

An Oral History Tape Transcription
Of
Baytown Oral Histories
With
Interviewer: Betsy Webber
Interviewee: C. M. Dickerson
June 29th 1976
Transcribed by: Lynnette Sargis

(Tape 1 of 1)

Baytown Oral Histories

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Interviewee: C. M. Dickerson

Interview Date: June 29th 1976

[Recorded during a thunder storm; some loud thunder heard periodically throughout the first half of the interview.]

BW: Today is Tuesday June 29th 1976. I am Betsy Webber with the *Baytown Sun* and the Baytown historical uh tape collection, and I am interviewing C. M. Dickerson, who lives at 2210 Morning Drive. Mr. Dickerson, I understand that you came to Baytown in 1915 when you were 7 years old. What brought you to Baytown?

CD: Uh my father was a carpenter and uh that was when uh Baytown was, the boom had just started.

BW: What did he do? What, did he build houses or oil rigs?

CD: Built houses.

BW: What was his name?

CD: It was J. M. Dickerson.

BW: Where were you from?

CD: Humble. Humble, Texas.

BW: Are there any houses in Baytown today that your father built?

CD: Uh there's...the only one that I can remember is on the corner of Pruett and uh, I don't the street but it's a street that goes down to Horace Mann school, two story building, that used to be a grammar school, there was a two story house that he built for somebody up north, that's the only one I can remember that's still...

BW: Well see did he did have anything to do with building the uh refinery houses that were built about that time?

CD: No, he didn't work for the refineries, he was a contractor.

BW: Where did you go to school?

CD: Uh well I started to school when I first came to Baytown in a little frame building down in the oil field.

BW: Where were the oil fields?

CD: Uh well, when, I guess it was what, is a continuation now of Lee Drive, where on the other uh near Highway-, where Lee Drive crosses Highway 146.

BW: It's at the mouth of Goose Creek Stream isn-, isn't it?

CD: Well, no, uh, yea, uh, close to there.

BW: And uh I believe Tabs Bay is on the other side.

CD: Mhm.

BW: Describe that school you went to.

CD: Well there was a one room school with one teacher.

BW: Do you remember the teacher's name?

CD: At one time I did, but I don't remember now.

BW: How many grades?

CD: Well they taught, I don't know how...I don't know the maximum, but they taught I guess to the 11th I assume, but I don't know. I was in the 1st grade.

BW: Was it uh were there very many students?

CD: Approximately 20, 25.

BW: Where there any problems that you remember?

CD: Well biggest problem was that they, um, the gas well came in and blew sand all over the school and the grounds, and we had to quit going to school there.

BW: Did it make any noise?

CD: Uh... it made plenty of noise, but there was about 6 or 8 inches of mud all over the school house and the ground so that you couldn't, that you couldn't get there.

BW: Mhm, did they close school?

CD: They closed the school.

BW: What happened then?

CD: Well they later built the school in what is now Goose Creek, old Goose Creek on the same site were that Jewish synagogue is.

BW: Mhm, how long did you go to the little school down on the uh bay front?

CD: Approximately 6 months.

BW: And then where did you go to school?

CD: Well I went to uh this school up where the old, where the Jewish synagogue is now.

BW: That was the Goose Creek school wasn't it?

CD: Mhm.

BW: I understand that you used to sell newspapers. What papers did you sell?

CD: I sold the *Houston Chronicle*.

BW: Is that all?

CD: Well, of course, like I told you before, we made...the distributor of the *Chronicle* were printing all of this, and he printed a little four-page paper called the *Goose Creek Gasser*.

BW: Who was he?

CD: Frank Boyer. His son just died recently and had this Boyer printing company.

BW: Mhm, what do you, what can you tell me about the *Goose Creek Gasser*?

CD: Well that was just a little four, four-page pamphlet, like, and um it came out on Saturday with local news and we...if anybody that bought a Saturday paper we gave 'em a...

BW: Who, anyone who bought a Saturday *Chronicle*?

CD: *Chronicle*, we gave 'em a...

BW: Got the *Goose Creek Gasser* free, huh?

CD: Mhm.

BW: How long did you throw papers?

