

**Beatrice Burkhalter**  
**Interview 4c**  
**December 1987, Diboll, Texas**  
**Angela Furgurson, Interviewer**  
**Retyped by Courtney Lawrence**

**ABSTRACT:** Long-time Diboll resident and educator Beatrice Burkhalter answers questions about Coan and Weeks family history and genealogy and remembers her early life. Her family moved around Texas and Louisiana before settling in Diboll, where her father worked in the sawmill and then for the Texas Southeastern Railroad. She recalls details about children's lives in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – their chores and games in particular. She also talks about home remedies that families relied on in the absence of reliable medical care, such as asafetida, sulfa and grease, and castor oil.

**Angela Furgurson interviewing Bea Burkhalter in Diboll on December 1987. Asking about other people and how things used to be. I am interviewing my grandmother.**

**Beatrice Burkhalter (hereafter BB):** I am going to give you a little background of the “Coan” family and the Weeks family, that’s the families that I have come from. In 1710 a wealthy German man named Coan sold everything he had and he and his wife and three children left their home for America, a new land that they had hear about. They started out on a merchant ship. He had sold everything he had and turned it all into gold and put his gold in a trunk and that’s what he had on the ship with him. While they were on this ship the pirates stopped them, got on board with them and I guess my grandfather was trying to protect his money because they killed him and his wife and took all their money and robbed everything else on the ship that was of any value. But the merchant ship sailed on to the New World and when they arrived these three little boys were just destitute and orphans. So the Captain of the ship, it was customary for him, if he had any orphans left on his ship, to bond them out to somebody to raise, so there was a man named Molford, a Deacon Molford, and he took the boys and they lived in Long Island, that’s where they grew up, that’s where the Coan family originated.

After the boys grew up they were real industrious so it didn’t take them long to accumulate things in the New World, and then the Coan family got to multiplying and scattering and finally got to Texas. The way they moved out, they started out and came as far as – my grandfather was living in Kansas when the Civil War broke out, so he fought in the Civil War on the North side.

Now I’ll take you back and see how the Weeks family got in with the Coan family.

The Weeks family landed in Georgia and the first record we have of them living in Georgia was in 1797. They were prosperous farmers there with slaves. They always owned slaves and always had big cotton crops and stuff. They began to move west and ended up in Louisiana where my grandfather was. The Weeks family, there is a big plantation down at New Iberia, Louisiana now that has a house built there what they lived in. It has been restored, it is a very beautiful castle looking think that you could go see. If

you are ever down in that part of Louisiana you need to go look at it, it is called "The Shadows on the Tiche" that's the name of the plantation. They lived there in Louisiana and my grandfather was the youngest boy in this family but he was twenty-two years old and had married so he found a thirteen or fourteen year old girl that he really liked but her people wouldn't let him have her, she was too young for him, so they made it up that he would ride up to her house one night on his horse and she would slip off the porch onto the horse, back of the saddle and they would go get married. So they did, she waited until her family was all asleep, she goes out on the porch and he came riding by on his horse, then she climbs up behind him and they ride all night. They get to the Sabine River, they catch a ferry across the Sabine River and then they ride the next day to Newton and that's where they got married. Then they have to turn around and ride all the way back. By the time they made this long drive and got back the Civil War started. My grandfather had to go off to the Civil War and leave his little bride at home. She went back to her family while he was gone so he fought on the South side of the Civil War. That's what makes it so funny about my two grandfathers, one of them fought on the South side and one on the North side. They never thought they would be closely related but the way everything happened, my mother and her daddy moved to Timpson, but then, one of the older daughters had moved out in West Texas, to Kennedy, and was just telling how good the crops were and so on, so Grandfather Weeks was always just a farmer and a carpenter. They told him he could make a million dollars with his carpenter work out there. So when they had gathered their crops that fall, they got in the wagon, two horses and a wagon and tied their old cow on behind and they loaded in their little stove, their bedding and all the clothes they had and what food they thought they would need to have during the ride. They set out for Kennedy. Well, my mother and her youngest son, she was fifteen and he was thirteen, they decided they would walk all the way so they did. They walked and the old dog walked too, but the old dog got so tired walking he wore his feet out when they got down to some rocky land. He wore his feet out on this rocky land so they would tie rags around his feet because he would cry when he walked, but he made it, he walked the same as they did. But they got out there and made one crop and then grandpa had had all he wanted of that country, so they turned around and came back. It took them three weeks to ride out there and three weeks to ride back, but they would stop every night and grandma would build up the fire and cook up enough food for them to eat that night and for them to have some for the next morning and enough for the next day at noon so they wouldn't have to stop on the way and cook.

They made it back to Shelby County. Well, my father, he had followed up and down, he had finally started working at the sawmills, too, but he had come to Timpson to see my uncle, his brother had married one of mama's sisters, so they decided that he would come to see them. Mama was there and they fell in love and married. My daddy never had farmed a day in his life, he had always followed around for public works. But grandfather talked him into the notion of farming, he gave him enough land to farm on, gave him cottonseed and everything. All he had to do was just get up there and farm so he farmed that year. They built a little house, just a two room shack looking thing, had cracks in it that you could throw a dog through, I imagine, but anyway they were happy in their honeymoon cottage and I was born that next winter. They said it snowed on the night I was born because it snowed that night. I guess that is the reason I am such a cold natured person. But then, grandpa didn't think my daddy would ever make a farmer so he

