dr. Harvey Whiting was probably the first doctor, medical doctor, in Baytown, Texas. And just this last summer, I was proud to write a little story about another new doctor in Baytown, Texas, uh, Matthew Brunson Martin, Raymond and Mary Martin's son, Matthew, that I, I knew him since he was a little bitty thang, and he, uh, is a new doctor and he is a direct descendant of Dr. Harvey Whiting. So the, the medical tradition goes on. I think that's real neat.

Uh, Lorenzo De Zavala, whatever happened to him? You don't hear anything about him much after the Republic of Texas, I mean after 1836, because he died. He died an untimely death, contracted pneumonia, and he was just, I think, 47 years old. He died just a few months after the battle of San Jacinto, and it's interesting to speculate what would have happened if Lorenzo De Zavala had lived. Because you know what he told somebody? He said that in 12 months, he would be back in Mexico and elected the president of Mexico. He really believed that he could do that. He said that Santa Anna's regime was so, uh, weakened that he could take over Mexico -- uh, win by popular election, that is, he would not be a, a dictator -- and I think it would have been interesting to see if that would have happened. Because certainly he would have been a strong leader, and he would have been a wonderful leader and we would probably wouldn't have any problems at all with Mexico after that. Because, uh, he strongly believed in Texas independence, and he would have always been on our side, that's for sure.

But, uh, I mentioned -- or did I mention -- that Lorenzo De Zavala's son, Jr., fought at the battle of San Jacinto. And I love to, to read about this. He, Lorenzo Jr. -- now, keep in mind they were a very aristocratic family, and you know really used to being waited on, servants hand and foot. So Lorenzo Jr. goes off to war, but not without his French valet -- and, you know, I keep thinking about a French valet waiting on him, you know, it, I can see it, you know: if, "Is my uniform were awry," you know, and, "Fix my gun," and everything. Um, so he had his French valet with him during the battle of San Jacinto while his father was over in Galveston tending to business with the cabinet. So after the battle of San Jacinto, you know, one day afterward Santa Anna was captured over there at the Washburn Tunnel, in fact, at Vincent Bayou. So Santa Anna was brought back, and they needed an interpreter. You know that famous scene, uh, old Sam under

the oak tree, you know, San-, Santa Anna brought before him. Uh, Lorenzo Jr. served as an interpreter, and a weird thing took place, as far as the accounts I've read. Uh, Santa Anna, when he first recognized Lorenzo Jr. he, he embraced him and said, "Oh, my friend, my long lost friend, my best friend's son; it's so wonderful to see you!" And they said Lorenzo Jr. stiffened, and he withdrew, and he really rebuffed him. And, uh, when Santa Anna said, "My dear friend," old Jr. said, "It *once* was so, sir." And he really gave him the cold shoulder, so much so, they said that Santa Anna just broke down in tears. He was just crushed that Lorenzo Jr. greeted him thusly. Now that's really hard for me to believe, uh, that he cried because of that. I guess Santa Anna really did cry because there were witnesses that said he did. Okay, he really cried. But do you think he was really crying because of that? I think that Santa Anna, poor thing, he was looking for an excuse to cry, you know. He'd been captured; it enough to cry about, and I think that was just his, his excuse to cry. Besides that, "best friends" -- my foot. Uh, Santa Anna had issued an order in early 1835 or year before that, an order for De Zavala's head. He said, Santa Anna said, "I will not invade Texas if someone will be so kind as to send me the head of that traitor Lorenzo De Zavala." And also, uh, Santa Anna's brother-in-law, General Cos was at San Antonio—

[END OF TAPE 1]

[TAPE 2 of 2]

WO: Between, uh, De Zavala and Santa Anna at that point. At one time they were good friends, but no more. Something else kinda funny about Santa Anna and De Zavala: remember the cabinet was located temporarily at Harrisburg. And they had to vacate, uh, abandon the cabinet of Harrisburg to go to Galveston. This is before the invasion uh, just before a few days before the Battle of San Jacinto. You know, here, here they come -- the Mexican Army.

So they were on the run. So Santa Anna he, he had this thing about burning things down. You know, besides burning down Morgan's Point, before that, he burned down Harrisburg. He got there and he was so mad that the cabinet fled, because, of all things, Santa Anna wanted to capture the cabinet. He wanted the president and the vice president of the Republic of Texas. But they had already fled, so he burned the place down, and so would you believe after the Battle of San Jacinto, De Zavala was asked by Santa Anna, "Why didn't you wait for me at Harrisburg?" You know, [laughs] and, uh, De Zavala said something like, you know, "You gotta be kidding me!" But he said "Indeed, I was persecuted by you enough down in Mexico, I didn't have to wait at Harrisburg to be persecuted by you."

