

**J. W. STOVALL**  
**Interview 058a**  
**May 8, 1985**  
**Marie Davis, Interviewer**  
**Retyped by Courtney Lawrence**

**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Marie Davis, lifelong Angelina County resident J.W. Stovall recalls growing up on Stovall Creek near Diboll. The Stovalls were one of the earliest settlers in Angelina County and owned a large plantation on Stovall Creek and the Neches River. Mr. Stovall recalls farming, family history, recreation, and working in the Diboll mills.

**Marie Davis (hereafter MD):** Today I am talking to Mr. John (J. W.) Johnnie Stovall, Route 3, Box 664b, Huntington, Texas. Today's date is May 8, 1985. And my name is Marie Davis. Johnnie, when were you born?

**J. W. Stovall (hereafter JS):** The first day of April, 1912.

**MD:** Where were you born?

**JS:** Over there on Stovall Creek.

**MD:** And where is Stovall Creek?

**JS:** It is four miles southeast of Diboll.

**MD:** Okay. Who were your mother and daddy?

**JS:** My daddy's name was Frank, W. F. Stovall. And my mother's name was Sarah Young.

**MD:** How many children do you have?

**JS:** Just one daughter.

**MD:** And what is her name?

**JS:** Katherine Modisett.

**MD:** And who did you marry?

**JS:** I married Zaney Mosley.

**MD:** Okay. Did she die?

**JS:** Yes. We lived together around forty years and she died...we married the eighteenth of May, 1936. And we lived together for about forty years...a little over forty years and she passed away. And a little later on I married Faye Homister and we've been living together about seven or eight years.

**MD:** Okay. When did your ancestors come to Angelina County?

**JS:** About....from what my daddy said that his momma told him about 1845 and they come the "Old Beef Road."

**MD:** Where is the "Old Beef Road?"

**JS:** The "Old Beef Road" run from Natchez, Mississippi through Angelina County. I think it come across the Angelina River by Brown's Ferry. And come on and crossed the Neches River at Clark's Ferry and come on, and my grandpa come through there and my grandmother. She was a Colwell from the Zavala Colwell's. And he was born in Kentucky in 1822. And she was born in Mississippi, I think it was Mississippi, in 1827. And they come through, come the "Old Beef Road" and settled on what is now called Stovall Creek. It's about four and a half miles east or southeast of Diboll.

**MD:** And so they settled right near the "Old Beef Road," didn't they.

**JS:** Yes ma'am. Had land on each side. Settled on six hundred and forty acres. That was a section of land. And they had six children. My daddy and two more boys and they had three girls. And they give each child about a hundred acres of land apiece before they passed away.

**MD:** What did your grandfather do for a living?

**JS:** He was a stockman, a farmer and a stockman.

**MD:** Okay.

**JS:** And he was in the military service during the Civil War.

**MD:** Johnnie, what were your grandparent's names?

**JS:** My granddaddy was named John McDonald Stovall. My grandmother's name was Caroline Elizabeth Colwell Stovall.

**MD:** How did he get killed?

**JS:** Well, they had started to old Homer. That was the county seat. So they were going the road from Prairie Grove to old Homer. And it was right near about a hundred yards of Bear Creek. It was between Red Branch and Bear Creek, had some...put some poles up in the road to single them out, him and grandma. They figured his wife would be with

him, might be with him. So it was them...she seen the poles ahead in the road, and she said, "John, I believe that could be a trap yonder." Said, "We'd better...might better turn." And said he kinda shook his head and rode on. And they shot him off his horse and he fell on his face. And so she says, "Dave" this was Grandpa's slave boy was with them. He was driving...he was riding behind. She said, "Dave turn him over while I run to the creek and get some water in his hat." So she run got some water in his hat and got back and Dave was slow about getting up to him and she turned him over and he give one last gasp. And so he was dead then.

**MD:** How did they get him back to the house?

**JS:** Well, they had to go back and go hunt the ox. And...them slave boys went and found the oxen and hooked them up to the wagon and went and got him in an ox wagon.

