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AN ORAL HISTORY TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

OF

DR. JIM MARONEY

INTERVIEWING

MRS. BLANCHE DuPLANTIS

on February 9, 1976

Cathy Ickes

This is Jim Maroney interviewing Mrs. Blanche DuPlantis on February 9, 1976. Mrs. DuPlantis, perhaps you could tell us when you came to Baytown and under what circumstances, and a little bit about your background prior to coming to Baytown?

BD: I was born and raised, raised until I was 18 months old, in Port Arthur, Texas. We moved to Cleburne, Texas, stayed there until I graduated from high school in 1921. Ready to go to college, my Mother had a complete nervous breakdown, had to postpone college. As a consequence, I took post graduate work under Olan Spurlock in business who was a graduate of M.I.T. and went to work.

We moved to Baytown, then it was known as Old Town, Middle Town and New Town, in 1923, Holy Week. The first church service I attended in Baytown was at Grace Methodist Church on Easter Sunday. I was primarily interested in the Episcopal Church. When I came here and found none, I immediately started looking for people who thought might belong to the Episcopal Church. I found Mr. W. D. Terry for whom I worked for the next 8 or 9 months in a real estate office.

During that time, the Goose Creek State Bank, located in I guess you would call it Middle Town or Pelly, started looking for someone to keep books that knew how to operate a Burroughs Posting Machine which seemed in those days to be quite an accomplishment, not being very popular by a lot of the girls who were working. So I went to work for the Goose Creek State Bank as bookkeeper in early 1924.

I stayed with the bank until the bank was merged with the First Guaranty State Bank in what was known at that time as Goose Creek, in 1930, after the moratorium. After that I stayed with them for just a short time and then I retired.

The coming to Baytown, or coming to Goose Creek in the old days was a hazardous thing. I arrived in Houston by train, my uncle met me there. We came out by cars to Lynchburg Ferry. Got to the ferry, it was the largest body of water I had ever seen in my life. The cable on the ferry broke. We drifted almost to the old Baytown docks before a tug boat finally came along and pushed us back up and I was frightened. The furniture had to come by barge in what was known as Morgan City, Morgan's Point, and brought over by barge. Incidentally, the piano that I brought over on that old barge is in Randy's home.

JM: Could you please explain who Randy is?

BD: Randy Cooper, is now Father Cooper, the minister of Trinity Episcopal Church.

We came primarily because of Mother's health. We lost her in 1925. There still being no Episcopal Church here, Bishop Quinn, whom we deeply love and whom many people in the community knew, came from Houston, muddy highways, a very bad day, to hold services for my Mother. As a consequence, he is very dearly loved by me.

Very odd things have happened. When I worked in the bank, the money of the pay-rolls in the oil fields came down to the Citizen's State Bank which was in New Town at that time. I had an old open Ford and I used to get in that Ford by myself and go to the Citizen's and get that money and lay it on the seat by me and I had no apprehension at all that I might be hijacked, that I might be run off the road. I just brought the money back to the Goose Creek State Bank and we carried right on.

JM: Would you describe Baytown as still have been being the Oil Boon Days, and how long did they last?

BD: Definately. There were no decent roads. In front of the bank, we had board sidewalks, ditches. You didn't dare get off the road. This went on until, I would say, 1929, then improvements started. Goose Creek, New Town, was in better shape than Pelly was at an earlier date.

JM: New Town would be what we know as Goose Creek now?

BD: Right.

JM: It was in better shape then than Pelly?

BD: Yes, Pelly was still bearing the earmarks of an oil boon with the oil derricks right in its back door.

JM: What oil companies were active at this time?

BD: Gulf Oil was the largest in the field. There was some Humble activity, but of course, theirs was mostly refinery. I think that you would find that the Gulf Oil Co. was the largest at this particular time. They had quite a colony down in the fields, where their superintendent of the Gulf production lived and quite a number of the people. The company had built their housing area down there comparable, well not exactly comparable, but similar to the one Humble had set up for their people out in East Baytown. Some of these shacks, if you might believe it, or still down there in those oil fields today.

JM: There was a major labor strike in the oil fields in 1917. By the 1920's was there any sort of difficulty of this type?

BD: None, to my knowledge.

JM: Were there still new strikes that caused excitement?

BD: No, I have never known of a strike.

JM: I mean strikes of oil.

BD: I beg your pardon, I misunderstood you. I think I saw one well come in and blow while I was there.

JM: So by the 1920's there was just sort of a steady withdrawing of the oil that had already been found earlier?

BD: Right.

JM: So that you would say that the oil boon days were still strong since there was a steady withdrawing production?

BD: Right.

JM: You mentioned that you came from Cleburne? Where is Cleburne exactly?

BD: Cleburne is about 25 miles southwest of Fort Worth. Santa Fe Railroad headquarters.

JM: I found it rather interesting that your doctor had recommended this area for your mother's health. What was the reasoning for that?

BD: Frankly, they thought just a change would be good for her, because her condition was more or less a nervous one. and incidently, my father had transferred to the Southern Pacific Railroad and he was to be stationed down here.

JM: Railroads were a major activity in Baytown at that time?

BD: At that time, they were extremely busy. The access by railroad from Dayton, Texas, was the only access by railroad, and the only other way you could come in here was by boat or by this one road to Houston, and that was down towards the Beaumont Hwy., Hwy. 90 and in that way. There was a ferry, and I mentioned previously, the cable would break. Sometimes you didn't feel too safe.

JM: So to go to Houston from Baytown, you either went across the Lynchburg Ferry or you went; you didn't have to go all the way to Dayton around 90 did you?

