

SHANNON CAPPS

Interview 129a

1973, Slide Presentation

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ABSTRACT: The following text is not an interview, but commentary accompanying a slide presentation given by Shannon Capps. She describes historical photos of Diboll and then introduces Diboll citizens who tell their memories on various subjects such as housing conditions, schools, recreation, buildings, and the changes in the town over the years. Those giving their memories include Clyde Thompson, Dixie Cook, Willie Massey, O.W. Harrison, Geneva Sides Ard, Dewey Wolf, Jack Webb, Dale Grantham, Ruth Poland, and Opal Franks.

Shannon Capps (hereafter SC): There is very little information about the city of Diboll, the information that is available is hard to find. The Texas Almanac doesn't show population figures on the town until 1950. Any books discussing this period of time mention Diboll only in passing. Most of the information in this presentation comes from the memories of people who have lived here and a little comes from city records. At this time I would like to share my findings with you.

The easiest way to discover early dates in history is through grave markers. These markers in the picture indicate people living here as early as the Civil War. The town of Diboll was established by T. L. L. Temple in 1894, but before this time the small community of Burke served as the center of trade. Burke is located about three miles north of Diboll. This town took pride in a general store, a drugstore which carried the latest stock of patent medicine and a combination dentist and watchmaker. This small town also had a school with an enrollment of fifty students and had an average attendance of 75%.

Another history marker could possibly be the Ryan's Chapel Church which was established in 1860 and is the oldest church in Diboll. In 1894 T. L. L. Temple purchased approximately 7,000 acres of land and established a lumbering community. The town began to grow and prosper because people came from all directions seeking employment. The commissary, which is shown in these pictures, housed all necessities for the mill employees. It housed a drugstore, a furniture store, food supplies and many other things. Mr. Clyde Thompson describes the commissary and its uses. He also describes living in one of the present day office buildings and the library it housed.

Clyde Thompson (hereafter CT): The building with the words Southern Pine Lumber Company on it was the old commissary. The first one that was built here and the old office was just over to the right, just north, of the old commissary building. The present office of Temple Industries was located on the sight of the old commissary. It was built for a commissary. The second building, just north of the old office building, now houses the Love Wood Products offices. It was built as a library and when I came to Diboll the upstairs was used as rooms for single boys. I roomed there a long time. The downstairs

was used as a library and Mr. T. L. L. Temple had it well stocked with various books and it was also a meeting place and during the war the Red Cross work was done there and the ladies and all the work they did in connection with making various (unintelligible) was done there.

SC: Living quarters had to be provided for employees and their families. Mr. Thompson, again along with Mrs. Dixie Cook describe earlier living accommodations, the Antlers Hotel.

CT: This was at one time the famous Antlers Hotel of Diboll. It was constructed by Mr. Cammack, who was formerly a game warden in some other state. It was built entirely of logs and the interior was very attractive. He did a lot of search in the woods and got many various logs and trees that were various shaped and he had those displayed prominently throughout the interior. For instance, the steps leading to the second floor, the hand railing was from a curved tree, it looked like it had just been grown for that purpose. And the hat racks and all the interior stuff was of some type of log or tree that he found. The big mistake was made, the logs were not treated before the building was built and eventually the termites began to take their toll. The company tried to kill them out and even put cement between the cracks that would result not only from the termites eating but from the logs shrinking, since they were not treated and were put up green. It was finally burned down.

Dixie Cook (hereafter DC): And here eating was wonderful. Albert Jackson was over the hotel at that time, he was a wonderful cook. Mrs. Jackson was too, so actually there is no home today that offers better meals than we were able to get there. Then of course our room was small, our bedroom was small but it served the purpose well in that if you became bored or tired of being in one room you could always go downstairs. In the lobby there were always wonderful people, congenial people, very compassionate [and] understanding, regardless of what your problem was. You were able to stay with the people as long as you desired and then you could go back upstairs or do as you pleased. Whereas today if you have guests who are visiting, they come into your home, you are there until they get ready to leave, whereas in the hotel there is an advantage that you could walk away if you desired.