**MD:** Did they ever know who killed him?

**JS:** Well, not exactly. They had an idea. He had had a little trouble with a man at old Homer just before then. And the man stabbed him. But he had some papers in his pocket that turned the knife. It didn't get to his heart but he had to stay up there a day or two before he was able to ride home. So they figured that it could be him or some of his buddies. He had been an officer in the Civil War to bring back deserters, so he had some enemies about that time. And so they put them poles out in the road to single him out and his wife or somebody was with them. And so they...they...they never did find...they suspicioned that they could be but the law never did prove it on them that they was one that done it. They got away with it, the one that done it.

**MD:** Did you ever know your grandmother?

**JS:** No ma'am. She died the year before I was born. I was born in 1912. She died in 1911.

**MD:** Living there on that creek when there wasn't many neighbors in 1845, I bet she had a lot of stories about her pioneer life. Did they ever tell you any of them?

**JS:** Well, I heard my daddy say that she told them a few stories. One time there was a...my granddaddy built a little house down on creek right close to where 1818 crossed at this farm road. Said that they built this...they had this little house and he had gone back east on his horse and there was a bear come up to the door. And she hit him with something...maul. I believe she hit him with a maul. And so...kind of addled him a little bit but he was able to leave. So Mr. Cherry come by right pretty quick with his dogs. She told him about it and he put them on his trail and they trailed him up and he killed him.

**MD:** When you lived on that creek did you ever see any wild animals?

**JS:** Well...nothing much only just what is kinda common, you know. Not a...I never did see no...

**MD:** Bears?

**JS:** Bears or anything...

**MD:** Panthers?

**JS:** Like that. Any bears or panthers. It was just animals that's kind of common.

**MD:** Common. How many slaves did your grandparents have?

**JS:** Well, I just don't know if I know exactly. I heard...

**MD:** A good many?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. Seems to me he had several of 'em, I think.

**MD:** 'Cause he had so much land.

**JS:** Yes ma'am, he had a section of land. And that was six hundred forty acres and that was a mile square and it was kinda...they called it Stovall Plantation. And so he had these slave boys and they...he was friendly with them. And they were friendly with him, you know. And so...when the war closed...ended...well, he told them says, "Now you boys can go back to where you come from and I'll pay your way. But if you want to stay here, you are more than welcome to stay." And so old Dave...I heard old Dave say this myself when I was a little boy. He died about 1924 and I was born in 1912. I remember him well. And I heard him say that grandpa asked him when the war closed, did he want to go back. And told him he said, "If it's all right with you, I'll stay because when I left, well, I looked back and Momma was standing on the porch a'crying and I'm afraid if I was to go back I wouldn't find her. She would be gone. So if it's all right with you, I'll just stay. You treat me all right and so I'll just stay here." And Grandpa told him says, "You're welcome to stay." So he just stayed here. And my daddy, he was the youngest boy and he give him three acres of land out on the old lane that went down to the Neches River, Dollar Hide Lake and Cypress Lake. And old Dave had three acres of land on that...there by the land. He farmed on it and he had his...a few cows and his chickens and cats, things that he had there. And so he had a milk cow. So he stayed there. Grandpa told him says, "It's okay, Dave, for you to stay. We'd be glad for...you just make the best of it that you can." And so Dave stayed there with him though. Old Dave and the Stovall's were good friends from then on. They treated him nice. So he was a friend to them. And so he died in 1924, as I remember. So when he...

**MD:** He is buried at...?

**JS:** At Prairie Grove. That's a white cemetery, but when old Dave died, well, some of our neighbors said we were going to bury him at Prairie Grove by his old mistress. And so, it don't make no difference what anybody might think. Said he has been here with us white people a long time. Said we are going to bury him out there by his old mistress. And so

we got him a marker out there. His name was...Simms. And so we put on his marker, "Dave Stovall Simms." And so...he is there by Grandma Stovall.