So we'll go on downstream here from Zavala Point and come on into Burnet Bay, Lynchburg and, uh, let's come right out Slapout Gully. You want to come on in right between Lakewood and Lynchburg, and um, meet the Burnet family. We have, well Sam Houston called him, among oth- other things, "Old Davey G." His name indeed was David G. Burnet, and he had a wife and small children with him at Lynchburg, and, um, they were not well fixed at all. Poor old Burnet - he never could do well at anything he tried. He couldn't make money with his saw mill at Lynchburg; he was lawyer and his clients wouldn't pay him. He never got enough pay from the government of Texas, and even when he was at Harrisburg someone got his horse, someone in the Texas Army stole his horse; he finally got that back. Now I read another account when, after uh, he fled to Galveston, well, he couldn't find his dogs; somebody got his dogs. Uh, they

ransacked his house, you know, the Mexican Army. Well I-; no, I take that back. The Mexican Army did not do that; they were accused of this, but I hate to tell you a lot of the looting and pilfering that went on you know before the battle of San Jacinto, uh, was not the Mexican Army. Texicans instead of Mexicans. Anyway, poor old Burnet, uh, it seems like in history he's, he was given the shaft in life and in death too; there just seems to be no proper memorial for that man even though he, he, uh, labored all his life here for Texas. Um, right here in Baytown, for instance, we...The marker on Decker Drive, you know, that tells you where to, to find Burnet's home in Lynchburg down over there...Uh, if you've ever seen it, you know it's just, you know, it's just sunk in the ground. To me, that's kind of symbolic of poor old Burnet's plight.

Um, now listen, there is a very nifty, beautiful, impressive statue, life-size statue, of David G. Burnet. There really is, no kidding, no kidding. There really was a big statue made of the first president of the Republic of Texas. You know where it is? Ever heard of Clarksville? Clarksville is, you know, it's way up there; it's uh, I'm not putting down Clarksville; it's very historic town. In fact, they said that was the first place that, uh, Sam Houston went to when he first went to Texas was Clarksville, very historic. But David G. Burnet's statue doesn't belong in Clarksville. Uh, it's on the campus of the high school in Clarksville. And the funniest thing, we've been trying to, to make pictures of that darn statue for months. Um, on a trip upstate several months ago, my husband and I drove 100 miles out of the way to go pay our respects to Old Davey G. in Clarksville. We were gonna get a picture of, of the statue of Burnet on the campus of the Clarksville High School. So we rode in there, and, uh, the high school was still in session at the time. There were some kids who, uh, were on KP duty or something, and they were picking up old potato chip wrappers and stuff. You know, the kids eat their lunch everyday on poor Old Davey G.'s statue at Clarksville; they don't care who he is. Uh, but to say anything about taking a picture, it turned out dark, and my husband really is a pretty good camera man and, uh, especially 35 mm, and I think he used two different cameras, and all of 'em turned out dark and so Skeeter thought it was just because he wasn't getting the light meter reading, you know. He, he didn't get his meter reading up close enough to the statue, instead he was going by the meter readings too far back. So I thought, "Well, that's, that's enough." Jean Shepard was gonna go up that way anyway, and Jean could get a, uh, picture for us with her polaroid. Would you believe they're all dark? And then I talked to Keith Thompson, who used to be the photographer for the *Baytown Sun*, and asked Keith when he was up that way -- he goes to college upstate -- um, please get us a picture of David G. Burnet. Well, I haven't talked to Keith directly, but I have heard, Keith -- and he is a very, very good photographer -- they all turned out dark.

So we've decided the problem is Davey G. wants to come home! He wants to be down here [audience laughs]. He doesn't wanna stay up there in Clarksville where the kids paint him up with shaving cream every day, you know, and um, another reason he really doesn't belong in Clarksville, to tell you the truth, they're pretty gung ho on the Confederacy. In Clarksville, as you go through their courthouse square there, you'll see, you know, a shrine to the Confederacy everywhere you look. And it's so ironic because -- listen -- Davey G. was not a Confederate man. He -- and by that, I mean he was not, uh, for secession. He definitely wanted to stay in the Union, as did Sam Houston, which you've probably heard. And then another ironic thing is Clarksville's connection with Sam Houston's debut in Texas, the fact that, that Burnet and Houston were not the best of friends.

