

ESTELLE EDDINGTON

Interview 070a

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Marie A. Cochran, Interviewer

Dorothy Farley, Transcriber

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Marie Cochran, Estelle Eddington reminisces about her life spent in Angelina County. She was born in Nogalis Prairie in Houston County, but her family moved to Lufkin soon after. Through her growing up years she also lived in Ratcliff and back in Lufkin near Ellen Trout Lake. She recalls life during the Depression and during World War II as a young married woman. In 1960, the Eddingtons moved to Diboll, where she worked for Albrecht's Pharmacy, and she briefly talks about the changes in Diboll from the 1960's to 1980's.

Marie A. Cochran (hereafter MC): When and where were you born in Angelina County?

Estelle Eddington (hereafter EE): I wasn't born in Angelina County. I was born in Trinity County or Houston County, I believe. It was at Nogalis Prairie, out in the country.

My daddy owned a farm there. We didn't live there very long until we moved. We moved, I believe, from there to Lufkin, out here on the Old Union Road. Daddy owned a farm there. We stayed there for about seven years. And later we moved to Ratcliff. He got a 200-acre farm and lived there until the boys married. I had two brothers and a sister and they all married within a year. So that left Daddy home with that 200-acre farm with me, about 11 years old, and Donnis, my baby brother, who was 4 years younger than I am. We sold it and moved to Lufkin on Groesbeck. Daddy went to work for the city. He worked for the city, I guess, twenty years. We moved from there to Ellen Trout lake at the water plant. They pumped water into great big huge tanks that didn't have covers over them. And he worked there for twenty years. And that's where I married, was out there.

MC: Can you tell us a little about what it was like when you were growing up – being a young girl at that time, from 6-10 years old?

EE: I lived at Ratcliff then and that's where I started to school. Well, I was always a tomboy. I was always grown; never little. Daddy bought me a horse and her name was Gladys and I rode her to school. I had an awful lot of fun, mostly with boys. There wasn't any girls. We would always meet at an old cemetery where the roads would come together. And we would ride into Ratcliff, which was 3 ½ miles to school. And one day I was riding my old horse and it was coming up a cloud, and a dog had followed us to school, and he ran a cow out. My horse threw me and the saddle girt broke and my little brother was with me. The hold hit me right in the back of the head and now I have a big scar up there where it stuck in my head. Just lucky one of the boys followed me. He was

trying to catch me because he was scared to death. He was quite a bit older than I was. He finally caught up with us and he took my little old patent belt I had on, and fastened it to the saddle girt; put me on the saddle and put Donniss on up behind me and then he took me home. There was blood all over me. Mother was scared to death.

MC: Most of the kids at that time, did they ride horses?

EE: We lived 3 ½ miles from school. It was kind of hard to walk. But we walked an awful lot of the time, most of the time in fact. But then, I rode part of the time on my horse. A friend of mine was visiting with me one weekend and we went out to ride Gladys for a little while, and the saddle broke again. I reached down to pick up the saddle to put it on her, and she bit me in the back, right across my back, and her old teeth popped. She would have broke my back if she could have, I guess. She really bit me! That liked to have killed me. I could have killed her, too.

MC: Who was your mom and dad?

EE: Frank Davis and Virginia Pixley.

MC: How many children were in your family?

EE: Two girls and four boys.

MC: How many are still around today in 1985?

EE: Two boys....80 and 82. And my sister is 78. W. C. Davis and Archie Davis. And Clifford Ann Green.

MC: What was it like when you were in school?

EE: Oh, I don't suppose it was any different than it is now. We just lived in a little country town at first. But then after I moved here, when I was 11 or 12 years old, we moved from Ratcliff to Lufkin, and I went to Central Ward School here. From there, I went on into high school. But I didn't finish high school. Mother was sick all the time. At that time, they took 3 points off your grade when you were absent. And I had to stay home 2 days a week because I had to wash and iron, and I couldn't do it in one day. So I stayed two days. My homeroom teacher told me that it wasn't my work I was failing in, it was because I was absent too much. She said I had already failed. So I went home and told Mother. And at that time, we didn't have any one living out there that Daddy could hire to help Mother and stay home with her when she was sick. She was sick all the time. And so I quit school and went home. There were some colored people who lived in a little house on the hill about a mile, Daddy hired Evelyn, that man's wife, and she worked for Mother for 6 years after that. So I went to work in Lufkin, instead of going back to school.