**MD:** Did you ever go out to his house?

**JS:** Yes ma'am. Us kids would go out there and aggravate him some when we was little. He would have...we would want to see if he had any cake cooked. And sometimes he wouldn't have nothing but bread so we'd fool with him, aggravate him a little maybe. And so we...one day we went out there and run up to the door. He had rock...dirt, rock floor. And so his...his milk cow was standing in the house. He was sitting in the back door. It was one room little house he had. So we run up to the front door, and scared the cow and she was jumped out all over Dave. Knocked him down on the ground. And so it scared us. We run up and picked him up and says, "Dave, are you hurt?" He said, "No, I don't think I am." So he wasn't hurt and he said, "Well, I'm going to have to do something about that old cow standing in there." And he said, "The way you kids is, you're liable to run up and cause her to do no telling what." And so he had his things that he had...and he had a horse. He worked his three acres of land there. And he had nearly three acres. So there by our field, up field, we had a field by the house and a bottom field down on Stovall Creek. So Dave he raised things he even raised watermelons and stuff like that. So he...we thought a right...we thought a lot of him and he liked us all right as long as we wasn't aggravating him too much.

**MD:** What was it like growing up on the creek when you were a boy?

**JS:** Well, we would go down on the creek fishing, me and two own brothers. Jodi and George and Ollie and Novie was my own sisters. My daddy married four times and he had four bunches of...four sets of children, thirteen children. We was by his third wife and Gussie Wright was by his second wife and he had four by his first wife, Levi and Sam and Virgie and Molly. So we were by his third wife and then he had a fourth wife and he had several wives dead. And he had a fourth wife and he had three children by her: Dale, and Caroline, and Nan. So I was born by his third wife.

We would go down on the creek, him and us. In them days holes in the creek, about 1930 or maybe a little before, was deep enough to have water in them. The fish lived in there and in a dry spell, he would go up the creek a'fishing. We would go down the creek fishing. Well, he would say, "Well, if I get tired and want to go to the house, I'll come back and mark on the ground here. Ya'll can come on in." He would catch more fish generally than we would. We would, of course, would probably be a gabbing at one another while he was a fishing. So we had a good time. Out there on the creek and fishing and going in a swimming. There was a swimming hole down there back of our field that I remember was...oh, it was about seven or eight feet deep. And we'd...us boys, neighbor boys would go there and go a swimming. And I was down there about three or four years ago and I went over to the swimming hole and it was all growed up. So it had filled up. There wasn't over two or three tubs of water in it, washtubs of water in it. So...next...about two or three years after that I went back to it and it looked like it was

coming back, but I may have got a stick and measured it and the hole wasn't very deep like it used to be. It might come back but I kinda doubt it.

**MD:** Did ya'll...have you ever walked all the way to the Neches River?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

**MD:** Along the creek?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. We've had...my dad had hogs in the woods. And we would go in there hog hunting. And be a walking and...go along the creek. It was more open woods than it is now. It is more grewed up now than it would have been then. We could...go to the creek and go down it and up it or down it. So it run into the old river down there about a mile above the Dollar Hide's place. And I have been to the mouth of it. In other words I have been...there is a hole of water in the old river. The next bend above the mouth of Stovall Creek and us boys used to call it the drum hole. We would go down there and fish for drum with crawfish. We would catch them. And so...I don't know how it would be now. That's been a club pasture for a while, several years. So it probably might be a drum hole now if a person could go in there and fish. We have to obey the law though, it is posted you have to stay out, you know unless we got permission to go in there.

**MD:** Yes. Okay.

**JS:** I had a good friend, J. Boren that I went in there with several times. He tells me...he told me now that he don't really, he quit the pasture. He don't go in there no more, so if we want to go in there we could ask the club, the club to go in there and they probably would let us. And they have other riders, you know, that we could ask too and they probably might could go in there with them if we was to want to go where we used to fish.

**MD:** I guess ya'll were pretty self-sufficient weren't you?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. We had...my daddy raised corn and peanuts and had a big garden. He had an acre garden that he stepped off one time. He knowed how many steps it would be to make an acre and he stepped it off. We fenced it with pickets. Got out enough pickets out of pine timber to fence that garden, an acre garden with pickets.

