

VINA WELLS

Interview 034b

Oct. 25, 1984 at the home of Mrs. Vina Wells

Becky Bailey, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Becky Bailey, Vina Wells and her daughter Louise Rector recall moving to Fastrill from White City and living and working in Fastrill. Mrs. Wells ran the boarding house with her mother, and Mrs. Rector helped with boarding house duties until she moved out to get married. They discuss the trip from White City to Fastrill, the houses in Fastrill, the layout of the town, all of their duties at the boarding house, going to school, the roads, and way of life in this semi-permanent Southern Pine Lumber Company logging camp.

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): I'm interviewing Mrs. Vina Wells at her home. Today's date is Oct. 25, 1984. Mrs. Wells, could you tell us about moving from White City to Fastrill?

Vina Wells (hereafter VW): Yes. I don't know how to word it, but I can tell you.

BB: Okay.

VW: We come and there were others on there. I don't know whether you remember this man. I don't know what he was doing, but he had some part of it and he was on there and they had one flat car out there that we sat in most of the time, day time when we were going along, you know.

BB: Yes.

VW: We had a lot of fun. We cooked while we were going along.

BB: Did you have like family cars or were they like a kitchen car where you did all the cooking in it?

VW: Yes. Dining room car.... long tables.

BB: Okay.

VW: And these Negroes they had. I never did see where they were because they were ahead of us all the time doing that. But they just somehow had it where we just got there at the right time, you know.

BB: Yes... Now they were actually laying track ahead of you?

VW: Yes, some of them were cutting trees and some of them... and ... but Momma cooked, no matter what momma cooked. We had things that big that she had made them these biscuits. I have never seen anything eat as much as those Negroes. You know that is hard work.

BB: Yes.

VW: Anyway, they eat a lot.

BB: Yes. Okay so there were probably two trains then. One with men who were cutting the trees?

VW: I imagine. I guess they...

Louise Rector (hereafter LR): Not necessarily. They could use the same train. When you moved from White City, you didn't stop like over night or anything until you got to this place between the river... but that is where they stopped and stayed for I don't know how long.

VW: Yes.

BB: Several days.

LR: Yes. Oh, Yes.

BB: Until they could finish laying the track between there and Fastrill.

LR: And as she said, they were cutting the timber there and that was the handiest thing for the men that worked.

BB: Yes.

LR: (tape unintelligible)

BB: How long did it take you...?

VW: I don't remember, but it didn't take no long time. But it wasn't as long as you would think, but I do know.....Where was the town that we.... It wasn't on the track.

LR: Alto.

VW: Alto.

BB: They had to go into Alto and bring your supplies back to the train?

VW: Yes.

BB: Just out in the middle of the woods though?

VW: Yes.

BB: How did they get there?

VW: I could tell you this. I don't know whether you want to put it in there, or not. But there was a family lived where the road crossed and, by the way, that was... What was that road? I can't tell you.

LR: (unintelligible)

VW: Well, the family that lived there, we knew them. And they had them ... Well, they had... They had the boarding house there for the track. To keep up the tracks. You know. And she thought that they ought to let her have this place in Fastrill. For she didn't Mr.... the man, he liked Momma's way of doing it and so he just ... He just went on and give it to us and she was kinda ugly to us. I don't know whether you want to go through that.

BB: Well, we won't mention names okay?

VW: I wouldn't either. They are not here now. They didn't get here, I don't reckon. I don't know.

BB: What was Alto like at that time? Did you get to go in and see Alto? Or did...

VW: Yes, after we got to Fastrill, Alto was one of our main ways. Alto one and Rusk the other way.

BB: Alto one and Rusk the other way. Okay, was Fastrill kinda located between the two? Between Rusk and Alto or where is it?

LR: It was a triangle. Fastrill here, Alto here and Rusk there.

BB: Rusk there. Oh, Okay. Well, I have lived in Alto – that is awfully little. Was it pretty good size at that time?

VW: It was. They had some pretty good stores there and a long time ago before us, they did... They had some old people outside the town where they were..... They still do. People go to see these old places.

BB: Oh, Yes. Down the San Antonio Road through there. There is some real old places.

VW: Yes.

BB: Okay. So you finally got to Fastrill.

VW: We finally got to Fastrill and I was sick in the bed.

BB: What did it look like?

VW: It looked like the hell. (Laughing)

BB: After White City, it didn't look too good?

VW: No, it didn't look near as good. But they didn't have but just a few.... They picked out the men, you know, were the most. Well, they had some that could build the houses. Some that could dig the wells and some that could do whatever they could. They didn't dig no wells, I don't guess. Yes, they did. Well, we had a spring there and with the river.... Yes....

BB: So they really weren't any houses built or anything when you got there. Just a few.

LR: Oh yes, after we got there. I remember going to watch them work. There were two different size houses. Most of them were four rooms, just a square box. There would be a porch on the front and porch on the back with the four rooms all connected and that was it. And then later on they built some little two-room houses for the smaller families.

BB: Oh, I thought you were going to tell me that was the big... the little houses and they built bigger houses, but they built littler houses?

LR: Yes. Yes.

BB: Oh, goodness.

LR: The boarding house, of course, where we lived was two stories. That was a big thing. The only other house that was anywhere near big was the.... They called him the woods foreman. Because he was over the whole...

BB: And his was the largest in town?

LR: Yes, and eventually my Dad got that job and me and Mama lived in that house. That was years later, but back to the building of the track. My Dad was grades foreman and he ...

BB: Yes, leveling the road, yes, Okay.