CD: Seven years.

BW: Where did you throw 'em?

CD: Well down in the oil fields and,

BW: Were there houses there?

CD: No there was, there were a few scattered houses and some work camps down there.

BW: What can you tell me about the work camps?

CD: Well, there was just, uh, big tents with, oh, 15 or 20 cots where the oilfield workers slept.

BW: Did you have any unusual experiences there that you can recall?

CD: N-, not, the only thing I, I well there's a couple of things I can remember, was a one time while I was in the oil field, I was about a block away when a well blew and caught on fire.

BW: Mhm.

CD: And, uh, the derrick man grabbed the rope and wrapped his gloves up and slid down the guy wire to and he just had got to the ground there when the thing caught on fire.

BW: Mhm, was it the rig that caught on fire?

CD: Well, the gas coming out of the ground flashed for some reason, maybe from the boilers or something, I don't know.

BW: And the, was the man injured at all?

CD: No, he wasn't hurt.

BW: Were you at school the day that the big gusher came in that that, uh, blew sand all over the school?

CD: No, mhm.

BW: Where were you?

CD: Well that, I don't... I don't know.

BW: Where did you live when you first came here?

CD: I lived in a tent down there right close to where Lee Drive and, and 146 cross.

BW: How long did you live there?

CD: Well I lived there until an oil well blew in the back of our house.

BW: Another one?

CD: Uh-huh, and everything was covered with crude oil, and you couldn't light a fire or anything 'cause your whole darn place would catch on fire. So then we, my father built a house one block back of...in Pelly, one block exactly, back of Leggett's Drug Store on the corner.

BW: Do you remember anything about the town or was there a town?

CD: Well there wasn't-, there wasn't a town in, uh, in...wadn't any town, period. The only town there was, was down close to Gaillard Landing, a few little shops and thangs.

BW: Let's see, in 1917 you were sev-, uh 9 years old, is that right?

CD: Mhm, yes.

BW: And that is when uh the town of Goose Creek was laid out by Ross Sterling, and I think Price Pruett had a, a hand in it. Uh, where were you living by that time? That was about two years after you came here.

CD: I was still living in uh in Pelly.

BW: Were you going to school at that time?

CD: Going to school, but we had to go walk all the way up to the other school.

BW: You went to school in Goose Creek, huh?

CD: Mhm... but they had about uh 6 or 8 rooms in that school, and, um, they a teacher for each class.

[LOUD THUNDER CRASH]

CD: [Laughs.] Guess that's gonna be on tape, and they're gonna think somebody's shooting at us.

Unidentified Person in Background: You wanna turn the TV off?

BW: Mr. Dickerson, where were you born anyway?

CD: Uh, at Cross Timbers.

BW: In what year?

CD: In 1908 September the 9th.

BW: Okay an, and uh,

CD: Now to most people cross Timbers is part of Houston now, but it was a separate...at that time, between Houston and Humble.

BW: After you stopped throwing the paper all those years, about seven years you threw the paper, is that right?

CD: Mhm.

BW: Well, you got another job when you were 14. What is it?

CD: Let's see when I was 15, I--, I must've sold papers eight years. But, uh one thing...you said, "throwing papers." You didn't throw papers then, you bought 'em and you sold 'em and got the money.

BW: Where did you sell them?

CD: Uh, well I started out down in the oil fields and then around Pelly and never did sell 'em in Goose Creek, it was always somewhere around Old Pelly.

BW: Did you sell every paper every day?

CD: No.

BW: How many would you buy?

CD: Well, it depended on what the...sold the day before, and what was brought back. But usually around 30.

BW: Do you remember anything about those men who bought the papers, where they lived, how they worked or anything?

CD: No, the only ones...Well, part of 'em [clears throat] lived in those camps that I've mentioned, and then later on when Pelly started, when they started building houses in Pelly, well, we delivered 'em to the homes and on the streets.

BW: Weren't those men called roughnecks?

CD: Uh-huh, still are, I think.

BW: What about, uh, transportation in those days. Can you tell me anything about the roads? How people got around?

CD: Well the main street in Pelly in the wintertime was about this deep in mud.

