

**Ruth Currie**  
**Interview 95a**  
**March 18, 1986**  
**Marie Davis, Interviewer**  
**Dorothy Farley, Transcriber**  
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**ABSTRACT:** Mrs. Ruth Currie reminisces about her life as a railroader's wife in White City, Fastrill, and Diboll. A native of Louisiana, Mrs. Currie followed her husband from one Southern Pine Lumber Company operation to another. In White City she lived in a boxcar house. When the White City camp closed, her family moved to Fastrill, where they lived until 1939. She fondly remembers her time in Fastrill and the closeness of the families that lived there. She also recalls the Depression and how it affected Fastrill.

**Marie Davis (hereafter MD):** Today I am talking with Mrs. Ruth Currie, Mrs. Melvin Currie. She lives at 204 Thompson Street, Diboll. Today's date is March 18, 1986. My name is Marie Davis. Mrs. Currie, when were you born?

**Ruth Currie (hereafter RC):** I was born September 19, 1905.

**MD:** Okay, and where were you born?

**RC:** In Logansport, Louisiana.

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

**RC:** I married Melvin Currie in 1920.

**MD:** What was his job?

**RC:** He was a locomotive engineer.

**MD:** What are your children's names?

**RC:** We have three girls, five grandchildren. My oldest girl was Loraine, she was married to Lee Whittington. They had one son, Janeau. Juanita, our second daughter was married to J. P. Miller. They have two sons, John and Montgomery. Janice, our third daughter married Hershel Vaughn. They have two children, Ruth and Andy.

**MD:** Where did you grow up? Where were you raised?

**RC:** I grew up around Logansport in Desoto Parish.

**MD:** Then how did you meet Mr. Currie?

**RC:** I was visiting a friend in Vonce [possibly Converse], Louisiana and he was on a run out there.

**MD:** Where was he working at the time?

**RC:** I believe he was working for, I can't think who-

**MD:** He was working on a train?

**RC:** Yes, he was engineer on a run, I believe Southern Pacific.

**MD:** Is that just about all he ever did, he kind of started on the train?

**RC:** That's all he ever did, worked on trains. He was also a loaderman, in loading logs and things like that with heavy equipment. Occasionally he did that but his main job was engineer.

**MD:** When did you move to White City, do you remember the date?

**RC:** We went there in October when we married and we stayed a few weeks. Then we came to Diboll and lived about three months, then we went back to White City in '21.

**MD:** Where did you live when you came to Diboll that three months?

**RC:** At the Star Hotel. Mrs. Estes was the hostess there then, the proprietor.

**MD:** Did you just kind of live the "Life of Riley" while you were here at that time?

**RC:** Right.

**MD:** Kind of took it easy, huh?

**RC:** Yes, we went back to White City and, I think, we boarded about two months with Mrs. Jordan. She had a boarding house there and then we went to housekeeping.

**MD:** What about your houses there? What kind of house did you live in? But first, where is White City; where was it located?

**RC:** White City is in San Augustine County. It was a little town about three miles from Sturgis and then there was Broadus. I think Broadus was about ten miles from there. Occasionally we splurged and went shopping.

**MD:** Would you go to Broadus to shop?

**RC:** Yes, we would go down on the train. There was a train, a passenger train that came out once a day. Then, of course, we would have to get a cab, a taxi to bring us back, but it was fun.

**MD:** Oh yes, to get away.

**RC:** To get away.

**MD:** We are still that way today, aren't we? How long had the camp been started when you came there in '20. Was it pretty well going?

**RC:** I didn't come, Melvin stayed in White City to pick up the logs –

**MD:** No, I mean in 1920 when you –

**RC:** Oh, we stayed there until '22.

**MD:** Had the camp been going, had it been there a while?

**RC:** It had been there quite a while, I only lived there a little over a year, or a year and a half, then they moved to Fastrill.

**MD:** What about the housing in White City, what kind of house did you live in?

**RC:** They were boxcar type houses. They were very comfortable. They were built like a regular boxcar because they were transported over the railroad. They were loaded on flat cars. They were very comfortable.

