

MRS. HAZEL TURNER
Interview 23a
November 4, 1982
Becky Bailey, Interviewer
Dorothy Farley, Transcriber
Retyped by Daniel Guerrero

ABSTRACT: In an interview with Becky Bailey, Hazel Turner reminisces about her life as a young woman in Diboll during the Depression. After graduating from Diboll High School in 1926, Mrs. Turner attended business school and began her career as a secretary. After spending time in Houston, she was hired by Southern Pine Lumber Company, where she worked as one of three women in the office during the Depression. She discusses work habits and pay procedures.

I am interviewing Mrs. Hazel Turner and her current address is 725 Booker in Diboll. Today's date is November 4, 1982. My name is Becky Bailey.
[Also present is Mr. Turner]

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): Mrs. Turner, where were you born?

Hazel Turner (hereafter HT): I was born in Nacogdoches County at eh. Oh.

BB: When were you born? In what year?

HT: In 1907, May 19, 1907. Oh, okay.

BB: What were your parent's names?

HT: Jim and Kay Richards.

BB: Were they from around there?

HT: Yes.

BB: Had they always lived around...

HT: Yes. They had always lived around there.

BB: Where was your family originally from?

HT: Well, my mother was from Shelby County and daddy came from...Alabama. I don't know the name of the town.

BB: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

HT: I had two brothers and one sister. Both of the boys died in infancy and my sister died about five years ago. Mildred Winder.

BB: Did she live around here?

HT: She lived next door to us.

BB: What kind of education did you have?

HT: Just high school and a business course.

BB: When you say high school, how far did you go?

HT: I finished high school.

BB: Did it go through twelve grades then?

HT: No. Then it was eleven.

BB: But it was here in Diboll?

HT: Yes.

BB: By that time?

HT: Yes.

BB: Where did the children go? Let's see wasn't the first high school class in 1920.

HT: I graduated in 1926. And I believe the first graduating class was in 1924.

BB: Where did the kids go if they wanted to finish high school?

HT: We went right here in Diboll.

BB: That was just it.

HT: Um. I do not know anything about the education before 1924.

BB: So when you finished high school you went to business school.

HT: Uh-huh.

BB: Where was this?

HT: In Lufkin.

BB: In Lufkin. Did you live at home?

HT: Satterwhite Commercial College, uh-huh.

BB: Was it there on Main Street? On First Street?

HT: No, it was on Raguet.

BB: How long did you go?

HT: Well, uh, I think it took me seven months to complete the whole thing that was offered.

BB: How did you go, every day or did you live at home?

HT: Well, I lived at home and my daddy bought a car. I finished high school in 1926 and my sister finished high school in 1927 and I stayed at home a year so we both could go together. When she finished high school we both went to Business College.

BB: Did you go on the train?

HT: No.

BB: Or take the car?

HT: My daddy bought a car for us to go in.

BB: And when you finished it took you seven months, then you went to work?

HT: Well, I just worked for the T.S.E. for almost a year just for experience. The only time I got any pay was when they were on vacation or something like that.

BB: You mean you just went up there?

HT: Yea. There weren't no jobs around.

BB: What year was this? 1927 or 1928?

HT: No, it was. We went to school in Lufkin. She finished high school in 1927. Guess it was 1928. It was 1928. And then I went to Houston and worked for seven months and lived with my aunt. She was going to be transferred away from Houston and my mama and daddy did not want me to stay down there. So they wanted me to come back up here. And I was up here one weekend and Mr. Weise who was the bookkeeper found out that I

had come home that weekend and he came down to the house and asked me would I like to go to work here as his assistant. The girl who was working with him moved to Groveton. And I was just lucky that he found out that I was here that weekend. Of course, I accepted the job and I moved back home in December. I went to work for the company on December 1st 1929.

BB: Business must still have been fairly good?

HT: It was pretty good.

BB: Pretty good at that time.

HT: Yes.

BB: What kind of work did you do in Houston when you were down there?

HT: I was just a secretary.

BB: You don't remember who-but uh. Do you remember what you got paid or anything there? Was it more than you got when you went to work here?

HT: Well, I guess it was about the same but I didn't make—let me see, I made, I know what I made- fifteen dollars a week.