MC: Were there any home remedies?

EE: When you were sick, one of the main things was Groves Chill Tonic. It nearly killed you. It was for everything. It had so much quinine in it. Ooh, it was awful. I said I'd never give it to my children and I didn't.

MC: Tell me about your life after you moved to Lufkin.

EE: Daddy was transferred and he worked for the city. They transferred him to the water plant. He was assistant water superintendent. Mr. Tom Russell was head of the water department. Daddy was his assistant. They paid him \$75 a month; furnished him a house, water, lights, and wood. Daddy always had a big garden and we had 2 cows. He bought a Shetland pony for Donnis, my little brother. And we really loved to live out there. We really enjoyed it. That was during the bad part of the Depression. But we never really knew there was a depression. We got \$75 a month, and then Daddy took the incinerator to clean at 4:00 every morning, and he made another \$35 for that. That gave us a little more money from that. And during the Depression days, they killed cows. They had more beef than they knew what to do with. They killed whole bunch of cows and they brought truckloads of those cows out there and burned them in the incinerator. Now with people needing that beef and needing that food as bad as they did, they did that. We thought it was terrible. But that was what they did.

MC: Who was doing that?

EE: That was back in Roosevelt's days when the WPA was going on. That was when it was done. During that time, they did all that cleaning out there. (She was referring to Ellen Trout Lake where she lived) They gave them jobs...a dollar a day. They would rake and clean and build bridges. And even planted flowers. They made a beautiful place out of it. It was just a showplace at that time. And people came out there fishing and picnicking.

MC: How was Lufkin affected by the Depression?

EE: Just like all other towns. It was hard. It was hard on so many people, honey. And there were so many people who didn't have work and food to eat, until it was pitiful. We didn't realize what it was all about because Daddy had a job and we had a house to live in. The lights, water and wood were furnished. Daddy always had a big garden and he would feed all the colored people around us out of that garden. And it was awful. I had an aunt and uncle out of work almost all the way through that, that Mother helped feed. If you didn't have a job and couldn't buy groceries, it was something else.

Mother would take \$5 and go to town on Saturday and she would buy groceries for us for a week. They were paid once a week. And she'd buy groceries out of that \$5. During that time, when we lived out there, my daddy built a duplex apartment in Lufkin on Groesbeck where we had torn down our home that we owned before moving to the water plant. He built the duplex apartment and paid for it, \$33 a month.

MC: When did you marry?

EE: 1938. I married out at the water plant. I married in that first house on top of the hill at Ellen Trout Lake. There was over 100 people at my wedding.

MC: What kind of work was your husband doing at that time?

EE: He was working at Atkinson Candy Company, at that time, when we first married.

MC: Were you working, too?

EE: Yes. I worked for Mike Edelman, at Edelman's Department Store. I had gone to work years before that. I went to work for L. I. Frank. It was Frank's Variety Store. He had been in business for years and years in Lufkin. And his son, Morris Frank was the one I really went to work for. He had taken charge of the store then, because his father was so old. And Morris wrote for the Houston Chronicle and for the Houston Post. He was a wonderful person and I really liked him.

MC: What was your opinion of Roosevelt and his administration during that time?

EE: Well, I was really too young to have too much of an opinion. I was about 16 or 17 years old. But everybody thought he was wonderful. And he really pulled the nation out with the WPA business and tree army camps. He set up those tree army camps for all those young boys and they would join that and everybody had jobs. That put some of the older men to working, too. They built all these farm to market roads and they did all of that during the Depression. So he worked the country. He was smart enough to know what to do, and how to do it. It was under his administration that social security was set up.

MC: How did people feel about social security?

EE: They were all for it. Everybody was.

MC: How do you feel about social security now?

EE: I think it's wonderful. And I don't know what us old people would do without it. I paid it from the very beginning all the way through.

MC: How many years was that?

EE: Gosh, I don't remember. But I was working at L. I. Frank's when they started. I started paying it and I paid it all the way through. I was 16 when I went to work for Morris, so I don't know just exactly when.