BW: That's about two feet, huh?

CD: Yeah, about 18 inches deep in mud, and the only way...well, of course, you didn't, there were very few cars and cars couldn't go up there at all. But, uh, the heavy equipment was moved on eight-wheel wagons with oxen.

BW: Where did they co-, arrive? Where did this equipment arrive at the landing? Or do you remember?

CD: I don't remember where it came--; it seem uh I know it-, I don't know, I don't know remember where it came from. I guess it came by road, but I don't where.

BW: Where did your family buy groceries?

CD: Uh, a lot of 'em were brought out here at Cedar Bayou. There used to be a huge mercantile store that sold everything out there by the light company at Cedar Bayou.

BW: On this side of the bayou wasn't it?

CD: On this side of the bayou.

BW: How did you get to the store?

CD: Bu-, well buggy or a wagon.

BW: What kind of recreational, uh, actives were there for uh young people, when you—?

CD: Oh, there wadn't any. Just whatever they could find.

BW: Was the-, were there any athletics?

CD: No.

BW: Did you, uh, finish school at the Goose Creek school?

CD: Mhm.

BW: What, what grade did you finish?

CD: The 9th, the 11th, we didn't have 12 grades. It was 1928.

BW: Didn't you tell me you worked at the, on an ice wagon for a while?

CD: Yeah, for a year.

BW: You remember who your boss was?

CD: A man named Shoemaker.

BW: Where was the company located?

CD: Well he had his own ice truck that, um ice wagon, that's the--

BW: Pulled by mules?

CD: Mhm, mules or horses I don't remember much.

BW: Where did they deliver ice?

CD: To, to the markets and stores and homes.

BW: This was in the pre-refrigeration days, huh?

CD: Mhm, yeah, that's right.

BW: What about the uh water and sewer facilities. Where there any?

CD: No wadn't any sewer facilities. There was city water, and got a, uh, well there wadn't to start with. They had water wagons with wooden tanks on 'em that came around, and you bought water by the barrel.

[Tape cuts out.]

BW: In the early days, when in about 1915, when you first came and those water wagons came to your house, describe how they delivered water from the wagon to, uh, your house.

CD: Well, at that time they had uh valves or spigots, I guess some people call 'em, and you, they'd back the wagon up to the barrel and fill the barrel with water.

BW: How did your mother get water out of the barrel to use for cooking?

CD: With a bucket.

BW: She would dip it out like you would dip water out of a well?

CD: Mhm.

BW: With a bucket?

CD: That's right.

BW: After you moved from the tent to the house that your father built, did you have running water in that house at first?

CD: No.

BW: Then later on you did have water piped in?

CD: Later on.

BW: And at first it was just cold water?

CD: Just cold.

BW: And not uh hot and cold water?

CD: That's right.

BW: And still uh what about the uh plumbing facilities, sewage, you still did not have indoor...

CD: No.

BW: Toilets?

CD: No indoor toilets.

BW: You went to school in Baytown for a while, and then your family moved out of town. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

CD: Well we moved to West Columbia and, uh, my father was a carpenter-contractor and there wasn't enough work in Baytown, so we moved to West Columbia. At that time, well, your furniture and everything was moved by train. We packed all the furniture in a boxcar and moved it to West Columbia. I lived there approximately two years, and I sold papers while I was there also.

BW: Do you remember what grade, uh, you were in school in West Columbia?

CD: No I don't remember what,

BW: Were you in elementary school?

CD: Elementary school.

BW: Okay and then you came back, and, uh, went, finished up school in Baytown, didn't you?

CD: In Baytown.

BW: The first job you had, uh, when you were about 15, no, this was when you were about 16, after you came back from West Columbia I believe...

CD: Mmm.

BW: Was in 19--

CD: No I, I hadn't been to West Columbia then.

BW: No I mean o-, at the refinery when you got, went to work there.

CD: Oh.

BW: Ho-, tell me about, uh, when you went to work at the refinery, and how did you get on as young as you were?

CD: Well, I told them I was 18 years old because they wouldn't hire anybody under 18.

BW: And you got a minor's release?