BB: That was in Houston?

HT: It took one week of my pay to pay my board. Room and board.

BB: So you got forty-five dollars to spend?

HT: Around forty-five dollars a month to spend.

BB: That you could spend?

HT: Right. Forty-five dollars a month to spend.

BB: What was your pay when you first went to work for Southern Pine?

HT: Well, I can't tell you that for sure. I never did until after the Depression. I never did make more than forty-four dollars a month.

BB: So was this...

HT: I guess I was making around forty-something when I came here to work.

BB: What kind of duties did you have? You said you were his assistant.

HT: Well, I had to take care of all the invoices and I had to figure the hardwood lumber.

BB: You mean the board feet and that sort of thing?

HT: Yes, and just anything I had to help him with and the bookkeeping. Yes.

BB: What were your hours at this time?

HT: We went to work at 7:30 a.m. and off at 6:00.

BB: What a long day. Did you get an hour for lunch then in that time?

HT: Yes.

BB: In '29 then business was still pretty good because you got hired, obviously?

HT: Yes.

BB: When did things really start slowing down? When did the orders stop coming in?

HT: I have **(skip in the tape)**

Mr. Turner (hereafter Mr. T): Crash in '29 and '30s see. The orders started slowing down but...

HT: The orders started slowing down in the latter part of 1929 and 1930.

BB: Did you notice...was this when they started...laying...did they actually lay anybody off, that you know of?

HT: Well, the only thing they did was to shutdown to see...

BB: Shutdown.

Mr. T.: The mill shutdown to two, three days a week.

HT: That's right two, three days a week.

BB: Just as the lumber orders would come in, and they would fill them.

Mr. T: Yes.

BB: How many women worked in the office?

HT: Three.

BB: You and?

HT: Me and my sister and Rhoda Faye Chandler, Mildred Winder and Rhoda Faye Chandler.

BB: She worked as a fill-in, kind of, by that time.

HT: Rhoda Faye did when she started. Yes. But she got a regular job. My sister worked upstairs in the timber department. She didn't have anything to do with the lumber department downstairs.

BB: Were you involved in payroll?

HT: Yes...uh-huh. I helped with the payroll.

BB: In making checks and stuff?

HT: Well, we paid off in cash. We didn't make checks.

BB: Oh, by this time in 1929?

HT: In 1929 we paid off in... with cash. Yes.

BB: Did the company use scrip later?

HT: Well, they were using scrip then and the ones who worked in the office never did get a payday. They could just draw what they wanted and what they needed. But they never did get actually a payday.

BB: I don't understand how this works. Okay you said they paid in cash.

HT: The men, there was no women that worked at the mill then. The men who worked at the mill and out at the plant and everywhere, they got a payday, and the money was put in a little envelope.

BB: But it was real cash?

HT: It was real cash.

BB: It wasn't scrip?

HT: No, it was real cash.

BB: What was Ms. Chandler telling me about dipping the checks and all this in wax?

HT: They had the checks, too, and the ones who worked at the mill and out around on the plant and everything when they wanted to draw some money they got those little checks. Round ones, doogies.

BB: Oh, is that what they called them?

HT: Yes.

BB: Okay.

Mr. T: Instead of cash.

BB: Instead of cash.

Mr. T: They gave you those to entice you to stop at the store.

BB: At the commissary. But you could have cash if you wanted it?

Mr. T: Well.

HT: Only at payday. Just pay day. It paid off every two weeks. Okay. That is the only time you got any actual cash.

BB: Oh, this, the checks, were kinda fill-in? Oh, I see.

Mr. T: You were kept fifteen days behind.

BB: If you needed money?

Mr. T: After payday they still owed you for fifteen days. The day after the Monday after payday they called it "draw day". She can tell you about it.

BB: Tell me about "draw day". Were you in charge of keeping up any of those records?

HT: I wasn't.

BB: This was someone else? Was it unsafe for women to work in the office then?

HT: Well, I guess so.

BB: You said there was only three.

HT: It was just three of us and at that time when I went to work, Clyde Thompson was the secretary.

BB: Oh, really?

HT: Yes.

BB: So they had a man secretary.

HT: Yes.