MC: Do you remember the day Roosevelt died?

EE: Yes. I can't remember back that far, but it was awful. It was really a blow to the nation when he died. I remember him having a heart attack and dying, and it coming over the radio that he had died. We didn't have television back then, but we all had radios.

MC: Do you remember December 7, 1941...Pearl Harbor?

EE: I was working. I believe that I was working at Beall's at the time. I well remember Pearl Harbor, and all the frantic and everything that went on...the declaration of war and all. I remember.

MC: What was the feeling around Lufkin when that happened?

EE: Everybody was scared to death. They knew what it was going to be and they knew that all the young men would be called in for war. And they were. My husband was called up 5 times, because he had a double hernia. We didn't know that he had it. He had worked out at the paper mill and we didn't know he had this hernia until the first time he was called for the draft. Of course, I just knew he was gone. And he went in and when they examined him, they put him out of the line and told him they would send him back through again. But they didn't tell him what it was, so he didn't know. And then they sent him back again and they told him he wouldn't go on with the rest of them. They wanted him to stay. He called me that night and told me that he had a double hernia, so he didn't know what they were going to do. He said, "You can't imagine how I felt when all the boys went on and left me!" He said that he could hardly stand it. So after that he was called up 5 different times before they finally told him. He asked the old major if he had the surgery done himself and paid for it would they take him then. He told him definitely not, that they would not take him. He never did have to go. But he was really disappointed because he didn't.

MC: What were some of the problems you faced during the War? How hard was it on the people back home?

EE: You couldn't get gasoline. We never had any trouble, because we knew so many of the soldier boys and we had an old 1936 model Chevrolet and it had 2 gasoline tanks. We had tickets for gas. There was rationing. The food part never did bother us, because it was just Sherman and me. And the gasoline didn't bother us, because somebody was always giving you a handful that didn't need it. For a lot of people, it was real bad, because they had no one to give it to them. We wouldn't have had any gas if we wouldn't have been given ration stamps.

MC: What kind of work were you doing during the war?

EE: I was working at Beall's and Sherman was working at Dixie Furniture Store at that time. We lived in Lufkin at that time. My daddy had built me a garage apartment behind the duplex then.

MC: When did you finally move to Diboll?

EE: When my daughter, Linda, graduated from junior high and my son, Royce, was a junior, around 1960.

MC: How had Diboll grown?

EE: It has really grown. When I moved down here it was just like living in the country. Mr. Temple owned practically everything that was here at that time. But we had to buy because we couldn't find a house for rent. Sherman came down here to manage a furniture store. We bought a house next door to the Temple's. He worked 2 or 3 years and then the furniture store closed. Then he went to work for Temple in supply and I went to work at the drug store for Dick Albrecht. He worked for Simpson's and I worked 2 years for him there. He went into business for himself in a little hole in the wall and he and I did that. Whenever I left him, he was in a huge building, doing grand. I managed the front and he took care of the back. I worked 18, nearly 19 years for Dick.

I went to work for Dick in 1962. I helped move the old Simpson Store. Dick opened his own store in 1964 and asked if I'd go with him. We were in a little building on the corner of Hines Street. He had a small store. Then in 1964, we had a fire. There was a dress shop in the far end of the building and a furniture store between us in the same building. The lady left a heater on with a dress hanging under it and it caught on fire. It burned all the ceiling. It was awful. We had to close that up. We went in the front of the post office in a building. We worked out of one room. Pharmaceutical people brought Dick prescriptions and medicine and stuff like that and helped him every way that they could. He filled prescriptions out of an old tub. His prescription didn't burn. They got those out. Then they built a new store that opened in February, 1979.

MC: How about the schools in Diboll?

EE: When we came down here, it was very small. It was segregated. The colored school was about 3 blocks across in front of me, and there was an elementary and high school. That was all they had at that time. Then, when desegregation came, they made a junior high and a high school. Then the city was incorporated and we had a city then, and things began to build up. It just grew into a real nice little town. And I have enjoyed living here very much.

MC: What do you think the timber industry has done for Diboll?

EE: Now I don't know that much about it. But I know that Mr. Temple has an interest in it and has done just grand in it. But I'm not that familiar with it.

MC: What were some of the favorite things that you cooked after marrying?