LR: He built the tram and later when they got to Fastrill and needed to haul the logs back into Diboll they had to build another track to Diboll. My Dad had never been to any kind of engineering school or anything, but they had an engineer that started from Diboll

and my Dad started from Fastrill and they were to meet at a certain point and they did. My Dad made it just exactly right, just as if he had a degree in engineering.

BB: They made sure. Oh, how neat.

VW: He was well known for that kind of stuff. Just like if he had been.... You know.

LR: Educated for it.

BB: Do you remember what year it was that White City moved to Fastrill?

VW: Well, what did I say? You know, I tried.

LR: It was either '22 or '23, wasn't it?

VW: I believe it was.

BB: Okay, and then the camp moved to Diboll in '41. Wasn't that right? So you all were there almost twenty years?

VW: Yes, that's right.

BB: That is a long, long time. Was there anyone left in White City when the camp up there was abandoned? Was there anyone left?

VW: Not yet. No, there was some went from back here, from here back up there.

LR: Not Diboll.

BB: But it wasn't like a camp any more. The camp was just gone.

VW: Yes.

BB: Maybe just some individuals left who wanted to stay.

VW: Oh, no. They didn't... I don't know how long they said that some stayed. I guess until somebody bought their houses. I don't remember.

BB: What did it look like around White City?

VW: It looked like home.

BB: Was there still woods left or had the forest been clear-cut or what?

VW: That is what it was. They had cut out, but they had some and Richie went back. He was my husband. He went back up there and they done a lot more, but I cried

because he wouldn't let me go back up there. He said, "You just want to go up there and cry."

LR: No, you are talking about when you moved from Fastrill down here.

VW: Yes.

BB: Okay.

LR: She wanted to go to Rusk, but she's getting ahead of herself, but when you ...

BB: When you left White City and went to Fastrill, was there anybody left in White City?

VW: I don't know. I don't know, but I guess so because....

BB: Were they still cutting around there or was it pretty well cut out by that time?

VW: I don't know.

LR: Yes, ma'am. The reason they left was because they were through with that and whoever stayed did not work for the company.

BB: Because it was all gone? For the company? Okay.

VW: Well, I will tell, too...about what.... this hasn't got anything to do with Fastrill, but my father worked for... what was it? Who owned the trees where?

LR: You are talking about the Texas Forest Service. Is that what you are talking about?

VW: No. I am not talking about that. It was something to do with Houston. Houston... they owned lot of timber and turpentine.

BB: Turpentine stills? Yes, I have heard of them.

LR: Now, Mama, that was before you moved to White City.

VW: Well.

BB: Yes, we have a lot of that on the other tapes. Yes. Okay.

LR: But let me tell you still one more thing. When we got to Fastrill, they did not have the store built.

BB: Oh, okay.

LR: The store was in boxcars. Still on the track and was parked behind the store building, but they had to wait until the store... So they would send me to get things from this place and it had steps going up into the boxcars and they had shelves and all. Just like a small store.

BB: Store?

LR: That is the way it had to be. But when they did get it built, it was a huge thing and they had everything. Just like...

BB: Was it like the commissary here?

LR: It had everything under the same roof. It had groceries, meat, dry goods, shoes and everything. Later they put the market in a little separate.... It was all still under the same building. But they fixed a separate place for it and also the icehouse was connected to that. Then there was a drugstore where the doctor and his wife ran the drugstore and at that time, one time the post office was in that, too. And they were the postmen. Later they moved the post office up to the main office where the company office was and where they paid.... got their paydays and everything. And there was a barber shop that my uncle ran and he also had the cleaning and pressing shop and he also had the only gasoline pumps there.

BB: Oh.

VW: And there wasn't a dozen cars in Fastrill.

LR: Oh, no. We didn't have any cars.

BB: Were there any roads out there much. Just out?

LR: Oh, there was a road to Alto and to Rusk, road.... Later when we first moved there was no road across the river and into the next county. But they later put one through there to go to Slocum, Elkhart and Palestine.

BB: Okay.

LR: Because I had to go to school and that is where I finished school, in Slocum.

BB: High school. You are talking about high school there?

LR: Yes. We only had eleven grades then and they only taught through the ninth at Fastrill and you had to go somewhere else if you wanted to finish high school. So my mother was on the Board of Trustees, or something, there at Fastrill and she worked like a dog to get this bus over to Slocum so we could all have a place to finish school.

BB: Slocum ... Over to Slocum. Well, good. Did the company provide it or did the school district provide it?

LR: No the school district had to. The first bus was Model "A" that was just, with a bed on it that they just made. A little bus thing. And, of course, the roads weren't paved and we would slip, slide and stick.

VW: And over toward Slocum there was just hills.

BB: Yes. Oh, gosh.

LR: The schoolhouse was, we had folding doors between rooms. Fold them back and have programs just like an auditorium.

BB: How many grades did they... They taught one through nine.

LR: Nine.

BB: Okay. Did you have enough kids to have one teacher to a grade or did you have to double up sometimes?

LR: Double up. There would be at least two classes in every room. Maybe the fourth would sit here and the fifth there and you would have just not pay attention to what they were doing.

BB: To what they were doing.

LR: Yes. But they later built another addition on one side for the higher grades. Higher grades and I remember sitting in that part, too. But it was a pretty good size school because that was a big camp. And I have said, this sounds crazy, but I have said that it was the most permanent temporary camp that they had. It was there longer than any other camp they ever had.

BB: Well, twenty years is pretty permanent really for that. Okay. About how many teachers, say about five or six?

LR: Not over three or four at one time and some of them boarded with us. The women teachers boarded with us. If they were married they had their own. They would rent a couple of rooms from some of these other people, but the lady teachers always roomed with us, boarded with us.