**MD:** Did you just have one car or did you have two?

**RC:** No, we had two cars.

**MD:** One for the kitchen?

**RC:** Yes, there was one for the kitchen, one for the bedroom and the sitting room.

**MD:** Did you have a commissary there?

**RC:** Yes, we had a real nice commissary and a meat market.

**MD:** Was the commissary, was it a big boxcar or was it a building?

**RC:** No, it was a big building that had been built there.

**MD:** What about the boarding house?

**RC:** It was box cars.

**MD:** Just several of them together?

**RC:** Yes, it was. I believe three for the main building and then they had different ones for boarding the men outside, located near the boarding house but not right in.

**MD:** They would sleep in a car and come to the main building and eat there?

**RC:** They would come to the main building for their meals.

**MD:** What about the schools did they have a special school?

**RC:** They had a regular school there, elementary. I don't think there were any high school students there. I'm not sure because I didn't have any children at that time and I don't know too much about what they had in school. But we did have a school there and church.

**MD:** How did you do your laundry, your washing?

**RC:** With a wash pot, three rinse tubs, a rub board and lots of elbow grease.

**MD:** Did you ever make lye soap?

**RC:** No, I never did.

**MD:** Where did they get the water supply?

**RC:** We had running water for the house but it came from a river and I don't think it was too good. I know, at the time, they hauled our drinking water. We had a little platform out by the fence and every day we would put out containers and a man would come along and fill them with water from a spring. He had, I believe, about three barrels at a time loaded on to this little cart and that's where we got our drinking water. Otherwise, we did have running water.

**MD:** Did you have electricity?

**RC:** Yes, we had electricity until 9 o'clock at night and then it came on at 4 o'clock in the morning.

**MD:** What did you do for recreation? Did you have a movie or what?

**RC:** No, there wasn't too much to do, we played forty-two and visited with each other and, occasionally on weekends, we'd go fishing.

**MD:** When they cut the logs over there, what did they do with them?

**RC:** They were cut in the woods and, of course, they had a railroad track that would go to different stops. They had a loader out there. First, they had a skidder that would pull the logs in from the woods to the railroad track. The loader would load them on flatcars and the log train that was stationed there would bring them into the camp and then they were picked up by another log train from Diboll which transported them back to the mill in Diboll.

**MD:** Did you have a doctor there?

**RC:** Yes, we had a doctor, a full time doctor, a Dr. Turner.

**MD:** Did he go with you to Fastrill.

**RC:** Yes, he did. He went on to Fastrill with us. That was Shorty Turner's, as we know him here, his father.

**MD:** When you moved, when they cut all the logs over there and they were ready to move to Fastrill, how did they move the camp and the people?

**RC:** I really don't know. I was visiting relatives at that time. I went visiting and stayed until everything was moved. Melvin had to stay out there. They left his train and one crew out there to pick up the railroad tracks into the – where the camp was, before he was able to move to Diboll.

**MD:** And they just went so far with the train and picked up the track behind them?

**RC:** Yes.

**MD:** Did they do that all the way in?

**RC:** No, they did that to White City. I'm not sure whether the balance of the track was picked up at Sturgis, but I think it belonged to another railroad.

**MD:** Do you know what happened to White City after the camp moved out? Were there any other people there?

**RC:** No, I'm sure that was the end of that little town.

**MD:** Then from White City you moved to Fastrill. Were you among the first people to move there?

**RC:** No, we were the last to move there. It had been there about three months when we moved. We moved in September and, I believe the camp, the majority of them moved in June, maybe.

**MD:** Had they brought these other people in, like from Walkerton, those camps?

**RC:** Yes, they were all there when we moved in September.

**MD:** What did you think of Fastrill when you first got there, do you remember?

**RC:** I didn't think too much of it, but of course, it got better. It grew and it was a great little place to live. We had better housing there and it was more comfortable.