SC: As the mill grew the need for housing increased. An area northwest of the mill was developed as housing areas for the mill employees. This was at about the same time the lumbering camp was abandoned at Fastrill in Cherokee County. These houses were brought in from there. The section became known as Red Town. The reason for such a name was because the houses were painted red. The year was about 1944 [Transcriber's Note: 1941 is the correct year]. Here is an account of life in Red Town given by Mr. O. W. Harrison.

O. W. Harrison: We called them shotgun houses back in those days. They moved them to Diboll from the old logging camp in Cherokee County, the Fastrill logging camp, and moved quite a few families down with the houses. [Transcriber's Note: These particular houses were built onsite in Diboll. While the families from Fastrill moved were relocated,

there are no records indicating any houses from Fastrill were moved to Diboll.] When I moved to Diboll that was the only type of house I could find empty at that time. The rent on the houses was \$6 a month if you got one with a car shed in the yard. If you didn't have a car shed you got your house for \$5 a month. They had a little space of land fenced in the back for gardens. Some people used it for cow pens, you could keep a cow there and a lot of people did. Some people raised hogs back in those days. The only water was...we had one water line that came into the kitchen and they didn't have hot water or hot water heaters in those houses back in those days. We used wood stoves and wood heaters to heat the house with. The lights, at that time Texas Power and Light Company hadn't run any lines into Diboll and the company had a power house and they generated enough power for the lights. I understand that at one time before we moved to Diboll they had a limited amount of power and they had a certain time at night they would have to cut the lights off. At the time we moved to Diboll they had enough power that we didn't ever have to cut the lights off at any particular time.

SC: Red Town survived through the late '50's and the early sixties; when space was needed for the mill these old houses were moved to a new location west of the mill known as Garrett Ranch. These houses at this time were used as living quarters for the black employees of the mill. Some of these houses have long since been torn down and new ones have replaced them. Here is an account given by Mr. Willie Massey of life on the Garrett Ranch.

Willie Massey (hereafter WM): These houses that we are looking at, looking at these houses recalls to my memory some very interesting experiences and information. These were the old type of houses which people lived in which they had to pay four, five, or 6 dollars a month rent. Of course, when I moved here as principal of the high school the house that I lived in, I still own that house now, I just moved it over on a vacant lot across from the gym here and repaired the old house. I had to pay at that time \$14.50 per month rent for this house, with all my utilities, running water, and of course I had bathroom facilities and whatnot, was all included. The house rented for \$14.50 a month. Now these old types of houses were the houses the people lived in here until we got the housing project approved to build houses in Diboll. I remember one amazing incident that happened. When we got the housing project completed and we got the people to move out of these old houses into the new homes built by the Housing Authority, some of the people really didn't want to move. I recall one old man telling us that he didn't mind moving into these new homes but if he did he had to have some barrels so he could catch him some water.

SC: The years have passed and it is now 1964. As the mill grew, so grew the town. The picture shown is a picture of the old city hall which was located on Hines Street and was later relocated on Hendrix Street. Mrs. Geneva Ard relates her story of the City Hall.

Geneva Sides Ard (hereafter GA): We had a part-time meter reader, two pickups were purchased for the city and that was the only vehicles owned by the city until the next year when the police department was started. Will Cockrell was the first City Manager that Diboll had. He was also City Secretary during that time but it wasn't the manager, he was

called the Administrator. One girl worked in the office the first four months, Judy Latham, she left in May and that is when I, Geneva Sides, went to work for the city in 1964. We moved into the present city hall in the summer of '66. It was quite a change from the small two room offices that we had occupied. For quite awhile the first City Hall, the Housing Authority had one of those offices and the city operated out of one little office at the time we moved into the new city hall there were three desks and three people working in a small room.

SC: As all growing cities have problems, Diboll was no exception. Law enforcement was a one man operation in the early days of the town's growth. Soon, however it became necessary to enlarge the police force. You see here just a few of the tools of trade used by lawbreakers that were confiscated by the police. Chief Dewey Wolf describes some of the history of the Diboll Police Department.