VW: My mother had had the role, well I can't say it... but she was the best cook that ever was.

LR: She had the reputation and you see...

VW: And it got everywhere and people always....

LR: All the men except just a few would go to the woods every day. The train left at six o'clock every morning to carry the men to the woods and my mother and grandmother had to get up at four o'clock to cook breakfast, pack their lunches and get them off on the six o'clock train. That only left a few men; the ones that worked in the store, the shop and things like that. But the salesmen that came to the store soon learned about this good food and they would make it a point to get there at noon. See it was a family deal. It was a great long table and you came in and ate all you wanted for fifty cents, or whatever it was, and just eat and eat and eat. And it was all.... They cooked everything. They did not have anybody else to help them cook.

BB: Just those two?

LR: And it was good. Yes, and it was good.

BB: How many would you serve?

VW: Oh, dear.... Twenty, lots of times.

LR: Oh, Momma. One time they had a ...

VW: Oh, when they used to come in from Diboll to lay the bridges, don't you know, we had all of them.

LR: I was going to tell about the time they were drilling for oil a couple of miles from there.

VW: Yes. Oh, we had ...

LR: We didn't even have enough beds. They would make beds on the porches. The boarding house was shaped like a "U" and the porches went all the way around this room, upstairs and downstairs. The men stayed upstairs and there were beds made all around this porch. And each room upstairs had at least two beds and there were two corner rooms that held three or four beds. And every one of those were full and then they had these beds on the porch during this drilling thing. The tables seated fourteen and we had two of those and two smaller tables that seated eight. And I have seen every one of those full. Full at one time.

BB: And two with eight...sixteen?

VW: With the dishes all on the table. We didn't serve them.

BB: Gosh, that is forty-five people.

LR: Yes, it is and ...

BB: And you did all the cooking?

VW: Did you ever see any pots like that?

BB: No.

VW: They had them like that, big.

BB: Big around huh?

LF: Well the bread pans were half as big as this coffee table and I've seen two or three of those full of biscuits and cornbread. Wood stoves of course.

BB: I was fixing to ask about that. That is what you had to cook on?

VW: One sawyer you know, then it was this kind of sawing. And there was one man that he ate about six eggs and the sausage and whatever meat we had and we had it every time, bacon or something.

BB: Or something huh?

LR: The way they did, they would cook the eggs and put them in platters down the table. They would fry some of them over easy, some of them hard.

BB: Or scrambled, just take your choice.

LR: Just take your choice and there would be three or four platters of those and then we had as she said the meat and biscuits you know. We didn't have toasters.

BB: Every morning.

LR: Hot biscuits.

VW: Let me say this. There wasn't no bread already sliced. You know, it just came to you whole. If you had it. We didn't have it. Didn't want it.

BB: Oh, you had to make your own bread?

LR: Oh, no. We had it but not for breakfast.

VW: That is what I was talking about. People, there just wasn't any.

LR: There wasn't any sliced bread.

VW: But we didn't want it anyhow because that is what the men wanted.

BB: They wanted biscuits so that is what you made?

LR: We did buy it because I have carried as many as six and eight loaves home and they would tie a string around it so I could carry it home.

BB: Carry it home...

LR: But the lunches had to be packed in buckets because they were going to the woods and this was food; it wasn't sandwiches. It was beans, potatoes and meat, biscuits and things.

BB: I don't know how you got it done in two hours. That sounds like a lot of work to get done in two hours.

LR: Well, it had to be cooked the day before mostly, the beans and stuff. They usually cooked in the mornings after the men left to go to work. They cooked all morning long. And then they came in from the woods, they called it the regular... "Here comes the regular." And it got back at six o'clock and the men ...

BB: They worked twelve hours.

LR: Well, it took twelve hours to go and come and work and they would come in and wash up and be ready to eat.

BB: And then you got to clean up after all that was over.

LR: Yes.

BB: Makes me tired.

VW: We didn't have a place to wash the dishes and they made us a trough, we called it. They made us one.

LR: They made a sink. It was a huge thing and they lined it with zinc.

BB: Zinc, I bet.

LR: Yes, and we called it the dish room. It was a little room between the dining room and the kitchen. And it had shelves for the dishes and it was a great big thing. And then we had another one in the kitchen for the pots and pans.

BB: Pots and pans.

LR: But we did have running hot water. If the thing didn't burst. It connected with the stove and they called it... What did they call it? Water....

VW: I can't think.

BB: Was it like a reservoir in the back of it and the heat from the stove heated the water?

LR: But several times the thing would either burst or it would just quit working and we would have to heat every drop of water that we used and no bathrooms.

BB: No, they were outside.

LR: And you had to heat the water and the only fires we had, we had two chimneys and the stove in the kitchen and the stove in the lobby, the heater in the lobby, were the only two just real warm places that we had. The bedrooms did not have...

BB: Any heat at all?

LR: No.

BB: Oh.

VW: When I think about it... I don't know. We just put on our clothes.

BB: You had better put on lots of clothes.

LR: One afternoon of course, when they got through with lunch and washed dishes, Momma and Grandmamma went to bed. They needed it.

BB: I don't blame them.

LR: And I didn't because I was afraid I would miss something. I don't know what. But I went down to Momma's room one day and it was real cold and she was lying in bed with the covers pulled up like this and she had on her bonnet and gloves. She was reading.

BB: Oh, my word. Did you work seven days a week at this? You didn't take off on Sunday?

VW: No. Well, we had it. We did not cook because some of them was from out of town, you know.

BB: And they would go home on Sunday?

LR: But some stayed and she did cook every

VW: Yes. I said....

LR: She asked though if you cooked seven days a week and you did.

BB: Just not quite as much.

