

PAUL FRED
Interview 46a
August 1984
Self interview
Dorothy Farley, Trasciber
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: Longtime Diboll resident Paul Fred talks about growing up and working as an African American in Diboll during the Great Depression. He mentions salaries, school, recreations, law enforcement, and going to Lufkin to watch football and see movies.

Paul Fred (hereafter PF): My daddy was working on the mill pond for \$1.00 a day and other than that he had to work part time, let someone else work part time so everybody would have a chance to get a little time in to receive some money for commodities. During the time he would be off he would make a victory garden, we had a big garden. So other than that during that time I was going to school from '28 to 1937 and my teachers were Professor Hurdle and Mrs. Hurdle and Mrs. Byrd. I had a job after school working for Mrs. Rutland and a houseboy, doing chores such as I was able to do at the present time. They would contribute money to help me buy school clothes. Later on as I became older I worked around the store for Chester Willis as a delivery boy driving a delivery wagon. During that time I was making about \$30.00 a month delivering at the Southern Pine Lumber Company store. They had, during that time wasn't paying much but was doing the best we could with what we had. At that time they had the store, they had the drugstore, post office, market and the people who run them things, the store, Mr. Drew, Jimmy Fuller was in the grocery department and Mr. Hines and Mr. Agee was in the drugstore department and Mr. Cruthirds was in the meat department. Miss Zettie Kelly was in the post office; she had been there for a long time. Chester Willis always picked the mail up from the train and carried it back into the post office. That was back in 1932, in the '30's, in 1932 I was working over there for Mrs. Rutland then, so I was pretty good size then. Then I was in the store. Then I left the store and went to the sawmill, worked around there a while and they weren't paying anything, about \$2.00 a day, or \$1.50 a day, something like that. Whatever it was it was nothing to survive on, you didn't have no other choice but that. I'd show pretty good at times and, well, we had our ups and downs regardless of what, so we had daily wages around then wasn't too much. The conditions was like the black section and the white section was on one side of town and we were on the other part of the town. Where I stayed it was called the pipe line and we had two bedrooms, no hot running water, a faucet outside and we drew the water, had heaters, no 'frigerators and nothing like that, iceboxes and icemen would come around sometimes, so other than that the living conditions was – part of the town, different sections. We didn't have no paved roads, all dirt roads and what not, and when it rained water would be standing in the roads and bad, and get stuck in the mud if you had a car. You had to have boots, you didn't have no other choice and raincoats and you got your wood in, put your pine wood up under the house to keep it dry so you would be able to start a fire. Get up early and during the day the mill would be running, making a

lot of noise and what not and had a whistle, they called it the 11:15, meant the husbands would be coming home and get the bread in the stove. That was back in 1932 all the way down. In 1940 by that time well, we had a man that drove the wood wagon, name was Winston Brown and Mr. Green. Mr. Green was the Sheriff and Southern Pine didn't have too many trucks there; it was on contract like to Mr. Paul Hogue to haul lumber in. Back into Kilgore and B. D. Black and them had a big truck, they would haul lumber for the company down to Houston and back and to different places like that. Then about 1936 they paid a bonus, lot of the blacks all got a little bonus and they all bought cars then. Bonus was from World War I and so that's how they came by the money. Other than that some of them were still working. Across from the store they had a hotel, called the Star Hotel, Mr. Lee Este's mother was running it and used to have to carry groceries over there every day. Mr. Lee Estes had a filling station on Highway 59, just as you were going out, going toward Lufkin. The filling station was an Humble and then they changed it to Sinclair Filling, helping in there was Bennie Rector. Then later on they built up on Highway 59 a big hotel called The Antlers, I believe that's what it was. They built that and then they commenced to build some more houses across 59. They brought in the handle factory around by the Temple Freight Train Station and they had their own lines, and I think one of the guys, foreman, over there was named Edwin Nelson during that time. They were making handles and they hired a few people. Right after that, when the war broke out, a lot of them, they hired a lot of people down at the box factory and the box factory was making crates and stuff. Women, they were hiring a lot of them, they had their little mill down there and this was right during the war started, the war broke out. I didn't leave until 1943, got drafted to go into the Marine Corps. So I hope you can get some benefit out of this. Then I think I said I graduated from the 9th grade.