EE: I could cook anything when I married. Mother had been sick all my life and I had kept house and cooked, and everything. I wasn't like the girls now. I knew how to keep house, cook, wash, and everything. I can give you some recipes. My mother was the best

dumpling maker there ever was. Even today, when we have a church picnic, they come to me to make dumplings.

MC: What was it like when you started dating?

EE: Well, I guess like any other girl. I lived out at the water plant and I had an awful lot of company because it was so pretty at that time. And all the kids from Lufkin loved to come out there. I had plenty of company. I went with one real cute boy that had an old jalopy Ford. He was one of my first sweethearts. Every Sunday afternoon, he usually came out and we took pictures of everybody. Mama and Daddy never would allow me to go anywhere. He painted that old car pink and put big red hearts on it and wrote, 'I love Estelle', in those hearts. And die, I thought I would. Lamar Collins was a real good friend of mine, and Elsie Dunn dated him. We had an awful lot of fun. But it was usually 8 or 10 of us on Sunday afternoon. It was some place to go and everybody enjoyed going out there.

When I was 17, my sister married. They invited me to go for the weekend, so I went. George and Sister came back home. Daddy had told me to come back when they came back. But Sister told me to stay and I thought that it would be okay, if she said I could. So that night, they gave me a party in the central office. So we went. Mama and Daddy never let me do anything. I couldn't play games. I didn't know anything about 'snap' and all of the other games they played. I couldn't dance. So I stood up against the wall. And finally the party was over and Petty, who had owned a store was there and he took us down to the store to let everybody have a cold drink. That's what we were doing about 12:00. My sister and her boyfriend drove off down the road and told us to wait. So we drove down the road any way and my brother, Archie saw me and told me he was going to tell Mother and Daddy. Daddy didn't do anything at first, but in about 2 weeks, boy did he give me a whipping.

I was seeing a boy from Nacogdoches and he saw all those stripes on my arms and legs. He begged me to run off and marry him. He said we could get a divorce after that. He just wanted to get me away from there. He didn't like it one bit. Of course, I didn't go.

MC: How does it feel to be retired?

EE: After you work from the time you are 16, until you are 65 years old, you are ready to quit. You get to stay home and get up at 10:00 in the morning, if you want to. Read until 2:00 at night, if you want to. It's a wonderful feeling. Now that you are retired, you can do some things with your friends. We go out to eat, go to concerts and things like that. We have our little get-togethers. They call us the "girls." And we have one little friend that calls us the 'bad widows.' We are not all that bad, though.

MC: Do you think times have changed for the better or for the worse?

EE: In the moral situation, it's...oh, it's terrible. We wouldn't think about doing, when I was growing up, what the teenagers do now. It would have been the most horrible thing in the world to do what girls do today. I wasn't raised that way and I think it's awful.

MC: What do you think is the reason for this change?

EE: Our children see nothing but that on television and they think and hear nothing but that. It's not like it was when I was growing up. We didn't publish sex and all that then. You married because you loved somebody. You didn't just live together and then get up and leave them. When you married you married for better or for worse, not just if I don't love you, I'll get up and leave you. And I think it's ruining the lives of so many people. And I hate to see my grandchildren grow up with it and live that attitude toward life.

MC: What church do you attend?

EE: Timberland Drive Church of Christ, since I was 12 years old. I obeyed the gospel on Groesbeck when Brother Moody was there. I was very young. And I've gone to church all my life. I've never known anything else. My mother and daddy were very strict and they were Christians, and worked in the church all the time. I've tried to raise my children that way.

MC: Describe a typical day for your mom when you lived there.

EE: That would be something. When we lived on the farm, we got up at 4:00 in the morning. Everybody got up. We all hit the floor. Mother went into the kitchen. We had a big long table with benches on each side, and chairs at the ends. We sat at that table, even the grown ones. Mother would cook biscuits. She had a pan that would cover the bottom of the oven. It was a big old wood stove. She would make that pan full of biscuits. And we had ham. Daddy was always a successful farmer. So we had plenty to eat when we lived on the farm. We never knew to want food or anything. We killed beef, raised cows, and hogs. We killed them and canned them. He had a big smokehouse and could get meat anytime he wanted it. We had an awful lot of company.