LR: No, and I will tell you something else. After lunch on Sunday there was no even warming anything. We put it on the table just like it was and you could eat it, or not. And they ate it.

BB: Sure.

LR: That was in the summer time, of course, but the peculiar thing was, we had one church building there and it was for any denomination or whoever wanted to use it. They had to take turns so they wouldn't get mixed up and the funny thing was that whichever preacher was coming to preach, whether it was Baptist, Methodist, or what, came to our house to eat and they didn't charge him, you know. Didn't go to one of the members...

BB: Members. Could have done that, couldn't he? Oh, me.

LR: Now the lights come on at four o'clock in the morning and they went off at nine during the week. They stayed on till ten on Sunday night. Fifteen minutes before time for them to go off, they would blink to warn you and you got up and got ready for bed. Or you would be in the dark.

BB: Or you would be in the dark.

LR: And I would wait until everybody went to bed to study and I had to study by a lamp because the lights were out. I wanted to study by the fire, and all the men were in the lobby and they played "forty-two" or something like that. And so I had to wait until everybody went to bed to study.

VW: And we didn't have no, there wasn't any ugly men, you know what I mean, they were all nice.

BB: What age men would generally work like that? Were they young men or were they older?

VW: Well, they couldn't have been too young. I don't know, you know there was a lot of them....

BB: Were they bachelors or they just worked like and went home on the weekends?

LR: Some of them were bachelors and some of them had families and did go home on the weekends. We had two or three young ones that were single like Paul and the... Who was the boy that... Ross Walker, before he married and several like that that stayed there until they married. In fact, this Ross Walker married while he was there and brought his wife there to stay. But most of them I would say were in their 30's and on up that way, because if you got married you couldn't stand the pressure of that work in the woods. It was really hard.

VW: It was hard work.

BB: I see. That kind of answers my question. I was going to ask if they stayed but...

VW: Oh, we had to wash the bed linens, too.

LR: Of course, we didn't. But we did have black women that came and washed out in the yard. We had a pot out there to boil the clothes and it took them nearly all day to do that.

BB: Who would do that? Would they change the sheets every day or like once a week?

LR: No, we changed the sheets. We did that.

BB: Oh, but they just did the laundry.

LR: They just washed and hung them on the lines and we would bring them in and fold them and then, of course, there was always several of the families that lived there. We lived in the same house and sometimes Mamma's brother and his wife lived there. And sometimes there would be others. But we had a big ironing because you had to iron everything then. The khakis and the overalls and the shirts, and the housedresses, the aprons, we didn't... The only thing we did to the sheets was just fold them and the pillow cases you fold them and just iron them once. But I remember we had two ironing boards and the flat irons that you heated on the stove. And there would be one of Mamma's sisters was there all time, her younger sister, in the summer time. She had to go away to school and then the other sister lived there awhile, Ora. They are both dead now. But we would take turns. Two of us would iron and the other one would read aloud and then we would change and let the other one iron and another one would read aloud. Because we all loved to read.

BB: You would have, too, because those irons are heavy. Those irons are heavy.

LR: We wanted that reading. We would all agree to that.

BB: Oh, how neat.

VW: Sometimes it was the Bible. Sometimes it was whatever we had.

BB: Where would you get your books?

VW: We had good books. Good books, but I guess...

BB: Did you have a library of any kind or just had to buy your own if you wanted...

LR: We bought them in town, I guess. I remember Mama giving me a book for my birthday one time, and I guess she got it in Rusk and I don't know whether the drugstore, or who sold them then.

VW: That one that....

LR: That one that you didn't know that I shouldn't have had.

BB: Oh, one of those, huh?

VW: I got it at Mrs. Mosley's and I went up there and give her a good talk. And she didn't know it either. She said, "Mrs. Wells, this is a good book. It must be a very good book because the girls are just buying it like everything." Oh, I just got that and carried it and then Louise...

LR: See it was for my birthday and she asked me how I liked it. Well, it was a present and I didn't want to say "well, I didn't like it." It was all right. It was good. She read it and now it would be nothing.

BB: No, not a thing probably.

VW: What had that girl done? She was pregnant, wasn't she? That was the first time that I ever knew they could do that.

BB: Oh, me. Well, tell me, did you have kind of a....

VW: Well, you ... we told you to lay us down.

LR: We are wasting your tape and time.

BB: No, no, no. This is fine. That is neat. I knew that they had the out houses. What did you do for bathing though? Did you have a bathtub in the boarding house or what?

LR: Tub. Yes. The men would carry the tub up there and then they would carry the water to fill the tub.

BB: To bathe in, so they would bathe in their bedroom?

LR: Yes. But in the summer we had a shower out in the yard.

BB: And they just got the regular tap water.

LR: Yes. And they would go out there and we would bathe behind the stove, either in the afternoon after everybody was gone or at night after they went to bed. Of course, the children, the small ones, could bathe back there any time, but then at night, the children, and I was one then, would put on... We would put on our sleeping clothes in there where

it was warm and run down this screened porch to our bedroom 'cause it was cold and jump in the bed. You would carry these irons wrapped up to put at your feet and cover so heavy you could hardly move, because there was no heat.

BB: Rooms were so cold.

LR: When Mama would call me and my bother to come and get ready for school, we would get up and get our clothing and run to the kitchen and dress.

BB: Dress in there, oh me.

LR: That is the way it was, and when I left, I married and left, they still didn't have, didn't have a bath tub.

VW: We never did, never did.

LR: Not at the boarding house, but when you moved, when my dad was wood's foreman and moved into this house there was a bathroom and tub over there.

BB: What was that house like? Was it fancy any way or just larger.