**MD:** Now, the houses, they were just regular houses?

**RC:** They were regular four-room houses.

**MD:** And the company furnished them for you?

**RC:** Yes, it was furnished by the company. We had a nice commissary there, a lot larger than the one at White City. We had a drugstore and a barber shop. It was very nice there.

**MD:** What about your water supply there, where did it come from?

**RC:** It came from the Neches River but it was, evidently it was very good water because we could drink it.

**MD:** Your children were born there?

**RC:** Loraine was born in White City and the other two were born at Fastrill.

**MD:** Did Dr. Turner deliver all of them?

**RC:** Dr. Turner delivered all three of them at home.

**MD:** If somebody needed to go to the hospital where did they go when you were living at Fastrill?

**RC:** We went to Jacksonville, to a Travis Clinic, Travis Hospital, Nan Travis Hospital. It was a very, very good hospital.

**MD:** Do you remember who the manager of the commissary was?

**RC:** Yes, the first manager was Wood Russell.

**MD:** Then he later came to Diboll?

**RC:** Yes, he later came to Diboll. And there was a Mr. Hunter.

**MD:** Do you remember his first name?

**RC:** No, I don't, but the last manager we had was Sherwood Burch and he stayed until the camp moved. He was there for quite a while.

**MD:** Then did he move into Diboll?

**RC:** No, he moved to Pineland. He was transferred to Pineland.

**MD:** Did they have the little round checks, little round cardboard checks at Fastrill, like they did at Diboll?

**RC:** Yes, they did, the same ones.

**MD:** Did they have Draw Day?

**RC:** They had regular Draw Days. I think they had them every day, you know. They would open every morning at 8:30, you could see them lining up.

**MD:** Tell me about this, how did they work?

**RC:** It worked fairly well, I think. Of course, they had paydays, too. If you didn't draw all your money out, all of your time or rather, they paid off in cash.

**MD:** Someone said that some of them never saw a payday.

**RC:** That's true. I think that's true in every day life, even now. You know, a lot of people live from day to day. There were a lot that didn't really live that way and never drew checks. They drew their full payday.

**MD:** Did the children in Fastrill seem to enjoy it, living there?

**RC:** I think they did, very much. They had lots of little parties, they had baseball during the summer and spring. They had the rock hole in the Neches River every summer, a great place to go swimming. All three of my girls learned to swim in the rock hole. You can ask any child, or man or woman that grew up there, now, where they went swimming and they will gladly tell you, "the rock hole."

**MD:** Did a lot of the people fish in the river? Was fishing a pretty good sport?

**RC:** Yes, it was pretty good, yes, it was.

**MD:** If you wanted to go shopping when you lived at Fastrill, where did you go?

**RC:** We went to Rusk, or Jacksonville. Rusk was fifteen miles and Jacksonville thirty. But it was nice shopping districts.

**MD:** Did you have churches in Fastrill?

**RC:** Yes, we had one church. It was nondenominational. It was used by, I think the Methodist and Baptist were the only ones, as far as I can remember, that had church there. We took turns.

**MD:** Do you remember any of the Methodist preachers that came out?

**RC:** The only one the Methodist ever had was Brother Treadwell. He was a retired minister but he was still a great one. He was loved by everybody there.

**MD:** I think he was in Diboll at one time, wasn't he?

**RC:** Yes, he was the pastor here but he had retired when he came out there.

**MD:** What about the school at Fastrill?

**RC:** We had a good elementary school, the high school students were bussed to Rusk.

**MD:** Was this a regular school bus or did the company furnish them?

**RC:** It was a regular school bus.

**MD:** Can you remember any funny things or incidents that happened while you were living in Fastrill that has kind of stood out in your mind all these years?

**RC:** No, not too many.

**MD:** Do you remember any special people that lived there?

**RC:** The official people I can remember, there were a lot of good people there, nice people. In fact the whole camp, we didn't look on it then as a camp really. To us it was a small town. Everybody was very congenial and seemed to cooperate and everything. We were all proud of it.