encouraged him, he had heard about a new sawmill that had opened up then, so he and Uncle Bascum and Aunt Effie and mama and me, we went up there and they went to work. There was just lots of work and money for those men. They hadn't been making that much on the farm, but they were real happy in their job, they had to work twelve hours a day for that dollar and we stayed there for about a year and a half. My grandmother died and we came back to the funeral at Timpson and when we got there we heard about this new sawmill that had just opened up and they were paying wonderful wages and had good living places. That was at Diboll, Texas, so that was where Uncle Bascum and my daddy headed out for. They went down to see if they could get a job before they went back to Louisiana. And of course, they gave them a job. Daddy came back home and loaded all of us, all our household goods and cows and chickens and everything in a boxcar and got on the train and here we came back to Diboll, Texas to live. We had to live with my aunt a good two or three weeks because they had to build a house and they built it right across from the planning mill and it made so much noise that we didn't like it there, so as soon as they built some more houses down in the other part of town we moved there to this house. We were living just down from the high school, I mean, the grade school on that road there, I don't know the name of the street now but just down from the grade school. While we were living there my grand- my Grandmother Weeks died so my grandfather came to live with us. He hadn't been there very long until my Grandfather Coan came to live with us. We just had two bedrooms so we had to give the two old men a bedroom and we put them together. We didn't have but one bed for them so they had to sleep together. Think about that, an old Southern gentleman and a Northern gentleman that had fought in the Civil War sharing one bed together. That would be something to tell your great-grandchildren. But, anyway, that was a good education for me back then because they would fuss about the war, which one of them won the war. We all know that the South was beaten with their ears down, didn't have anything left down here to live on but that was a little bit of the background on the Coan family.

Now you wanted to ask me about some stories or questions?

**Angela Furgurson (hereafter AF):** What was one of your first memories?

**BB:** One of the first things I remember about was when we lived in Louisiana; I must have been about two and a half. We lived in this house and had a back porch; there was a water bucket with a dipper in it. We had to draw our water out of a well. Papa always drew water up, would bring it in and put it there for us before we got up. Behind us there lived an old man, I don't know if he had a wife or not, if he did I never did see her. But he had a lot of fruit and he was always bringing me something, like some fruit off of his trees, petting on me like I was a little baby.

**AF:** What was your family's occupation, your mother and father?

**BB:** My mother was just a housewife, you know back in those days women didn't work. My daddy worked at the sawmill until he became conductor on the railroad. He was conductor on the TSE [Texas Southeastern] Railroad for a number of years.

**AF:** Did you have any brothers and sisters?

**BB:** I had one brother and two sisters, my brother is not living but my two sisters are still living.

**AF:** What kind of chores did you have to do?

**BB:** Boy, we had the chores; you young folks now think you have something terrible to do. The dishes had to be washed every time we ate. We didn't have any running water now, remember, when we got to Diboll – yes, we did have running water but no hot water. You had to heat your water in a kettle and wash your dishes. Everybody had to take a stab at washing dishes. We had to make our own beds, we had to keep everything picked up, because if we left anything in the floor and it got stepped on it was thrown out in the yard. We had to sweep the yard, we never would let any grass grow on the yard, if grass grew on the yard you just got a hoe and cut it down. We didn't have any grass, it was always weeds, cut the weeds down, pick them up and burn them. Raked up under the house, too. The children always played under the houses, they were built up off of the ground and there was a good place to play under there; we always had a playhouse under the house. We had to wash in a wash pot outside, had to build a fire around the wash pot to heat the water. You had a scrub board and you scrubbed them and then you put them in there and boiled them, then you took them out and rinsed them and we had three rinse tubs, the first was to get all the soap out, the next one was to get what soap was left and then the next one we put bluing in it to bleach the sheets to make them white.

**AF:** What kind of games did you play?

**BB:** Oh, we had lots of things, we played “Annie Over,” do you know that is? We would divide up in teams, one team on one side of the house and the other on the other side. We would throw a ball over and if they caught the ball they could run around there and catch everybody they could and you would have to be on their side. The object of the game was to get everybody caught on one side. Then the ones that caught the ball then they would throw it over to you and if you caught it you could run catch some of them. That would just go on forever. Then we played “Shinny.” We would get a stick and a tin can and we would draw a line in the ground and hit that can and try to keep it on their side of the line. Some times it would skin your legs because they would hit you in the legs. We played “Drop the Handkerchief” and “In and Out the Window.” That was an awfully good game to play. You didn't have windows really, we would have a circle and hold hands and there would be a couple in the circle, we would all hold hands up and we would sing “Go In and Out the Window” and they would go out and come back in and if we could catch them they had to get in the circle and the ones that caught them would be the ones who went in the center. We played a little baseball, not much.

**AF:** What kind of remedies did you have?

**BB:** Oh boy, we had lots of good remedies. The best one was asafetida. Everybody had to wear a little ball, and you have no idea how it stinks, around you neck from the time – about September to May, that was to keep germs off. We always put that asafetida on

there and it just stayed on you. Then we had what we called “Sulfa and Grease.” If you had any kind of itching places on you they always had some sulfa and grease to put on you that out stunk anything I ever saw. Then we had this “calotabs” – that was a laxative, or castor oil, we took that. One of the good remedies, if you were down anywhere and got stung by a wasp or a bee – there was always a man or a woman with a chew of tobacco in their mouth and all they had to do was give you a little dab of that tobacco on that spot and it would take all the sting out, wouldn’t be any more hurting for that. We had, I can’t remember anything else. Is that about the end of our tape?

**AF:** Yes, thanks a lot for letting me interview you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**