CD: So I got, talked my mother and father into going down to the lawyer's office and having a minors released-, release signed. Except that they put my true birthdate on it.

Then the next morning before I went out to the plant to carry this minors release out there, well I went by the lawyer's office and told him that date was wrong and had him change it to where I would be 18 years old.

BW: What year was that?

CD: 1925.

BW: And what was your job at the refinery?

CD: Boil-, worked in the boilermakers.

BW: Did you, uh, continue to work there or how long did you work this time?

CD: 3 months, during the school vacation.

BW: Alright and then the next year I believe you got another job in another place. Where was that?

CD: That was,

BW: In '26?

CD: That was on a wildcat well out in Trinity River Bottoms.

BW: Close to Moss Hill?

CD: Close to Moss Hill.

BW: Alright and then '27 you got another job, where was that?

CD: Worked for the Houston Light and Power and that,

BW: Where'd ya'll lay those power lines?

CD: From Humble to Huffman substation.

BW: And then the next year was '28, and that's the year that you finished uh high school, is that right?

CD: That's right.

BW: At the Goose Creek, uh, school?

CD: That's right.

BW: Then what did you do?

CD: I went back to work at the refineries.

BW: And I believe that you worked there for about how many years?

CD: No, I worked another 3 months.

BW: I see, 3 months. Then what did you do?

CD: Then I... well, that fall, well, I got a football scholarship to Blinn Junior College in Brenham.

BW: Had you had any experience in playing football?

CD: Yeah, I played football during high school. I was captain of the team in 1927.

BW: What was the name of the te-, team?

CD: It was called Ganders, same as they are now.

BW: Yeah.

CD: Yeah.

BW: How was the football season that year?

CD: We won every game except one.

BW: Who was on the teams you played?

CD: Teams that were, we played?

BW: Mhm.

CD: Well, let's see. We played Humble, Texas City, that's all-, I could get my--

BW: Did you play Dayton?

CD: Dayton.

[Tape Cut]

BW: Mr. Dickerson, when you first came here, uh, there were landings down on Goose Creek Stream. Can you tell me a little bit about those landings? What were the names of some of 'em?

CD: Well, the one closest to the ship channel was Gaillard's Landing and there wasn't a whole lot there except the wharf. It wadn't but the, they called the, Mr. and Mrs. Gaillard had a home down there. That's why they called Gaillard's Landing.

BW: Was that the only one?

CD: Then, uh, Busch's Landing was up behind where the, uh...well south of where the sewage disposal plant is now. There was a man named Lerner had a big, all-purpose store where they sold clothes and groceries and farm equipment and everything else.

BW: Is that where you picked up your papers every day?

CD: That's where I picked up, where we picked up the papers was at Busch's Landing. They came by boat from Houston.

BW: Wha-, what other things came in at that landing? Is that where groceries came in or,

CD: Well, groceries and everything that people needed came in, and there was, uh most of 'em, originally, was stocked at that two-story store that Mr. Lerner had.

BW: Tell me a little bit uh what you remember about Evergreen and the public swimming facilities there.

CD: Well Evergreen had a sandy, I mean, uh, had a clamshell beach, it was pretty and white. And it had sand out for, in the water for the first two or three hundred feet but it was, it was shallow. And then it turned to mud and the people the-, and in order to get out to where it was deep enough to swim, you had to go out about 1500 feet to a sandbar. And the people in the community took up collection and built the pier out there. Fifteen hundred feet out to where the sand bar was, so that people would go swimming out there.

BW: Was there a pavilion of any kind?

CD: Well, there was some dressing rooms up next to shore on the pier, but that was all.

BW: Can you tell me where this, uh, Evergreen place was?

CD: Well it was, there's an Ever-, uh road now that goes almost straight down to where this pier used to be. At the present time, there isn't enough water to swim in out there because it's all filled up with silt and stuff.

BW: What's the name of the road that goes down there?

CD: They call it Evergreen Road.

BW: Now I'm sure in all the time that you have lived here in Baytown, there have been some big changes. Do you remember when the high school, Robert E. Lee high school was built?

CD: They started going to school in Robert E. Lee in 1928.