I think I told you about that thought, I wasn't too interested in learning – they wouldn't hire kids, sometime during, when school was out, to cut weeds in different areas, like that, and we didn't have no unions, nothing like that, we worked so much a day, working life in Diboll, working and life was always pretty hard in them days but later on, I think, after I left it they brought in a lot more people. They had a place called Fastrill, they brought those people in and they built some more houses and they called that Red Town. So some of them were telling me, they didn't have no street numbers or nothing, only thing they went by the number on the houses and by people's names, that's the way you could find people, they didn't have no kind of communication, I think they had a phone at some places so in case of fire you could dial that just for fire only. That's all I can think of right now. I should have it all together but I'm doing the best I can and I appreciate you people sending me this correspondence and to make the history of Diboll a hundred years. And thank you – I hope that's it. Paul Fred.

They had the colored section of town and they had the white section of town, they had a school for the whites and a school for the colored, sometimes for recreation they would have the whites visit the coloreds and play ball, or else, we would go play ball at the church. A few places we went for recreation and then, we used to go fishing for recreation and played basketball, played different games, different schools, like Lufkin and Nigton, back in there during that time. It was pretty good, some of it. Then they had the 19th of June and they would contribute, the company would contribute so much to the people, the 19th of June, everybody would be off, they would have big dances, big parties,

contests and during all that and what now, that was back in 1939 on up to I guess '43 after I left. So I hope you can get something out of this cause that has been a pretty good while.

Then they had Mrs. Farrington, the lady on the ladies side of the store. Jim Fuller had furniture upstairs and they had, let's see, I'm trying to think now, and the train ran through there twice a day, the passenger train and it ran twice at night, going to Houston to Shreveport. They had other recreations, the school, during the school, they had participation, different games, what not back then. It was pretty hard but we made the best we could so I hope you are able to get something. Did I tell my age? Well, I was about 9 or 10 – yeah, in 1928, I think I was 9 or 10. I worked around the store and got to know a lot of people and they used to have little rodeos back in some days there and so other than that we used to go to Lufkin they had the county fair in Lufkin. They had special days for the blacks to go, but you could go anytime but they had one put aside for nothing but blacks. Other than that I hope you can get something out of this.

Yeah, I was caught back there a couple of times in a big tornado, it came and blowed lumber all over the place, blowed the smoke stack down, then they had a big snow back in 1932 and that ground turned hard as concrete. You talk about rough, it was mighty rough then, trying to keep warm, the wind was blowing, did a lot of damage back in them days. Later on the NRA came out and the people went to working eight hours a day fixing it, a little bit sanitary places for people, building roads, helping them during the Depression back in 1928 – 29, they had the Red Cross there giving out flour, giving out food stuff, some canned goods, didn't have no label on it, didn't know what you were getting, was in the cans and during that time it was really rough. They had a little Judge Peace on the back side by the Methodist Church. Mr. Johnson was the judge and on Saturdays we'd have, a lot of people came in in wagons, buggies, horses and things going and going to court, that was really something to see then. Then they had Mr. Smith had the pressing shop, the only pressing shop there and he had a couple of fellows working in there, one of them was black, I think, one was T. L. and the other was Happy. And another boy, I think his name was Clyde. Just as the war broke out they were signing, and they picked them up and that left him with one fellow, I think, an elderly fellow was working there during that time. Oh yes, they had a little calaboose, when you would act up they would put you in there and let you stay there over night, then pick you up and carry you to Lufkin to the big jail.

For money they used to have a thing looked like a milk top, they had blue, white, green – I think the white was \$1.00, the blue was \$0.05 the yellow was \$0.10 and the red was \$0.25 and that was your money to spend in Diboll. Some other outlet store would take it and then they would cash it in for a little money. They would pay every two weeks in cash. But very few people made much every two weeks, they had a place in the store you could, the fellow would fill it out for you and then you would carry it over to the timekeeper, Mr. Nelson, and he would okay it and then that's how you would get your commodities, other than that you didn't have enough time and no money, you didn't get nothing. Sometimes some of them would see Mr. Rutland and talk to him and he's say go ahead and let that boy have so and so, said he will ay, said he just hit it hard right now at

the present time. I've seen Mr. Rutland give people clothes at the store cause he was the superintendent of all the stores, Pineland, Fastrill and Hemphill. I used to go I used to drive him as a matter of fact, back in those days. He had a daughter named Miss Josephine, she was a school teacher.