BB: Of your graduating class, when you graduated from high school, were there many women that went to work then or did most of them...?

HT: No. One was a schoolteacher and the others, I think, married. There were just nine in my graduating class.

BB: I see. Makes it easy to keep up with them any way. Okay. ... But you don't recall anybody getting laid off, as such? Where they just didn't work any more and the company didn't pay them?

HT: No. I don't think we had that. I think everyone got to work a little. Okay. Enough to keep going.

BB: Mr. Turner, tell me about the draw days

Mr. T: We got paid every two weeks in cash. But, the day after the Monday following payday, as I said before, you were held fifteen days behind. You could go to the office and draw almost, I think you could draw it all but one day or maybe could draw it all, that fifteen days, but you would have to take it in "checks" or "doogies".

BB: Scrip or whatever?

Mr. T: We called them "Whitehorses" and everything. But you could draw your time and go spend it, see.

BB: And then when payday came again your pay would be...

Mr. T: Your pay would be deducted. They would deduct it out of your pay. You see, you would not have very much pay that next time.

BB: That's a good way to stay two weeks behind, isn't it?

Mr. T: It wasn't a bad idea. It kept people with a little bit of money, see. They was gonna get a little bit. You wouldn't pass a payday without getting any. They wouldn't let you draw it all but they let you get almost all of it.

BB: Okay. Now I understand how the checks worked because it was just a fill-in, really, between times.

Mr. T: That's right.

BB: Okay. Mrs. Turner, when do you think that things seemed to start being easier for everybody? When did the mill start going five days a week again? That sort of thing.

Mr. T: In 1930. The later part of '33 when the N.R.A. came in.

BB: About that time?

Mr. T: The N.R.A. came in and you know established a wage standard and a minimum wage.

BB: Yes. Then they started working five days a week?

Mr. T: Yes.

BB: They had enough orders by this time?

Mr. T: Nine hours a day. They worked five nine-hour days.

BB: Did you go down on your time any?

HT: I worked six days a week.

BB: You still worked the 7:30 to 5:00 p.m.

HT: Yes.

BB: Okay.

HT: We didn't have Saturdays off.

BB: Um. It would be hard to get all your housework done and all. Do you think that a depression such as 1929 could happen again?

HT: Well, I think it can. I really think it can if things don't get better.

Mr. T: It would be worse.

BB: It would be worse.

Mr. T: Um-huh. The employer is not gonna care about the employees like they did back then. It's gonna be "Dog Eat Dog" in the next one.

BB: Um....do you think people will be as accepting now...as people were...as you were back then?

Mr. T: No.

HT: No the company was so good to all of us that we didn't know anything but to accept it. We worked hard and we worked long hours. But still they were so good to us.

Mr. T: But you looked out there on that track and saw the boxcars. The empty boxcars full of hobos and things. You knew you were doing pretty well.

BB: Had a place to stay and food to eat.

Mr. T: That's right.

BB: When Roosevelt was first elected into office, did people feel like things would be better? Or did you just....

HT: Well, I know my family did, and I feel like that everybody thought so. We all thought he was the grandest president that ever was and ever would be.

Mr. T: Yes, he is one of the best, I tell you that. He did more for this country without doing anything for himself, than any of the rest of the presidents. He had the people in mind, I think.

BB: Do you think Hoover was just out of touch with the way people were suffering?

Mr. T: That's what I think.

HT: Well, uh...Hoover; he wasn't president when I started working. I can't even remember him.

BB: Can't even remember him.

HT: But anyway I didn't know too much about him.

Mr. T: Hoover just got in at a bad time, that's all. I don't think he caused the Depression or anything, but he just didn't have anything to do anything with. A lot of people love him because they ate all those armadillos. He taught them to eat armadillos. "Hoover Hogs" they call them.

BB: Yes, I've heard that. When the social security system was implemented, did you like it? Did you like the idea behind it?

HT: Well such a small amount was taken out of our pay that I never did pay it any. I just never did think anything about it.

BB: Did you hear any comments from other people who resented it?

HT: No, not really.

Mr. T: Nobody resented social security in those days. They felt like they were going to get something out of it. And of course, we're getting out of it right now.

END OF INTERVIEW