BW: Do you remember uh when Pruett's uh ranch was down there where Weingarten's is now?

CD: Yeah. He had a private road going down there, and I remember when he donated that Texas, part of Texas Avenue where that big oak tree is, with the understanding that if they ever cut that thing down, well, the land went back to the original heirs.

BW: You were telling me a little bit a minute ago about the moving of a post office and uh you said you knew a little bit about that. How-, what can you tell me about the post office?

CD: Well my recollection is that the post office was at Busch's Landing originally, and, uh, when what was called Pelly then was turned into a town, the post office was moved to Pelly. And it was called Pelly because a man named Pelly, an old-timer, owned uh a good portion of the land around there. Then later on when uh the railroad came into what is n-, was called Goose Creek, the mail was coming by train then and they moved one night; some of the people moved the whole post offi-, the post office up to Goose Creek from Pelly.

BW: How'd you hear about that?

CD: Well, I was selling papers and you hear about all kinda things.

BW: Did you know anybody have anything to do with that?

CD: I think my father was part-, was mixed up in it.

BW: When you, your family moved back to Baytown from uh West Columbia, where did you live?

CD: We lived across South Main from Fuller's filling station.

BW: And by that time, did you have water and sewage?

CD: Uh, no sewage; had water. The land belonged to some people named Hunter. You couldn't buy it; you had to rent it.

BW: Do you remember when, uh, Pelly and Goose Creek incorporated?

CD: No. You mean when they both, when they went together?

BW: No, that was in '48 when Baytown was formed, later on.

[Tape Cut]

BW: Mr. Dickin-, Dickerson, how old were you during, uh, World War I and what do you remember about the activity here then?

CD: Well, I was selling papers during World War I, and, uh, there were two, I don't know how many soldiers were in the camps. But there was one, uh, across Main Street on the south side of Main Street in old Pelly, and there was another one up in what it-, old Goose Creek. Now how many, how many soldiers were stationed there, I don't know, but I can imagine...

BW: Where in Goose Creek, do you re-, remember?

CD: Uh no. I can't remember for sure where that one was, because I didn't sell papers up there. Uh, during World War I, there was a strike at, and the, the oil workers went on strike and there was, they had soldiers here, I suppose, to guard the oil wells and where Gulf Hill pump station was at that time they put up big flood lights all around that station and you had to have a pass to go through there, because I had to go through there with my, from Busch Landing to get my papers.

BW: Do you remember what year this was?

CD: It was sometime during the war. It was either '17 or '18-, 1917 or '18, I don't remember which.

BW: Mr. Dickerson tell me how you used to get to work when you were working at the refinery in '28?

CD: Oh no, that's not '28 I'm talking about.

BW: Okay when was it?

CD: I'm talking about uh when they first started the refinery that the railroad was put in and they had three passenger cars that carried people from Goose Creek, old Goose Creek, to the refinery. Carried 'em every morning and brought 'em back every evening because the Goose Creek people-,

[Tape cut]

BW: By the time you were working regularly at the refinery, I suppose, uh there were other, um, means of transportation, right?

CD: That's right.

BW: Did you have your car now when you were working there, or did you ride with other men or how did you get to work?

CD: I rode with uh rode with other men part of the time until I was able to buy a car, and then I'd go in the car.

BW: When did you uh get married?

CD: March the 4th 1933.

BW: And,

CD: Same day that President Roosevelt took office the first time.

[Tape cut]

BW: How many years did you work at that refinery anyway?

CD: All together, 40 years 3 months and 26 days.

BW: You stopped work there in the middle for something, what was it?

CD: Oh I kept tryi-, I was working in the laboratory, and I got transferred to the labor gang at 25 cents an hour in 1932, and I resigned. Then in 1934, after working at all kind of jobs, I finally got back on out at the plant on June the 8th and stayed until July the 1st 1972, I believe it is, no, uh 1971.

BW: And what have you been doing since you retired?

CD: Having a good time.

BW: That's good. That's the way to enjoy retirement. Thank you for the interview this afternoon Mr. Dickerson.

[END]

Transcribed By: Lynnette Sargis