**MD:** When did you move to Diboll?

**RC:** We moved to Diboll in '39.

**MD:** Why did you move ahead of the other people? A lot of the other people?

**RC:** There was a change in here, I think. Melvin was on that train crew that was transferred to Diboll and they had begun pulling the logs from Fastrill to Diboll. I don't know what happened to the train crew that had been here. They probably retired or something. Anyway, they were moved in here to do that. So they moved the train crew in here at that time and that's why we moved in here. The camp moved, I believe, in '42.

**MD:** '41.

**RC:** '41?

**MD:** I knew that you came early. How did they move you to Diboll?

**RC:** The company moved us on trucks, transport trucks.

**MD:** You didn't move on the train?

**RC:** No, we didn't move on the train.

**MD:** What did you think about Diboll when you got here?

**RC:** Well, I'd always loved Diboll from the first three months I lived here and I was happy to come back. I knew a few people which helped a lot, I think.

**MD:** What did the people, in general, think about closing Fastrill?

**RC:** It was kind of sad for some of them, I think, and some of them, they didn't mind it. But a lot of people were really upset about it, but I think they really enjoyed living in Diboll after they were moved and got settled.

**MD:** Is there still closeness between the people who lived at Fastrill, after they moved to Diboll?

**RC:** Yes, I think there is, a very close connection because we shared something that people here didn't share with us. Our best memories of Fastrill are the good times we had together there. However, there are very few of them still living that lived at Fastrill. There are a few.

**MD:** Some of the children.

**RC:** A lot of the children are but the older people are not. The children have a lot of good memories of Fastrill.

**MD:** Do they ever have reunions?

**RC:** Yes, they still have reunions up on the river there. Of course, you know, when Fastrill moved, all the houses were moved. There was one house left there for a caretaker. It was reforested and he cared for the forest.

**MD:** Did they tear down the commissary?

**RC:** Everything, there was not a thing left. We went back several years ago, me and the three girls. We couldn't, we looked for our house place, of course...they couldn't find it.

They did find a big cactus bed which we had in our yard so there were still cactus there and that's the only thing or place they could locate and call where we lived.

**MD:** What did they do, do you remember what they did with the buildings?

**RC:** They sold them, I think, tore them down, and a lot of them were moved.

**MD:** And the railroad track?

**RC:** It was all taken up. One thing I remember about Fastrill, when the place was built sycamore trees were put out in every yard. When we left they were huge trees but I'm sure the company sold those because they were all cut down. They make very good lumber for furniture and things like that.

**MD:** But you took good care of them?

**RC:** Oh yes, they were great.

**MD:** Provided a good shade for you?

**RC:** Yes, I think each yard had two in it.

**MD:** Were the houses painted?

**RC:** No, the houses weren't painted.

**MD:** The houses weren't painted, inside or outside?

**RC:** No, they were sealed inside.

**MD:** You know, the houses here weren't painted for a long time.

**RC:** I know. Of course, the houses were sealed but we papered two rooms with builder paper, heavy builder paper, you know, it made for warmth. And Fastrill was a cold place, in the winter especially.

**MD:** Did you have a garden?

**RC:** Yes, we had a garden.

**MD:** Did you have a cow and chickens?

**RC:** Yes, we did. We had big yards which were built by the company, gardens, too. There was a garden place between each house, garden spot.

**MD:** Did you ever work outside the home when you were in Fastrill?

**RC:** No, I never did.

**MD:** Could you buy most anything you needed at the commissary?

**RC:** Yes you could. They had dry goods, of course, they had a drugstore, too, for medication, everything. It was a good place to live.

**MD:** At Christmas time did the company do anything special for the children? Do you remember?

**RC:** I can't remember that because we always went home for Christmas.

**MD:** When you moved to Diboll did you feel that you and your family were accepted by the people who lived here?

**RC:** Yes, I did.

**MD:** When you moved, how many children did you have in school?

**RC:** I had just one, Janice was in school here. Loraine was in college and Juanita stayed at Fastrill with a teacher and finished high school. It was her last year and she wanted to finish at Rusk which she did, and then she went on to Louisiana Tech. She has never lived in Diboll and Loraine never lived in Diboll. Janice did.