Dewey Wolf (hereafter DW): Diboll Police Department was formed in March of 1965 when the City of Diboll hired Ray Chapman as City Marshall. Ray worked by himself for several months until the city hired its first patrolman, who was Ward Phelan. Ward was later promoted to City Marshall in November of '66 after Mr. Chapman had left the city. Doug Robinson was hired as Chief of Police in January of 1970. Doug stayed with the city until June of 1973. I was promoted from patrolman on August 15, 1973 to Chief of Police. In the background here you can see some of these certificates of training that we have sent our patrolmen through. The numerous burglar alarms that are now installed on several of our buildings to give the citizens better protection. The present city jail is only two jails that will hold four people. Construction is now underway on the new Diboll Safety Center which will house the police department and the fire department. It really will be a big asset to the citizens of Diboll and will let each department perform their duties as they should.

SC: There are many programs on TV today which depict life in the fifties. The producer of this presentation was not around at that time and I certainly have no idea of life then. To get an account of what it was like here Mr. Jack Webb talked to Mrs. Dale Grantham. Mrs. Grantham also discusses the Old Orchard Park in her interview.

Jack Webb (hereafter JW): Where was the show or anything around here? What did y'all do around here, run to Lufkin?

Dale Grantham (hereafter DG): Yes.

JW: Was there anything to do around here?

DG: They would bring in a skating rink every so many months and set it up and all the kids would go to the skating rink. Where White's Auto is, this right in here is White's Auto now. When I was in my teens the drugstore was right here and it was Rexall Drugs and Ralph Magill was the druggist. He left and went to Oklahoma and Dick took over. Dick stayed there for awhile and then he moved and opened his own deal. They done away with Rexall there on the corner.

JW: (unintelligible)

DG: Yes.

JW: Could you go in there use a tool and run around?

DG: Pretty much. Well, it was when I was there but I assume we could go over there like we did at the Dairy Kream. My mom and dad's cutting torch come off if I was treating anybody unfairly. Back then it was hard. He was working two jobs. He would work a day job and then he would go back in the evening and work and I could go over there. Yes, this is it. This is it. (looking at a photo) This is Baskin's now but right here in the very corner it was Rexall Drugs and then the Western Auto was right in here. It was Lee Estes, Mr. Estes had it but now this was back in the fifties, he had the Western Auto, the first Western Auto right in here. The drugstore was right here and then the Western Auto. There was a furniture store right in here. Bob Scoggins had the furniture store right here where Bill's Dollar Store is now. This wasn't there.

JW: Where Baskin's is, wasn't there?

DG: Wasn't there. Okay, after we moved out of the Red Town houses we lived in one of those houses over there about nine years. Then where the Tinsley's Fried Chicken is, the whole street, they had rent houses. It was back, oh I don't really know, anyway we had a house, in fact the old house was old. We were living right across the street when they built that Dairy Kream, the old, old Dairy Kream and started building on it back then. You know back over behind here.

JW: Where Dick's Pharmacy is now?

DG: You know where Jerry Gartman's mother-in-law lived? All right, there was a row of houses there and then you come around this curve and there was a house here, there were houses here, this was sort of the loop then. I mean the road was coming around this way but all of this wasn't there then, it was houses right here. Right back over in here is where Mrs. Jordan lives now and on down the road was all kind of houses. Mr. Pate and his wife lived where Elite Cleaners is now. When he was principal of the school he lived where Elite Cleaners is now and the house right next to him, next to the cleaners now was there then, it is the original old house and Mr. Pate, his house looked like the house does now. I believe Mr. and Mrs. Rains live there now. This whole downtown area was built back in the fifties when we were living right up here, right across the road.

JW: Does it look pretty much the same now as it did then? What changes have been made?

DG: Well the whole Village.

JW: All right what about (unintelligible).

DG: Back off over in there, back off over where the orchard is, the park, that was company land and it had the pecan trees and everything but the company hired a man to break different spots up for the different women who couldn't have a garden by their house and that is over where the city park and ballpark and everything is, was garden spots for people. They could just go over there and break them up some land and have a garden. All of this back in there was just woods, just wilderness you might say.

SC: In the 1920's, needless to say, the white and black schools were separated. The white school consisted of only one building as did the black school. The building which housed the white student body was located in the present day elementary campus. As time passed and more space was needed new buildings of the same type were built. Just prior to the present day elementary building this old building was delegated as a book storage room but the building still holds quite a few memories with such people as Mrs. Ruth Poland and Mr. Willie Massey.