**MD:** Did ya'll make the pickets?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. We drove them out and...out of timber, pine timber and maybe some oak, too. And we fixed an acre garden and we had fields of corn and peanuts and stuff like that. And we always had, generally had a hog up for fattening him. Give him corn and peanuts. You could make some good meat out of him. We raised some cotton. In 1925 was a good cotton year. That's when my daddy bought a car. So we...there was a man come down. We was picking cotton in the bottom field, down on the creek and there was a man come down there, Louis Odem was his name, and him and my daddy was

friends. And he says, "Frank" says, "Looks like you got a good cotton crop here." He says, "Yes, I have, Louis. I'm going to buy a car." Says, "You selling cars, ain't you?" He says, "Yes, I'm selling Ford cars. Like to sell you one, Frank." He says, "Well, Louis, you and me is friends and I'd like to buy one, but I done paid down on a Chevrolet." And he says, "Oh, I can get that back." My daddy says, "well, I told him I would buy a Chevrolet and I hate to go back on my word, Louis 'cause when we tell...you tell a person something, well, your word is suppose to be good." He said, "Yeah." But he wanted to sell him a Ford. My dad still bought a Chevrolet. And so he said, "Maybe if I buy another one I'll buy a Ford from you." Oh, they laughed it off, you know.

**MD:** What games did ya'll play when you were young?

**JS:** Well, we played marbles and we played ball, played baseball. And we had friends. So we would just gang up and have a big time playing a game of baseball. Get to a place where there is a...there is enough so that we could have a ball game. Either go to the school yard, that is if it wasn't against the school business. Have a ball game there. Or we could have it at recess when we was going to school.

**MD:** And where did you go to school?

**JS:** Prairie Grove, yes ma'am.

**MD:** Prairie Grove. Who was your teacher, some of your teachers that you remember?

**JS:** Well, I remember John Dearman Burris. He was my first teacher. He lived on my daddy's place. And...no, that was another teacher that done that. He lived at Fairview. And he would come down and teach school. And the school house was in the old church house just below the cemetery. And...later on they built a new school back this side of the cemetery, near about a hundred yards. And that was a church house that old one. Well, that church there in the week days...church there on Sunday and school in the week days.

**MD:** Was this a one room school?

**JS:** A one room school and one teacher taught the whole school.

**MD:** You went to church at Prairie Grove, too?

**JS:** Yes ma'am.

**MD:** Do you...do you remember the first time you ever went to Diboll?

**JS:** Well, not exactly. But I was pretty small and we'd go in the wagon. And...in fact, my daddy had horses and mules. And sometimes though we'd...me and my brother would strike out and walk to Diboll. Of course, we might have been bigger than when we was when we first went.

I remember one time it come a real...I heard my daddy say this, that there come a real cold spell. Now that might have been the time that I heard one of my brothers say that history says the Sabine Lake froze over down close to Beaumont in the late 1800's. And so I heard my daddy say this, that it come a real cold spell and that could have been time that Sabine Lake froze over that he started to Diboll or Burke one, on his horse. He said he got just a little piece and he turned his horse around and went back and took the saddle off and put him back in the stable. And said that it was too cold for him to go to Diboll or Burke. And that could have been the time Sabine Lake froze over.

**MD:** You don't remember White Oak creek flooding when you couldn't get across?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. Now I remember Bruce George was living off...close to White Oak Creek when I was a boy and...we...I've been down there in that park on White Oak creek that Diboll's got there now. And I heard Bruce George say this. He said water would be about...he put his hand here...he put his hand up there like that.

**MD:** About four feet?

**JS:** Would be about four feet deep. And that would be there in that park in places. And so...now it don't seem like the creek gets that high.

**MD:** No, they have...

**JS:** They have different things that keeps it from getting that high if it was to come that big a rain.

**MD:** Yes. Did you ever trade in the commissary?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. Now there is...us...us kids would go in the commissary and our daddy would give us a nickel or dime to buy some candy. And we knew a clerk in the commissary that was...we thought would give us more candy for a nickel or dime than any other clerk. And he probably...he might be busy and...another clerk would ask us and say, "You kids want to buy something?" We'd say, "No, sir." We was waiting on that clerk that we thought would give us more candy for our nickel or dime. And so when he would get through with this other person or people, well, we would tell him that he wanted a nickel or dime's worth of candy and he would go get it for us.