But who in the heck was David G. Burnet? Where'd he come from? What was he doing down here? Well, they say you wouldn't have known it to of seen him because he looked so conservative and drab and well just like some kind of non-entity, but you know he had very colorful life? Exciting soldier-of-fortune kind of life before he ever came to Baytown? Um, he was born in New Jersey, a member of a very prominent, uh, family that goes way up, way back before the American Revolution, of course. Uh, his parents died when he was young, and he was raised by his older brothers. And one of those brothers, incidentally, was the mayor of Cincinnati. You know the, the famous Twin Sisters are...that we're so proud of? Those two guns that they have a replica of at the battleground? Well, they say that Burnet played no small part in getting the Twin Sisters here because the people of Cincinnati were very strong, very high on the Burnet family and, uh, that was our Cincinnati connection.

But anyway, uh, Burnet, when he was very young man, decided that he would go off and free Venezuela. Well, what was wrong with Venezuela? Well, back then Venezuela, like all South American countries, were under the dictatorship of Spain. Well, he met up with this man named Francisco Miranda, who said "Well, we're gonna go down there, and the British Empire is gonna support us, and we've got it made, and we're going to free Venezuela from the tyranny of Spain." So that appealed to David G. Burnet. But, you know, things always went wrong for Burnet, and the Miranda Expedition was one of the things that went wrong. Actually, what happened, the prime minister of England, William Pitt, died, and he was the one who backed this plan. So they didn't get the reinforcements that they had expected. So they, they failed in their attempt to liberate Venezuela from Spain. 'Course years later, it was liberated by Bolívar.

Anyway, Burnet was returning to the United States from Venezuela after that ill-fated expedition, and, uh, he contracted yellow fever and nearly died. And, and nearly everybody on the boat died, uh, and it was a terrible experience for him. He wound up eventually in Louisiana, running a store. And, uh, I've read several different accounts of his illness, but it sounds like he must have had tuberculosis. And his doctor said, "The only thing that's gonna help you is to get out of this damp climate, and go to a high dry climate like, you know, Texas." So, uh, yeah, [laughs] he wound up in Baytown of all places, um, with our low, wet climate. Anyway, Burnet uh, took off for Texas. Now this was, uh oh, it was before 1820, and that was before we had, uh, there were just hardly any settlers at all – Anglo-American settlers -- in Texas at that time. Um, he-, first he went to Nacogdoches, and there were some people there, of course. But after that, he kept on going west and man he didn't meet up with *anybody*, and he, he was just alone on horseback, and you could just imagine the sight of this poor, lonely man.

So who do you think took him in? The most, one of the most vicious tribes in the history of the world, the Comanche. Now, you know, Sam Houston could brag about living with the Cherokees. I wouldn't mind living with the Cherokees; they were civilized people and good folks, but I wouldn't wanna be with the Comanches, not from what I've heard. Um, but they said that reason the Comanches didn't capture him and torture him and eventually kill him like they did everybody else, they felt sorry for him, they really did. Here's this poor sick man, and they, they were kind to him actually. They took him in, and he took what I'd call the Comanche cure. He lived outdoors; he lived on buffalo meat and other wild meat for a long time. Meanwhile, the Comanches were to their old bad tricks. They, uh, they loved to steal horses, and they not only stole horses, they would steal the people with them. And their favorite occupation was to go way

down below the Rio Grande and, uh, capture the Mexicans and their horses and bring them up to the Comanches and, uh, they were just terrible. They would, uh, you know the stories you've read about them apparently are true; they did torture their prisoners quite a bit. Uh, if they didn't kill 'em, they just drove 'em crazy with torture, but they loved those horses. Well, finally Burnet had recuperated enough that he could leave, and he did in-, a very nice thing when he left the Comanche bunch. He gave them all of his personal valuables, any -- all his personal garments that were worth anything at all -- in trade for some Mexican captives in the Comanche's camp. And I thought that was very commendable of him, and so when Burnet left the Comanches, he took, he liberated some Mexican captives with him.

So eventually Burnet uh went back. He, he married Hannah Este, and they came back to Baytown on this, uh, ship that landed at Bolívar, right in the middle of a good old Texas Hurricane. And, uh, the ship was aground and waves were, you know, uh, all around them and about to overwhelm them, and Hannah Burnet's introduction to Texas was wading through the Gulf, literally, to get to the beach. And I've often thought this was, must have been, kind of an omen of, of stormy life to come for the Burnets.