Ruth Poland: The fondest memories I have of the elementary school is when I was in the sixth grade. This was quite a number of years ago and the window that you see in the building to the left, the first window to the left was the sixth grade class room and Mr. Davis was our teacher. One of the boys, larger boys, had misbehaved and was going to be punished by Mr. Davis and the boy jumped out the window and when Mr. Davis jumped out after him he broke his leg. Needless to say we didn't have any more school that day and everybody was really upset and wondering and crying about Mr. Davis's broken leg.

WM: In looking at this picture recalls a lot of memories to me. I remember this old school building. When I came to Diboll, I first came to Diboll in the early twenties. I came here as a young teenager looking for work. Of course, I came to Diboll, the way I got here I walked into Diboll because my native home is only, is less than 20 miles from here and 20 miles to walk then wasn't a very hard job. People didn't look upon it as a very hard job. That was one of the ways of travel then. I stayed here only for a short while when I first came here but I stayed here and worked. During that time, I would say generally it was very enjoyable. It seemed to me that the people really enjoyed the way of life that they lived here then. However, they didn't make much money but they didn't need a lot of money to live on. Actually, when I came here to work the average wage that people received for working was about twenty five cents an hour. I remember quite well I was drawing \$16.20 a week. The working people here in Diboll on the salary they were getting, the living expenses were very, very cheap because then, the houses they lived in they could rent those houses for \$4.50 a month. Some of the houses would go as high as \$8 or \$10 a month. With your house you had all the utilities, the kind of utilities that were available were furnished free of charge with the rent you had to pay.

When I came back to Diboll after attending college, I came back to Diboll and worked in the early thirties and worked awhile. This was before I finished college. I only stayed here for a short time and worked then, I had to earn a little money to help pay for my schooling expenses. Then I came to Diboll in '51, I believe it was, as principal of the Negro high school in '51. Ahead of me was principal of the school on the picture that I

am looking at here now, I believe Mr. Hurdle was the principal and he stayed here for a long length of years and after Mr. Hurdle we had a fellow instructing schools here by the name of Bill Davis. Mr. Davis stayed here for a long time and I believe after Bill Davis came Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Kenyon stayed here for eight or ten years. Before Mr. Kenyon was Mr. Oliver Bradley. Oliver Bradley stayed here as principal of the school for ten or fifteen years and Mr. Kenyon stayed here from five to six years. Then I came along as principal in '51. I moved down here at the time I was serving as assistant principal at Dunbar High School in Lufkin. I came to Diboll and I don't know school conditions here then were something really interesting to think about. Actually there wasn't a whole lot of interest in school because during the time when I came here we had about 125 students enrolled in high school and all of those were girls except about six boys, five or six boys in high school. We had the boys here but they were not interested in going to school. Actually, the boys were only looking forward to getting a job with the company and working here because the jobs, that was what they were looking forward to. They were not inspired or encouraged to go on and try to get an education or to get a higher education. That had to come in later which we were, I think, successful in doing in inspiring the children to study and to try to get a college education. What I am looking at here was completed in about '53. We worked in the old school building and the building was an old frame building, we don't have a picture of it. It was located just north of this building, actually this building now was built just back of the old building, to the south of it, actually where the Temple playground, football field is, is where the old building was located. It was a very big frame building. It was heated with wood, oh, I guess it was very comfortable under the conditions.

SC: The new elementary building was built in the mid 1950's. It housed approximately 300 students from grades one through six. Mrs. Opal Franks gives her account of the new building. She also concludes our slide presentation on the history of Diboll.

Opal Franks: This picture was taken in front of our new elementary school on the day of the grand opening. This was the day we had been waiting for, a dream come true. The teachers, as well as the community were looking forward to the day when we had a new elementary school. We were all dressed up in our best and waiting for all the dignitaries and the visitors in the community. This picture was taken just in front of the entrance. To the left there is Mrs. Burkhalter's office, then the book room, then six class rooms down the hall. Then on the right there was a music room and then just opposite the hallway was the library with four classrooms. Those four classrooms were made for the first and second graders. Diboll was a sawmill town years ago but within the last 25 or 30 years it has changed dramatically with wise planning and dedicated work, the citizens of Diboll have helped to make it one of the fastest growing little towns in East Texas. People who have been away for a few years and have come back for a visit can hardly believe the progress that has been made and we are still growing. The Dibollians are proud of our town.

END OF INTERVIEW