VW: It was larger. It was...

LR: It was built different.

VW: It was...

LR: It was just a frame house, but it was built differently. It had a great big living room and the bedrooms, the bathroom, another bedroom and they had screened the little porch on the back.

VW: Wallpapered part of it is what I'm trying to say.

BB: Oh, that was pretty fancy then to have wallpaper?

LR: Of course we had a dining room and the kitchen was kinda small. And the kitchens in the other houses didn't have cabinets built in them, it was just a room. It had a hydrant that came into the kitchen, just the bare hydrant.

BB: Didn't have a sink?

LR: Not unless you fixed it yourself. Just four rooms and one hydrant in the kitchen.

BB: They just had a ... Oh, my goodness..

LR: And one on the back porch, you know.

BB: Yes. Did they provide any of the furnishings or they all had to be your own?

LR: They had to be your own, but you had no utility bills. No water bill, no light bill, but you had to furnish your own wood. But you could just go to the woods and get it.

BB: Yes. That would be easy.

LR: And the...

BB: But the stove the wood stove, any of that stuff you had to get. No cabinets in the kitchen.

LR: You had to get it yourself unless you had them built. Most of them just used tables. You had a dishpan to wash the dishes in, but now the ones... I knew several that had sinks put in. But Mrs. Currie wouldn't let hers, when she washed dishes she wouldn't, she wouldn't wash them in the sink. She didn't want that ugly water to get on her sink.

BB: Ugly water to get on her sink.

LR: I don't know what it was for.

BB: Just for clean water. That is what it was for. Was the boarding house that primitive as far as things or did you have cabinets and all?

LR: We had a big pantry that had shelves for all the food and stuff, but...and these sinks that we told you they built.

BB: Yes.

LR: But there was two great long tables that we used.

BB: As a counter.

LR: Yes, as a counter. And the cooking utensils were just hung on the wall behind the stove and around.

BB: Behind that.

LR: And....

BB: How did the boarding house work? Now, you ran the boarding house for the company. You worked for them and was paid a salary or what? How did that work?

LR: No. They furnished the dishes and everything.

BB: And the house.

LR: And the sheets. Everything like that, but the boarders were charged and Mama kept books on it. They did just pay ninety cents a day for three meals, everything. Ninety cents. I think it started off around seventy-five cents a day, but finally went to ninety cents. And she kept books on it and they would take that out of their payday and that was what Mama... what they made.

BB: That was what they made. So it fluctuated.

LR: They had to pay for the groceries and everything out of that. They didn't pay for the groceries. We had to pay for them.

BB: Oh.

LR: We had to buy the groceries and everything. They furnished the sheets, towels and dishes. They had to get a requisition for all that, you know. And they did that except Mama, I remember you making sheets.

VW: Well, I started to say when they run out... out of the material and couldn't get it. I don't know how I got it, but anyhow I did it and Mr... What was his name?

LR: Strauss.

VW: Strauss told me to, oh... go to Rusk and get the material and he wrote me off a... that he would pay it you know. And if I would hem the sheets, he says every time you give us a sheet, you take a sheet.

LR: You couldn't have done that you would have had a hundred. But I remember Mama hemming them on the machine and I was supposed to tie them. She cut...

BB: The thread?

LR: And she could hem them faster than I could tie them. See there were four different things. And she could hem them faster than I could tie them.

BB: Sit there and tie them.

LR: One more thing. She mentioned when the Diboll people came, about once a year all the big dogs....

BB: I hear you.

LR:from Diboll had a banquet.

VW: We had that regular man.

LR: Well, the boss, Mr. Strauss, as I said the big shots. And they came there instead of going to Lufkin, or somewhere. They had us do it. And for days we would clean, the chairs were just, they weren't painted or anything, we would scrub the chairs and we had beautiful tablecloths, napkins and iron those. And wash and iron the curtains, which we didn't ordinarily use, because it was too much trouble. And I would... the silverware, it was not silver, it was the kind with wooden handles, but I would take soda... That was all we had... to clean and make them look real nice.

BB: To clean them.

LR: And they Mama and them would fix the dinner, they called it. And that was a really wonderful thing for us. It was just something else to see all these men come dressed in their suits and ties and everything, because the food was so good. That is what they wanted to do.

BB: Yes.

LR: And it was just a joy to do it and because I got paid.

BB: Oh, that was a change.

LR: Yes. They would tell Mama to hire any help that she needed so I was the help.

BB: Oh, how nice.

LR: I was good help when I wanted to be.

BB: When you got paid for it.

LR: My Grandmother used to say, "If Louise is in the mood, I had rather have her to help me than anybody, but if she is not, I don't."

BB: Rather not. Mrs. Wells, did Tom Temple ever come?

VW: Oh yes, Tom Temple, the very oldest one that I know anything about.

BB: Did he come to this dinner like you were talking about? Or was it....

VW: Yes. Yes. He came to one of them.

BB: What was he like?

VW: He...(laughing) I can't remember what kind of hat he owned, but he had on a funny something on his head, you know, we couldn't keep from laughing.

BB: It was different from what you had seen anyway huh?

VW: Yes, I was about half scared of him, because I knew who he was. But there were several men with him, course I guess playing like to me, you know.

LR: By the way, they didn't stay at the boarding house. There was a special little house built for them out behind this grocery store and it had the bed and the dresser, and had a rug. It wasn't papered or anything, but we called it the "Strauss House" because he was the boss then. And when he would send word that he was coming, we would have to go out there and clean it up real good, because that is where they had all their meetings, where he slept and everything. That was the boss's house.

BB: Did they have meeting rooms in it? That sort of

LR: No, it was just one room.