But be that as it may, we cannot forget that Burnet had his faults, I know. He was a prude; he was Mr. Goody Two Shoes, and he was the opposite of life of the party. But let us not forget: he did work hard, diligently for Texas. He served not only as our first president of the Republic of Texas and the ad-interim governor. He served again, uh, in the capacity of vice president under Lamar, and actually for several months, now, when Lamar was supposed to be president, Burnet was president, really. Um, I don't know what you think of Lamar -- he certainly was the father of education, and a, a wonderful Texas hero himself -- but he tended to be nervous. Uh, Lamar kind of cracked up under the strain, to tell you the truth, and, uh, someone had to take over. And Burnet did, and he, he did as well as he could. Of course, it wasn't as well as Sam Houston wanted, but Sam Houston never liked anything that Old Davey G. did.

Um, see, the trouble between Sam Houston and Burnet actually began at Washington-on-the-Brazos, at the convention. You know, when they declared the, uh, Declaration, uh, when they passed the Declaration of Independence. Before that, uh, Houston and Burnet had been pretty good friends, but, uh, Sam Houston had a drinking problem, and, uh, he and his drinking buddies would keep Burnet awake at night, and Burnet was very critical of people who, uh, would drink, and he called Sam Houston, "The Big Drunk," all the time. Well, actually, he didn't have to put up with Sam Houston too long at Washington-on-the-Brazos, because, as you know, the news came of the fall of the Alamo while they were there, and so Old Sam had to sober up real quick then. And he, you know, he hot-trotted down to Gonzales to get the army all ready.

But anyway, um, there was these two famous Texas heroes over here at Beach City and Lynchburg ya-ya-ing back and forth all through the years of Texas' colorful history. Um, Sam Houston, he knew what would really irritate Burnet. He called him "[W-]" and I could just hear burnet saying "[W-], wh-, wh-, what does that mean?" And Old Sam would say, "Hog thief," you know, an Indian name for hog thief. And Burnet: "You big drunk; you half Indian, you big drunk," and then Sam Houston would say, "You hypocrite! I know you like to tip that French brandy under the table when nobody's looking. I know you're, you're not a teetotaler like you claim to be."

But anyway, uh, as the years passed on, I think both of them kind of mellowed; let's hope they did. In fact one time at Cedar Point, uh, Nanny, one of Sam Houston's daughters, returned to Cedar Point in Galveston one day and she said, "Oh Father, I met an old friend of yours in Galveston today, and he spoke so highly of you, and he said you were such good friends during the, the early days of Texas." And Sam Houston said, "Who are you talking about?" "Judge Burnet," and they said Sam Houston didn't say anything. He kind of smiled, you know, but he never told his daughter -- at least not that time -- about all the, the trials and tribulations that they had.

But to go on about the, uh, credentials and the contributions of David G. Burnet: after he served as the, um, acting president now under Lamar, uh, Sam Houston ran for president again, and he ran against Burnet, and that's when it really got hot. When Burnet and Houston squared off for the presidency, and there they were, uh, Sam Houston over here at Cedar Point, and Burnet over here in Lynchburg. Both of them running kind of an underground press. Um they were writing these scathing articles about each other and using pen names. You know, and everybody knew who they were and what they were up to.

But I read about one account where, uh... Now, Ashbel Smith, he really didn't get involved in personalities so much like the others; he was a diplomat if there ever was one. But, uh, Sam Houston would get Ashbel Smith to, to proof-read, you know, all this terrible stuff he was writing about David G. Burnet and they just worked you know, way into the night writing these horrible thing and going [silly mimicking laugh], "This will really get David G." Um, so the outcome of that, of course, Sam Houston was elected president. Poor Old David G., he couldn't win anything. In fact, they said he couldn't be elected the Second [inaudible] General of Texas.

So he, afterward though, he didn't quit; he stayed in there. And he became the, uh, Secretary of State, uh, under Governor Henderson. He holds the distinction of being the first Secretary of State of Texas when, after Texas was admitted to the Union. So we've got that to brag about here in, in Baytown. Plus, we've got the last Secretary of State under the Republic to brag about, and that was Ashbel Smith. So Ashbel Smith and David G. Burnet were the men I was referring to a while ago that's our two Secretaries of State. So David G., after serving as Secretary of State, he did bow out of politics for a while. And, as you know, along towards the 1860's, the Civil War was brewing. That was the, a terrible traumatic time for everyone. Uh, but after the Civil War, by then Burnet had moved to Galveston after Hannah died. You know, she's buried over there on Burnet Drive in Lakewood.