**MD:** After you got here and if you wanted to move to another house in Diboll how would you go about getting another house?

**RC:** Of course, when I moved here I didn't get the house I wanted but I lived until I was settled, we lived in the one we moved in about a year. A man in charge of the houses here, a Mr. Jackson. I was wanting a house pretty badly and I felt like Mr. Henry Temple was my best bet. I went to him and he gave me the first house that became vacant which was the Otis house and then later, this house that I'm living in became vacant. It was a better house and a better location. He asked me if I wanted it and, of course, I did, and I'm still here.

**MD:** When the company offered to sell the houses did you buy your house?

**RC:** Yes, we did and I think that was the greatest thing that ever happened to Diboll because they were helped to get a home. They were sold so cheap that you couldn't turn them down. I think it was just great what the company did for the people of Diboll.

**MD:** Mr. Currie and you have been associated with Diboll for a long time, did you always feel that you were treated pretty fairly?

**RC:** Yes, we did. We lived here, of course. All of our married life was spent with Southern Pine Lumber Company.

**MD:** Then when Mr. Currie moved over here, what was his job, did he go back to working on the log train?

**RC:** Yes, he was the senior engineer here and then he was put on the TSE [Texas Southeastern] train. You know, they pulled the logs from here to Lufkin or freight.

**MD:** Did he end his career here?

**RC:** Yes, he retired in '59.

**MD:** And he was working for the TSE then?

**RC:** Yes.

**MD:** I guess he had some good experiences?

**RC:** Yes, he did but he enjoyed it. He was always a railroad man.

**MD:** Were you ever employed outside the home, after your children left?

**RC:** Yes, after the war I worked at the commissary about eight years.

**MD:** What did you do there?

**RC:** Well, I did anything that needed to be done, from selling groceries, dry goods, posted tickets. The last few years we had a bookkeeping machine and I operated it.

**MD:** Who was the manager of the commissary when you worked there?

**RC:** Kirk Drew.

**MD:** When you were at Fastrill – when you lived at White City were there colored people there and Mexicans there?

**RC:** Yes, there was and they each had a boarding house for their people that came there. I remember the Mexican, her name was Susie. She was such a good cook. When the camp moved Susie was left there with her boarding house because the majority of the men that was there, well, it was the train crew in the section gang which were mostly Mexicans. They were picking up steel so Susie's boarding house stayed there and the train crew took their meals with her.

**MD:** Do you remember her last name? Any of her children?

**RC:** I can't remember.

**MD:** Any of Susie's children, did they still live in Diboll or Fastrill when it moved over?

**RC:** Well, she has two daughters here, I know. Rosie and Mary and she had some boys but I don't remember their names. They were in the grade with Janice. They were very smart boys. I'm sure they have gone far in life.

**MD:** You were living at Fastrill when the Depression hit?

**RC:** Yes. I was.

**MD:** Do you remember how it affected the people out there?

**RC:** Yes, I do, I remember it very vividly. In the first place the Red Cross Board at Rusk had a few things that they gave out. They had material and flour and meal. I was appointed to distribute it to the people. The company people did a lot better than the country people did. There were just a few in Fastrill that needed anything but it was mostly in the country surrounding Fastrill. I think all that I ever got for the people was flour and material to make clothes.

**MD:** Did the company cut the men back out there?

**RC:** Yes, they were cut back but they were still allowed to make enough to live on. It was pretty hard but everybody had gardens and the company had also built a little canning house out there with the pressure cookers. Everybody canned. In fact they made a living that way.

**MD:** Did you can your own stuff or did somebody do it for you?

**RC:** You did your own stuff. Take it down to the canning shed and they had sealers you would buy the cans and everybody had a garden.