BB: No, just one room.

LR: That is where, if they had any business to tend to, that is where they met. It was a big room with double beds and everything.

VW: Out in the back of everything else.

LR: In back of the store.

BB: Just away from everything. Did the boarding house have wallpaper or anything like that?

LR: Oh, no. Always wished it did.

VW: It was good lumber though. They didn't pick out the ...

LR: None of it had paper unless you did it yourself.

BB: Was there anything painted?

VW: No. Not a drop of paint.

BB: No paint.

LR: Unless you painted it yourself. Nothing.

VW: They didn't know, I don't think, when they put it there....

BB: That they were going to stay so long.

LR: You know I used to wish that they would paint it. And I dream, even now, that they have painted it and it was the prettiest thing. It was a nice looking old place, as I said, it

was two story. The front porch didn't go all the way across, but it was way, way across and had these rockers, great rockers all across and my Grandmother had them build flower boxes. And they were great big ones all across from the end to the steps and she planted this wandering jew in there every year. And on the outside it would just hang to the ground. But the men would prop their feet upon it inside and keep it cut off. And she always had pot plants that we had to take in. And they had flowers in the yard, except one day they told this Negro man who stuttered, and we called him "Stuttering Jack", to go out there and clean that yard real good. He hadn't swept it or anything. She said "I mean clean it good" and he went out there and cut down every plant, rosebushes and all. It was clean! He did clean it.

BB: So he did... Oh, me. Were there fences around the yards in Fastrill like there were here?

LR: There were fences. These houses were in rows and there would be a garden between the houses. Each family had a garden spot. Now the boarding house, the fence came up to the side where the porch was. Not across where the porch was, but where the porch started and then went on back and it had a back yard. The front, of course, was open because that is where they parked and everybody came in. But everybody had a fence because the cows and everything ran loose and you had a garden spot if you wanted to do that. Or you could build pens out in the back of the house. There was plenty room out back for you to build your pigpens and all that. Cows, everybody that wanted to have a cow... chickens. And they almost had to have.

VW: Chicken houses.

BB: Did most people have them?

LR: Yes, ma'am. Because they didn't make enough to buy all this stuff and there wasn't anywhere to buy it. I don't guess they ever sold eggs at the commissary. I don't ever remember buying eggs there.

VW: I don't either. We got the eggs though.

LR: We went out to the country. Mama would send me a lot of times, and I loved that, to these different places out in the country. We knew people who would raise, have the eggs and we would buy oh, ten and twelve dozen at the time. That was just absolutely necessary.

BB: So the boarding house, ya'll didn't raise any animals?

LR: Well, we had cows for personal use, for our own milk and stuff. We didn't try to furnish it for the whole thing. But sometimes when the cows weren't giving milk, Mama, they would buy it from some of the neighbors for us, for just us. In fact, my brother and I wouldn't, we wouldn't eat unless we had milk and Post Toasties. That is what we liked.

VW: Tell her about that one. This is one where she told him to come down there, for you all to come and bring me a bowl, or glass.

LR: Oh, she sent my brother and me to get the milk one day. He was four years younger than I. I don't know how old I was, but we went to get the milk and the women was out in the pen milking. She had two cows. And we bought buttermilk too. But we went out there and my brother said "Mrs. Powers which cow gives the buttermilk." (laughing) By the way he and I have the same birthday. But I'm four years older

BB: Well that is unusual.

VW: They do. I was that.....I wasn't, everybody would say did you plan that. I would say "Do you think I'm crazy." But I was glad I was crazy.

BB: Did you have a garden too? Or did you try to do a garden on top of everything else?

LR: My granddaddy had one.

BB: Your grandfather had one.

LR: The road that you went to go to Alto and Rusk, across the tracks down there, there was a track that came in and brought the horses and things you know. It was nearly a mile out there I guess. But he had a huge garden. He raised enough stuff for the boarding house. It was a huge thing because he had always farmed. And he loved it, he loved farming and he was a good one. He raised everything, beans, corn, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, just everything.

BB: Did he work in the woods too? Or did he just work at the boarding house?

LR: He scaled logs. Do you know what a scaler is?

BB: Yes.

LR: He scaled logs a while. Did he do anything else for the Company Mama?

VW: No he got the fire job.

LR: O.k. that is what I'm talking about. He worked for the forest department. They called him a smoke chaser. They had these towers, you see them around now. The man stayed in there all the time and if he spotted smoke or fire he would call Papa. And Papa was supposed to go put it out. And sometimes Papa's car wouldn't work and Mama or I would have to drive him to these things and we'd just sit, I'd just sit in the car while he got out and....

VW: I got out lots of times.

BB: Just got out and pushed out the fire.

LR: If it was too big then he would send me back in to try to get someone to help him. But he did that for years and that is why they called them “Smoke Chasers.”

VW: But he could make... He could still have his garden.

BB: And do that, too.

LR: And then there was time in there that he had what they called a “jitney” that he had. It was a model “T” truck that he fixed the bed on. It had a cover like a bus you know, it had seats and he drove to Rusk and charged, you know.

BB: Oh, like a taxi kind of, and what did they call it?

VW: And he carried the mail.

LR: A “jitney”.

BB: A “jitney”? I have trouble spelling that, I imagine.

LR: J-i-t-n-e-y. I don’t know why they called it that, but that is what they called it.

BB: Oh, goodness. How many people lived in Fastrill? A whole lot?

VW: I’ve tried to imagine. Tried to think how many houses there were to a row, but I can’t. I didn’t pay any attention then I guess.

LR: No we didn’t. It was planned. They planned it this way. They called it the front row. The store, the barbershop and all that was on this side and then the front row went all the way from one end of the camp to the other, but right in the middle in front of the store they started going this way.