Um, he, he was very lonely. He had originally... they had four children; three of them died. They had one left, William Burnet, who was a soldier. Uh, so William Burnet, his son, saw how lonely he was, and he said "Why don't you, um, rent your place here in Lynchburg and go live in Galveston with, uh, your dear friend, General Sidney Sherman." Which he did. So meanwhile, the Civil War broke out, and Burnet was against it; he was against secession, as was dear Old Sam. Uh, Sam, at the time of Civil War, was the governor of Texas. He gave up being governor because he stood up for his principles, and that was written about by John F. Kennedy in *Profiles in Courage*, uh, as an example of true courage. You know, when you *really* believe in something, whether you're right or wrong, you have to have the courage of your convicti-, convictions, certainly as Sam Houston did. He refused to take the oath of the Confederacy.

Meanwhile, Burnet's son was already in the Army. He was trained to be a soldier, so you know, matter of fact he had to go to war right away. Uh, as it turned out, William Burnet was killed at Mobile, Alabama, shortly before the Civil War ended in, uh, '65.

Sam Houston didn't want his son, Sam Jr., fighting in the Confederacy, but what you can you do? There he was, Sam Houston Jr., over there at Cedar Point, just a stone's throw away from Evergreen, and you what was going on at Evergreen? Dear old Ashbel Smith was organizing the Bayland Guards and they were working out and going through maneuvers, uh, right there at, on the bluff over Tabbs Bay, and uh his regiment was composed of good old East Harris County and West Chambers County boys. And some time ago Deacon Jones did some research on Ashbel Smith's Bayland Guards, and I dug up this paper the other night and, looking through the names here, I won't read 'em all -- it's too many. But I see good old Barbers Hill and Cedar Bayou and Goose Creek names. Dougal -- you know, that's about as Chambers County as you can get -- uh Fisher, uh, oh what else? Rhea spelled R-H-E-A, of course, it's a long-time Cedar Bayou name, uh, Fitzgerald, Tompkins, uh, and, and so on. They're, they're names of, of I'm sure these are ancestors of people we've got right here now in Baytown; they're bound to be. Um, now there were two famous soldiers in Ashbel Smith's Bayland Guards. Bayland, by the way was named, I'm sure you can make the connection to the Bayland Orphanage. We've have the Bayland city park now over there off Highway 146.

Anyway, there were Sam Houston, Jr. and Anson Jones' sons. Uh, Anson Jones was the last president of the Republic of Texas. Anson Jones himself did not live here, but his widow did. After he died, Mrs. Jones, uh, lived right in the heart of Pelly up there on South Pruett. Uh, she bought land from, uh, Ashbel Smith's brother, I think, or Tuck and Henderson. Anyway, my favorite theme to, to read about in the Bayland Guards is this: they didn't have a drum and bugle in the Bayland Guards. But they had this guy named Jim Hagerman that played a pretty mean fiddle, and so that's what Ashbel Smith used, you know, to rally uh his forces, a fiddler. And it sounds so funny, I'll read this verbatim what Deacon wrote. He said, "As Captain Smith set about drilling his men on his plantation on the bay at Evergreen, he had no bugles or drums and Jim Hagerman was a good fiddler, so he was pressed into service as a one-man band," and, get this: "When the Bayland Guards went to Houston to enter Camp Van Dorn, Captain Smith marched at the head of the company. He was preceded by Jim Hagerman playing a lively tune on his fiddle. As the company marched into camp, some of the other groups in the camp were highly amused by this. When Captain Smith was asked why he used such music he said, 'My men are so rambunctious and eager for war that I have to use music from string instruments to soothe them.'" [Audience laughs.]

Can't you just see that...you know, fiddler on the road going down. That's great. Okay what about good old Ashbel Smith? His credentials go, you know, his credentials alone fill up the whole thang. What a man. Terrific. Uh, he was a Connecticut Yankee. He received his uh medical degree from Yale. Uh, he practiced and studied medicine in France; he was a friend of the novelist James Fenimore Cooper and also, uh, Lafayette, you know the hero of the American Revolution from France. Uh, he spoke French fluently, of course, and so he came actually after uh, the shooting was over, after the fireworks. He didn't get here till 1837; he was a latecomer on the scene. You know, I've often thought of the four men we're talking about tonight, the two who did not know each other were Ashbel Smith and Lorenzo De Zavala, because De Zavala

died before Ashbel Smith arrived here. I think they would have been terrific friends. They would have had a lot, they were both medical doctors, did you tell that De Zavala was a medical doctor? Uh, they were both doctors; they had both lived in France, and they were, they just seem like they would have hit it off real well.