I'll tell you something funny, when I lived on the farm. Mother would make me churn. And we had an old porch that went around the back part of the kitchen, which was all the way around the back. It was high up. And Mother would put me on the porch with a big 3 gallon churn full of milk to churn. And one day she had me out there churning that milk. I went round and round the churn. And I got drunk and fell off the porch. The churn fell on top of me and I had butter and milk all over me, and on the ground. Believe you me, I got a whipping for it. I never did walk around the churn any more when Mother put me out there. I was 9 or 10 years old when that happened.

MC: Did everyone have specific chores that they had to do?

EE: Oh, yes. The boys fed the horses and the cows. Donnis, my little brother, and I would bring in the wood. Daddy always had a hired hand and he cut wood. We had to

gather eggs and things like that. He never had less than 100 chickens. So, we all had work to do. Everybody had things that they had to do.

I set the table and helped Mother in the kitchen. Sister would help her cook, make beds and things like that. And then when we got ready to go to the farm, Daddy would hitch up the wagon and go to the bottom of the field, which was about a mile from our house, to pick cotton or hoe. And we would get in the wagon to go to the bottom of the field. And a lot of times, we had to walk, because they had to use the mules. We had a walk down there and then walk back. And that was a chore in itself, especially after picking cotton all day.

MC: Did you get paid for picking cotton?

EE: Oh, sometimes Daddy would say to us; not very often. But a lot of times when our neighbors would be sick, Daddy always had time to go help them. And the whole family would go. He'd get all the neighbors in the neighborhood and say, 'Let's go give them a day's work.' That's what they'd say. All the families would go. Mr. and Mrs. Meyers lived next to us and he died while we still lived there. He was real sick one whole year. So he was about to lose his farm. The neighbors took care of it that whole year. We would go pick cotton all day long free, the whole family. Maybe there would be 5 or 6 families over there, working at one time, helping them get their crops in shape. That was the way you lived when you lived on the farm.

MC: What kinds of things did your mother do around the house?

EE: Oh, she worked side by side with Daddy. Daddy could go nowhere, that mother wasn't right there with him. He wouldn't have it no other way. When he was in the fields, she was in the fields. When he came out, she came out with him. And then we got in the kitchen and we all cooked. Sister and Mother did most of it, and I set the table and things like that. Sister was 7 years older and she could do a lot more than me.

When I was 8 years old, Sister married, and Mother was sick. Mother was sick all my life. I started cooking on an old wood stove, standing on an apple box. I learned to cook cornbread, and I'd run to the bedroom and ask Mother how much meal to put in the bowl, and she would tell me. I'd run my legs off from the kitchen to the bedroom, asking her what to do and how to do it. That's how I learned to cook.

MC: Could you cook just about anything on a wood stove?

EE: Oh, yes. They cooked real good. The food cooked on them was delicious. You could cook anything on a wood stove that you would cook on an electric. You just had to watch it more careful I guess, because you had no way of regulating your heat to any certain temperature. You just put the wood in there and your oven got hot. And you watched it, because it cooked so much faster on top of the stove. You might burn a lot of things too, which I did. But I learned to cook early in life, because of Mother being sick. She had pneumonia 2 or 3 times and appendicitis and almost died.

MC: How did you handle situations in which you needed a doctor?

EE: We had a doctor that lived in Ratcliff only 3 ½ miles from us and he was a very personal friend of Daddy's. In fact, just about every Sunday that rolled around, they had dinner at our house. Mrs. Barclay loved Mama's cooking. And my mother was a good cook.

MC: Did your mother quilt?

EE: She did beautiful quilting. When we lived out at Ellen Trout Lake, that summer, or the year before I married, we quilted 15 or 16 quilts. We put up some quilting frames out on the porch and it was cool and nice. And together it took no time to quilt. And too, we had friends that would come in, sit down and quilt. We were always having company. There was always somebody fishing, and coming up to the house.

MC: Do you still quilt today?

EE: Yes, and I love too. I did several here lately. Yes, I can show you some Mother gave the kids. And then, I gave Linda, (her daughter) a king-size quilt. I have a small one with everyone's name on it.

NOTE* Estelle showed me pictures of the past and allowed me to photograph some of her quilts.

END OF INTERVIEW