BD: No, you could cut through Highlands, through that way and you would hit 90 at that old bridge. I think the old bridge is still standing, but is is not in use.

JM: O.K. Almost to Crosby?

BD: Right.

JM: There was a bridge across the San Jacinto River at that time?

BD: There surely was.

JM: And so either way was not really direct like we have today?

BD: No, it took hours to go.

JM: And the roads were, like you said, narrow.

BD: They were narrow, they were muddy and in real bad weather, you just didn't go. Now to go by Dayton, you went by train.

JM: What sort of place was Baytown like in the 1920's?

BD: It was sad. I think was about the best word I can use to describe it. Having come from an old, old town, a well established town, I was quite amazed with the way the town operated. There were still people who lived in the oil field who had to go to public bath houses. They didn't have the bath houses and accommodations that people were accustomed to more or less, in that day.

It was rugged, but it was so interesting. There was always something interesting happening. We had an extremely interesting person right across from the bank, Mr. Leggett who owned the drug store and who had owned it from the early, early days. He was a colorful character. We had two doctors in Middle Town, Dr. Robbins, and his partner. It is unfortunate that I cannot think what his partner's name was, but he was a very short person, very outspoken. He reminded me a great deal of the

movie actor Fields. He was that type of character. He was very colorful, very colorful and he was in the bank every day in the world. We just had a good time.

In the bank we had a table set up, a desk set up for the collector of the water rents for Middle Town. At that time, Jimmy Riggs owned the water works. In the early days, Mr. B. C. Porter was his collector and at the same time he was constable. He sat there at the desk with his gun around his belt. We felt rather secure.

The library was in the bank director's room of the old bank and Jessie Mabry Davis was the librarian. She is still living in Baytown. She is Bitsy Davis' Mother. We would clear off the desk back there for the directors meeting and then she would conduct the library in there all the rest of the time. It made it interesting.

During that time, churches were beginning to build better buildings. People were coming in constantly. There was a flow of people and it just seems like that has been the history of Baytown. There is still a flow of people through here. We think we have reached the saturation point and then about that time, something else happens. That was just the same as it was back in the 1920's.

JM: Several people have told me that in the 20's during the oil boon days, there were numerous boarding houses. Can you tell us something about those and the hotels?

BD: There were two particularly large ones, the Allen Hotel and Boarding House which was right on the main street of Pelly. It was occupied later on by R. C. Stevenson's Grocery Store, and I believe at the present time it has a used furniture store in the bottom part of it. But this was quite a popular boarding house. This is the Allen's out of Houston, some of their descendants. Then there was Mrs. Compton's down on Pelly hill, they called it. That was where Mr. DuPlantis lived. Then there was another large one about half way between those two. I do not recall the name of it, but it was quite large. But those three were very prominent in the life of Pelly. A lot of people lived there.

At the time I came to this part of the Country, the building that the bank was in had just been finished. It was a one story stucco building and it was looked upon with a great deal of delight by those who lived here because it was quite an asset to the town. The town had suffered, I am sure you have had someone tell you about the post office having been moved.

JM: No, I haven't.

BD: Not really? The post office was a small post office located in deep Pelly, or between Middle Town and Old Town, and when they decided that they wanted New Town to be The Town, one night somebody came down there, I don't think they ever named anybody, but they put rollers under the post office and moved it. And they found it the next morning up in what did become Goose Creek, and is now Baytown.

JM: Now these names, New Town, and Middle Town, and Old Town, were these just in common usage, or were they official names?

BD: I really don't know if they were ever shown on a map. I think it was Baytown, Goose Creek, and Pelly, but before those were officially named that, they were just Old Town, Middle Town, and New Town.

JM: But people actually did call them Old, Middle and New Town?

BD: Yes, they did and they did for years after they got their names.

The Old Town was actually down where Gulf Oil Co. had made its location. Down in the oil fields, Down there on the banks of Goose Creek Stream. That was Old Town, and Pelly was Middle Town and Goose Creek was New Town, and where the refinery was was just the Refinery.

JM: When was the refinery built? Do you recall?

BD: I think they put the first stake in the ground in 1919.

JM: So there was nothing out in what is now Old Baytown except the refinery?

BD: Yes, and East Baytown was nothing but swamp cause I walked down there. We took walks into that area.

JM: While we are still in the 1920's what can you tell me, maybe, about the social life in Baytown in this period of the 1920's? What was there to do? did people go to Houston?

BD: That's quite a question. Any entertainment at all, you had to go to Houston. Really, you made your own entertainment. I was quite young when I came here and as I recall the church's had the entertainment for the young people, and there were some places out towards Cedar Bayou, which was an old, old settlement. Some houses in which the young people in this area would gather for dancing and for Saturday night parties. But these were small, you just had no real facilities. But for theaters and for good entertainment, one had to go to Houston. For meals in a restaurant, one had to go to Houston. The old Oiler Theater was built and had movies. These were highly patronized by the youngsters of this area.

JM: Where was this theater, the Oiler located?

BD: The Oiler theater was on the corner of Defee and North Commerce. Incidentally, that little building by the side of it was where we had our first services for the Trinity Episcopal Church.

JM: What about the effects of the radio? When did people begin to get radios? In the 1920's?

BD: I really couldn't answer that.

JM: I believe the national hook ups and networks, people began to listen to those in the mid 20's but before that, there were local stations. I wondered if you recalled what sort of roll they played in the social life?

BD: No, I really don't.

JM: Well, perhaps we can move to the 30's now. If I might ask you, when were you married?

BD: In 1926.