But anyway, Ashbel Smith came here in '37 and Sam Houston immediately made him the Surgeon General of the Army of Texas. And so at the time, in '37, the capitol was located in Houston and, um, uh, Ashbel Smith moved in to the capital, uh, with Sam Houston, and they said they had some good times. I'm about to tell you some historical gossip. They had some pretty wild parties. Um, but eventually Ashbel Smith resigned as the Surgeon General, and he went to Galveston to practice medicine, and he got involved right in big middle of the 1839 yellow fever epidemic, and it was terrible. But he was terrific in that they say he saved many hundreds of lives because of his, uh, expertise in, uh, medicine. Uh, he--; that was his first claim to fame really, the yellow fever epidemic in Galveston in 1839. So, you know, he had his eye on the medical community in Galveston from the very start. It's no wonder that he wound up as, uh, one of the prime movers and shakers behind the, uh, University of Texas medical school at Galveston. Another ironic twist: you know that beautiful old building at the medical school in Galveston they call Old Red? You know, that's kinda cute. But why don't they call it by its real name? It's the Ashbel Smith building, uh, and I think they should call it that as a tribute to the great Ashbel Smith. So, Ashbel Smith became the ambassador to France and to England; he knew all the high, highest-ranking people and royalty in Europe. He was on speaking terms, he was on party terms with them; he socialized; they said he danced with Queen Victoria.

He, he knew them all; he liked them, and they liked him. He was a real different man, a real old smoothie, I guess you could call him. Um, he never married; he was a bachelor, uh, but they said he came here in the first place because he was trying to forget a girl. He had a long lost girlfriend up east, I guess. Uh, and I read somewhere else where he was courting William Scott's daughter from here at Point Pleasant but ever came of that, and Sam Houston, after he got married, just worked very hard to get Ashbel Smith married. He was always telling him about, you know, some pretty girl he wanted him to meet. But he did not marry.

Uh, he went on after he served, uh, as the ambassador to, uh, France and to England. He got involved in something called the Smith-Cuevas Treaty, and that's kind of, um, an unhappy episode in his, uh, otherwise fairly happy life. Uh, he negotiated this treaty with Mexico, uh, and this was in a very, very ticklish, delicate stage for Texas with the annex by the United States, and every time you made a move, you know, somebody said it was wrong. Uh, but he was greatly criticized for negotiating this treaty with Mexico, uh, saying that we-; that Texas would always be independent because it was like we were courting Mexico's favor, and poor old Ashbel Smith was hung in effigy, and he was criticized when actually he was just carrying out the orders of higher authorities when he negotiated that treaty. But after he, uh, served as the ambassador to France and England, he served as Secretary of State, as I mentioned, and then after Texas was admitted to the union, he was a state representative. Uh, we think that Joe Allen was the first state representative in Baytown, but he wadn't, Ashbel Smith was.

Um, Ashbel Smith, too, was responsible for some important legislation. He, he passed legislation for railroad construction, and for payment of the public debt, and for many other significant

things. But you know Lamar is always called the “Father of Education” in Texas. Well, that’s fine; he is. But why don’t we call Ashbel Smith the “Father of Higher Education?” The “Father of the University Education?” Because if anybody deserves that title, Ashbel Smith does, believe you me. Uh, he worked so hard in forming the University of Texas. Uh, as the president the first president of the board of regents, he was no figurehead; he didn’t just go to meetings, you know, and preside and wield a gavel. He went all over this country recruiting hot talent, hot teaching talent, for the first classes at the University of Texas. He played a leading role in setting up the first curriculum at the University of Texas and did the same at the University of Texas Medical School, and in his spare time, what’d he do? Set up Prairie View A&M College. At that time, you know, strictly for whites. But, uh, so we three things in education that are directly due to his efforts. Uh, the University of Texas at Austin, and by the way he made--; when they, they the cornerstone at the University of Texas, who made the main address? Ashbel Smith. He was in demand all over the country as a speaker. In fact, he made, uh, speeches like to the Phi Beta Kappa, uh, meeting up at Yale, to the West Point graduates; he was in demand everywhere. Uh, after, see all this took place after the Civil War, and actually after Sam Houston’s death; uh, Sam Houston died in ‘63. Um, now before Sam Houston—

[END]

Transcribed By: Lynnette Sargis