BB: I am going to get you to sketch that for me before I go.

LR: Okay. I will need my glasses.

VW: Here is mine if you want them.

LR: I want mine. I thought I had them.

VW: Well, here... I’m not...

LR: Okay.

VW: She is not as old as I am.

BB: I hope not.

LR: She is just 17 years older than I am.

BB: Oh really.

LR: Yes Ma'am. O.K. Of course I'm not drawing it to scale. Here is the first row of houses right here. And here is the store and things. These houses, there would be a garden space and then another house and then a garden space all like that. That is the way these were down here. These went way, way down the same way. And they had there garden space too. All right, now this right along in here would be the boarding house and then next to that would be the post office and the company office. And that is where the bookkeeper stayed. Then next to that would be the great big commissary, icehouse and everything. Then on down here was the drug store and post office first there. And here the last thing was the barbershop, cleaning and pressing shop and the gasoline pumps. Later when he gave the thumbs up that they moved him up here to the store.

BB: In front of the commissary.

LR: Had those old timey things you pumped by hands you know. Now from here, this is the boarding house, there was a row of houses that went on down to the end of this. But this was a curve down here and these houses went to here. There were two houses in this curve and then it came right on back up to the boss's house.

BB: Oh, right next door.

LR: The boss's house was next door to the boarding house and this street, the main street, you know, went on down past the barber shop on down past these houses and around the last house down here, turn the curve and went on toward Alto.

BB: Where was the little house? Was it back behind the commissary you said? The Srauss house?

LR: That Strauss house, yes, back here, right back here behind the commissary. It had a little porch on it. Something like that. Had its own little heater and everything.

BB: Where was the school?

LR: Out here, see this is the road. The school was out here like this. The funniest thing there was a little road down here that you could go up to the school house because later they built a couple of those little two-room houses along here. But we didn't want to go way down there so we would just go through the neighbor's yards and they got to where they didn't pay any attention to it. They just expected it. We all went home for lunch of course, you know, we went home. Have I left anything out?

BB: The church, you said there was a church. Was it just on the opposite side?

LR: No, it was down here. Later when they, I told you about those little two-room houses. They were down here later on and the church was right opposite those. Right in here and you could turn from the street here or this street that went out to Alto and Rusk. You could come up to it that way, but it was just a little plain building and just had benches. Homemade benches and all that and somebody had put a piano in there. And I don't know who it was, but there was piano there for anybody that wanted to use it. But I used to say that "every dog has his day and every preacher has his Sunday" you know, because sometimes we had church in the afternoon. A preacher would come from Jacksonville or somewhere and we had our services in the afternoon and then somebody else would have theirs.

BB: In the morning.

LR: Morning or night. The Baptist usually had theirs in the morning. There were more Baptist than any other kind.

VW: But they didn't feed him.

BB: You all still got to feed him no matter what.

LR: But something we haven't mentioned is the quarters, we called it. The quarters were out behind all this. The Negroes had this end. The Mexicans had this end.

BB: Oh, there were Mexicans?

LR: Yes the Mexicans. And the Mexican boarding house was right in here. They didn't have a Negro boarding house. Yes, they did. Rosy... Rosy and Jack had it.

BB: Oh.

LR: Well, it was up there close. Well, they didn't have a Mexican boarding house. Yes, they did because....

VW: Yes, Susie.

LR: Susie and Lucy and Mary. Yes.

VW: Yes.

LR: Well, they must have been close together.

BB: So it was a Mexican family that ran the boarding house and the Negro family had the Negro boarding house.

LR: Yes, and the Negro school. There are two or three rows of these Negro houses, you know, and Mexicans. And there weren't as many Mexicans. But behind all this, back in

here was what we called “the hall” and that was the Negro place like they would dance sometimes, and they played “forty-two” and they served certain kinds of food and every Saturday night they had ice cream, you know. I mean good bought ice cream. And we would take a big bowl over there and get a dollar’s worth of ice cream. Take this bowl and take our spoons and eat ice cream.

But anyway, the Mexicans went to school with us, but the Negroes had their own schoolhouse out here like this. And it was a two-story building and I don’t think that they had, I don’t know whether they had enough to go, to use both or not. But they used theirs for a church house. They used their school for a church.

BB: Schoolhouse and church.

LR: And later then when they opened up this road to Slocum. It was right, it came down by there. It turned right here by the foreman’s house and right in here and went right down through there and crossed the river down here and there was a long, long narrow bridge. There was room for only one car or truck and when the bus would come, it would come on across, it would come on up then to Fastrill to pick us up except when it was raining hard. It would wash the slough bridges out and it couldn’t come. It would come to the end of the bridge. It would come all the way across this little narrow bridge and stop right there and the ones whose mothers made them, would walk and wade the water and guess whose...

BB: Whose mother made them go?

LR: Mine was the only mother that made hers go and then he would have to back up. You couldn’t turn around.

BB: He couldn’t turn around and he had to back up through that bridge.

LR: I would wear my overalls and my boots, my rubber boots. And put my shoes in my pocket and when I would get to the bus I would take my rubber boots off and put my shoes on.

BB: Oh, no.

LR: But you can talk to anyone who used to live there and they loved it. It had a... as I said... there was... It was kinda enchanted. We didn’t have very many deaths there. I don’t remember. Mr. Hunter died. He was the store manager.

VW: He was an old man.

LR: And he was old when he came there and Mrs. Durham’s baby. Paul Durham’s mother, they had a little... she was about two, I guess. I don’t know what ... Do you know what?

VW: No, I just can't ...I just remember how that was.