This is the history of Diboll to my knowledge, a lot of places and what not, they had CC roads and brought in a lot of CC camp people there building roads out in the country, going out different places. Then they brought in the NRA so people could work eight hours instead of working them long hours from sun-up to sun-down, that made a big change right there.

Mr. Rutland lived right across the street in that big place where they had the office that was his house. That's where he stayed during that time, Mr. O'Hara, Mr. Strauss, Mr. Durham, Clyde Thompson, a lot of big shots. Mr. Thompson was over the woods. Another fellow they called Mr. Kenley, I think he was a woods foreman too; he had a lot of cows, too. And they had Dr. Dale and Dr. Clement, oh, so many of them – I can't think of names. They had Miss Rhoda Faye, I think she was secretary and old man Weise was over the houses, worked in the office. Mr. Richards had a daughter by the name of Mildred, Miss Mildred Richards and he brought some company in there to build a water tank. They built a new water tank there; they brought a lot of people in there and built a water tank back during them days, the mill pond and the train. I think I will sign off.

When Mr. Temple moved there he brought a woman in there named Cristobel and her husband and we built a house for her, then the big house down there going toward Conn Pond, the big house. They brought her there; she was supposed to be the cook for Mr. Temple and them. She come down, I think she died. The bookkeeper had three sons, Junior Nelson, had one daughter named, I don't remember her name, but I know he had Edwin Nelson, Junior Nelson and Kenneth Nelson.

Mr. Porter ran it and another guy's name was Rat Johnson. He used to buy all the material that they would need for Temple Lumber Company railroad. If all this don't do – why you can call me at San Bernadino – my phone number 888-4795, my name is Paul Fred, 612 area code and I'll be glad to give you some more information. Maybe you could have a recorder record it as I talk, and ask questions, get to bring my memories back around to me. I would appreciate it if I could be of any help to you for this history, story type of record. Thank you.

Oh yes, by the way we used to play Corrigan, used to go down to Chester to play basketball. Then we used to play Woodville, during the baseball season we played Lufkin, Corrigan, a team out of Groveton, and Henderson and Longview. We used to go up to a big colored dance they would have up there, like Cab Callaway and Ella Fitzgerald. We would get a car; it would take so much money to go to those dances. Also to Nacogdoches, Wells and Alto, sometimes Jacksonville. One time there was a black team come out of Houston called the Grand Prize, came up there to play adult ball, we were all black out of Houston. Sometimes the blacks would get a school bus and they would go down there and play down in Houston, Pineland and a team came out of

Fastrill. Sometime they would come over here and play ball. We would have a good time, would have a dance after the ball game at night. Also we used to go to Camden, we had a big sawmill out there and we would go out there and play ball. They would come up and play ball with us. They would invite us on 19th of June.

We had a pretty good time, hard living back in 39, 38 or 40 when the war broke out, such as it was at the present time.

We used to go to Lufkin, see the Panthers play football, in the winter time up to Lufkin, few hot spots in Lufkin. We used to go to dances on Keltys Street. Another street was Chestnut, had a big colored theater there, we used to get there at 11 o'clock Friday night, see all those shows, Cab Callaway, Lionel Hampton and after hours come back in, the joints in Diboll would still be open selling hot dogs, hot links, selling hamburgers and chili, you could get a bowl of chili back in the '30's for about \$0.15 or \$0.10. Nehi – you could get a bottle of soda water for about \$0.05 or \$0.06. Back in those days gasoline was for \$0.10 a gallon. They had two types of gas, one, the white gas called Blue Goose and Chester Willis had a truck, old man Ben Bevins had a Model A. Winston Brown had a Studebaker or Chrysler – a few coloreds had cars, not too many and it was some had T-models and had '36 Fords, some had Nash, Essex with a Sparrow on the back. Miss Cora Nash used to cook for the hotel for Mrs. Estes. Mary Collins cooked for Mrs. Rutland, a lady name of Bertha. Back in them days I had to get up about 4 o'clock, go over and light the fire in the stove for Mr. Rutland and them, cook stove and have it burning when they got up. Then from there I walked back across town to school.

END OF INTERVIEW