**MD:** Who was that?

**JS:** It was Ed Day. That was his name.

**MD:** Yes. He was a pretty good old fellow, wasn't he?

**JS:** Yes, he was. He was a nice old man.

**MD:** Everybody liked him.

**JS:** We liked him we sure did.

**MD:** Did you work at Diboll later?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. I got on there when I was about twenty-five or six years old.

### **END OF SIDE ONE**

**JS:** I learned how to oil the mill. So one day, the oiler would go home at one o'clock for lunch, and one day just before one o'clock the mill had done started up and the millwright, Sage Ward, run down the steps and said, pointed towards the bandmill hole...hopper, and said, "Man in the hole." And I run and throwed the belt off. And found out that it was Wilbur Fogg. He was extra sawyer. They brought him and a big fellow over there from Pineland to edge behind him. So they'd raised to cut the mill some. Wilbur was in there and they got him out and he kinda fainted and he went to the doctor. And I never did tell him that I throwed the belt off. But I imagine the millwright did because later on long after then I got sick and left Diboll and I worked at several jobs, contract jobs around Corrigan and Camden, different places. And one day I wanted to go back to Diboll and Wilbur Fogg was Assistant Superintendent then. And so...I went to his house one Sunday morning and he hadn't got up. His wife says, "Good morning." I says, "Good morning." She said, "You want to see Mr. Fogg?" I says, "Yes, ma'am, please." She says, "He hasn't got up." And he seen me out there and he said, "Come on in here, Johnnie." I went into his bedroom and he was sitting up on the side of the bed. He says, "What's on your mind?" I said, "Mr. Fogg, I would like to go to back to work at Diboll." Now, this millwright I imagine told him that I pushed the belt off that might have saved his life when he was sawing before I left Diboll. So he says, "Okay, come out and see Dred Devereaux in the morning." I come out the next morning and seen Dred...Garvey Walker was Dred Devereaux's leader when...he give me a card. I went to Dr. Dale and he said, "You're okay, ain't ya?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Go on back out there then." And I went back out there and the next few days. I was wanting on at the paper mill because I was living up there close to the paper mill. I owned a place. And I was wanting on up there. And I went back to work for Diboll then when I got back home. The next two or three days, I quit again. I guess Mr. Fogg thought, "Well, he just thought he wanted to work." He probably knew what I wanted, you know. That I wanted on at the paper mill. So...but anyway Diboll is a good place. Nice people, of course. Mr. Fogg has had a bad accident since then and we all hated that. So...but anyway they repaired the mill and it's a big mill now. Cutting lumber.

**MD:** Changed a lot since you worked over there.

**JS:** Changed a whole lot. It really has. So we...appreciate Diboll and we appreciate what Arthur Temple has done. And we think Arthur Temple is a fine fellow. And so we just like...Diboll okay.

**MD:** Yes, back home, isn't it?

**JS:** It's back home.

**MD:** How long did you work at the paper mill?

**JS:** About twenty-five years.

**MD:** Did the Depression hit you all pretty hard?

**JS:** Well, in a way it did. It was about the time that I begin to want to...I was about...twenty years old I guess, something like that. I was kinda wanting to...look for me a helpmate. So you couldn't find a job no where. The thing shut down and they laid people off. Of course, that was about the time that the East Texas oil field went to opening up. But I didn't have to get up enough about me to go up there and get a job. And so, the Depression...well, now we was all staying on the farm, it didn't bother too much because we had our stuff like that we could eat and stuff like that and it didn't take many clothes to wear. But still, if a person wanted to...a boy wanted to find him a wife, well he couldn't find no job so there that went. So...I was about that age to...but anyway that is the thing of the past and now we just have to look ahead and go on and do what we need to do.

**MD:** Yes. Back in the Depression, in those years, was there much bootlegging going on out on the creek?

**JS:** Yes, there was, Marie. There was some of it going on. That would make...give a fellow a little extra money. And I remember the time that there was...I knew where there was some water. And there was...I was in the woods a hog hunting. And I was a walking and I seen down here at this spring.