LR: And then there was a boy who was killed in the woods. And by the way, when you would hear this whistle blowing a certain number of whistles, you would either know there was an accident or someone had been killed. Everyone would run down to the Doctor's office, which was in the drugstore. You had no idea who it was.

BB: Just wanted to make sure that it wasn't yours.

LR: Just wanted to make sure it wasn't ours and when that whistle would blow it used to scare everybody. And we all run down there to see who it was. And they had a ... After I left home they had a bad wreck and killed one man and burned another one real bad because they had a heater in the car that they were riding in, and that thing turned over and that....

BB: Oh, you mean like a little stove?

LR: Yes... and this thing caught fire and he was burned and they were all bunged up pretty bad. Just lucky that more of them weren't killed. But the women, of course, they were there with their children all day long. Their men had gone to the woods, but the company doctor was a company doctor and you did not have to pay him. You did not have to pay for your medicine and he came to the house.

VW: Every day, he used to make a round.

LR: Well, Dr. Evans didn't because he couldn't drive. Did you ever see a doctor that couldn't drive? He couldn't drive. His wife would drive him if she was there. She wasn't there all the time. But you didn't have to pay. If you needed him, you just went up there and told him that so and so was sick. And then they made the medicine. They didn't pour out of a ... it was liquid and he fixed his own.

BB: Oh, you didn't have a pharmacist?

LR: No, he did his own.

BB: He did his own medicine.

LR: He surely did.

BB: Mr. Turner... Was Dr. Turner at Fastrill?

LR: Yes.

BB: I was talking to him and he said people would ask him why he didn't want to be a doctor like his daddy and he said, "They don't make any money."

LR: He didn't.

BB: It is not like now days.

LR: I loved him. I loved Dr. Turner and when they moved, they left... I cried and cried and cried because I just loved him. Mrs. Turner was a small woman and had little feet and she wore high-heeled shoes and I would just stand around waiting for her to throw a pair of her shoes away so I could have them because they just fit me. And when they left I wrote her a letter and told her how much I missed them. How much I missed Dr. Turner.

VW: Dr. Turner was just as sweet as he could be.

LR: He was. And jolly and had a good sense of humor and was just as witty as he could be. Everybody loved him.

BB: Well, after your husband got to be wood's foreman and you moved out, did you still help your mom with the boarding house or did they have to ...

LR: No, they had moved out. They had already moved from the boarding house into another house. This was before. And I don't know why you all, was it just because...

VW: Momma got sick.

LR: Sick. Okay, they moved into a house.

VW: Momma had some...Momma couldn't work anymore and I didn't want to.

LR: She had gallstones and she had a hernia and she just had...

BB: Just couldn't do the physical work anymore.

LR: Couldn't do it. So they moved into one of these houses where they built a sleeping porch on the side and they had the living room, bedrooms and the bathroom. They fixed their own, but when...

VW: We fixed our cabinets.

LR: Cabinets. Oh, yes. We fixed our own cabinets. That's right but then when my dad was promoted to this other, they moved into the house.

BB: Into the other one.

LR: But my grandparents lived right across the street from that. They moved in a house that was right across the street from Mama and she was still there to help her get groceries and everything.

BB: How long did you all have the boarding house?

VW: Oh, shoot. I don't know.

LR: Just a minute. I left when I was nineteen and my baby was born when I was twenty-one and you had already moved out then.

BB: So you are talking between thirteen and fifteen years.

LR: Yes.

BB: That is a long time to have a boarding house.

LR: You had better believe it is.

BB: One more thing I want to ask, okay. These women did the laundry, the sheets and things. Would they do the laundry for the men too? Or would the men have to do their own?

LR: No, they had to see about their own. This was strictly the... She did ours.

BB: The linen and things.

LR: She did our clothes. They did our clothes and the linens and things, but the men were responsible for their own.

BB: Okay. What was... Oh, I know one other thing. Was there anyone living in Fastrill who didn't work for the company or were they all...?

VW: No, they didn't have any business being there.

BB: Okay, it was strictly...

LR: There wasn't any houses.

BB: Okay, so it was strictly company.

VW: Yes, you know the farmers all around they... they... shoot, they went home at night. Some of them didn't though.

LR: I really can't think of anybody that didn't because it was strictly company houses and nothing else.

VW: It was that way here when we came here. You didn't They wouldn't let you have any land when we moved here. (To Diboll) That is the reason they built these houses, you know. This is one that they built.

LR: This is one of the first houses that they built.

VW: And ... It was... I forgot how long it was because... but when they started letting us buy our own houses.

BB: Well, that wasn't until the '50's, was it?

LR: No, because.... You moved here in the

BB: In '41.

LR: And they had just built it. It was brand new.

BB: But it's still a company house, right?

LR: Yes, it was still a company house and they paid rent on it. But they were nice houses here and all that street in front of the old commissary, that was where the bosses lived and you could say this was the "O'Hara" house and this was the "Doctor's" house and this was so and so house.

BB: You are talking about on the other side of the tracks. Just on the same street as the commissary would have been on.

LR: No, Opposite. Do you know the old Southern Pine office is?

BB: Yes. Okay. All right.

LR: Okay that street that goes by... This is the same street.

BB: Right. Hines that goes around.

LR: Right there on the left.

BB: Okay.

LR: The poor people called it "White Stocking Row" you know, because it was the bosses and that went on... If you remember there is a great big house still standing just this side of the Methodist Church down there on the left. Mr. Hines lived in that. He was supposed to be a pharmacist, he wasn't but he was. (Phone rings) Is your little boy looking for you?

BB: I bet...

**TAPE STOPPED
END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO
END OF INTERVIEW**