**MD:** What was the name of the spring, do you remember?

**JS:** Squire's Spring.

**MD:** Was that kind of south of your house?

**JS:** Yes ma'am, about a mile south of us. And so...I seen a little thing down there that they run off some booze with. I was walking, hog hunting, so I was looking at them from down behind a tree. I was off about forty or fifty yards. And I think it was two of my close neighbors. And I thinks that I am going to have a little fun out of them. So I set my corn down behind a tree and I run up to where they was at and they started to run and they seen who it was and they stopped. One of them says, "Johnnie, you done a dangerous trick then." I said, "Yes, I guess I did. Ya'll passed that gun sitting there." So I waited around there awhile and they give me a drink. And so...they was our close neighbors and friend. So after they give me this drink, then for a while everything was pretty for a little while. But of course, I didn't drink enough, you know...

**MD:** Oh, yes.

**JS:** To get drunk.

**MD:** No. Someone was telling me about a gate that was across the road. What do you remember about that gate? And where was it?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. It was over there at Uncle Tommy Stovall's place.

**MD:** Is that kinda on this side of the creek?

**JS:** No ma'am. It's just the other side of the creek, yes ma'am.

**MD:** Okay.

**JS:** And it was on a public road, but it...it...later on they took the gate out on the road. And so now it is Farm Road 1818. And so I remember one time, Uncle Tommy was...he wasn't able to work. Back then men had to work the road.

**MD:** Why did they have to work the road?

**JS:** Well, they...they just wasn't organized enough to have people to work the road or something. The...

**MD:** Everybody had to share?

**JS:** Share in...and work his part. And so they told Uncle Tommy that...now this is on Uncle Tommy. Kind of a joke.

**MD:** That is your father's brother?

**JS:** My father's brother. One of my father's brothers. And they says, "Tommy, it is your time...you need to work the road." And he says, "I ain't able to work the road." And so a little after then they...somebody died and they sent word down there to Uncle Tommy to dig the grave at Prairie Grove. And old Steve Treadwell was the commissioner. He was there at Burke then. And he says, "Thomas Sto..." he overheard him say, "Thomas Stovall ain't able to dig no grave. He ain't able to work the road, I know he ain't able to dig the grave." Said, "He might go along and tote the measuring pole." And so somebody told Uncle Tommy that and he made like it made him mad but he...but I guess he thought about he got out of working the road.

**MD:** Why was the gate across the road?

**JS:** Well, that was to hold stock in the pasture, had a big pasture, his part that Grandma Stovall had give him. And he might have bought a little of another part. And he had a

pretty big pasture and he...had stock in there. But now days if a person had a pasture they'd have to have the stock fenced up on each side of the road because they couldn't have a gate across the road.

**MD:** Then anybody that would pass along they would have to stop and open the gate before...

**JS:** Open the gate and...so they had a fishing club down there just coming into what we call Cohn's pasture. And so...this fishing...there was some folks lived there named Foster. And them Foster kids would run out there and open the gate and that fishing club would throw them a little gift, a nickel or dime or quarter. And any other kid come along and open the gate, he wouldn't like it because he would think he ought to open it. He might have had a point. So...this...but this gate has been done away with, and this Farm Road 1818 is there now.

**MD:** Did you ever open the gate and get any money?

**JS:** Yes, ma'am. I sure have.

**MD:** That was pretty nice, wasn't it?

**JS:** That's right...it sure was. Maybe the club members would go down there and they would turn down the lane then and go into the pasture, Cohn's pasture. They had a club in there called the Dollarhide Club, they had.

**MD:** Yes.

**JS:** They would go through part of the pasture to get to the club. And so they had a Dollarhide Club. And so we would run...if we was handy enough, we would run open the gate and they might throw us a nickel, or dime, or a quarter. To us kids that looked like gold.

**MD:** Yes, uh huh. Johnnie, we didn't get your grandchildren's names. What are their names?

**JS:** Tammie Lee Modisett and...

**MD:** There is a short history of the Stovall family in the book, "The Land of the Little Angel" on page 304. There is a picture of John McDonald Stovall and Caroline Elizabeth Stovall in the book, "The Lufkin That Was" on page 17. Mr. Stovall would like to add that his father had two step-children. Mamie Charlotte Pelly and Ester Johnson Lynn. This concludes the tape.

**END OF INTERVIEW**