

O'HARA CHANDLER

Interview 148b

August 17, 1999 at Diboll Rotary Club luncheon, Diboll, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In August, 1999, Howard Daniel asked O'Hara Chandler to speak to a meeting of the Diboll Rotary Club about his memories of growing up in Diboll. He talks about going to school in Diboll and leaving town for college, using checks at the company store, attending and participating in a traveling circus that stopped in town each year, and a traveling stack cleaner.

Jonathan Gerland: (hereafter JG): Today's date is August 17, 1999. And Mr. O'Hara Chandler will be speaking at the luncheon meeting at the Diboll Rotary Club.

Howard Daniel (hereafter HD): A few weeks ago I was visiting with my neighbor, who is sitting here on my right, one morning as we often sometimes walk together in the neighborhood, to see if he would come and do a program for us. Since he is native of Diboll and lived many of his early years here, worked here and then went a little further field later on. He knows a lot about what happened and who was here and what was going on. So I asked him to maybe come and reminisce a little bit. And in the process, Jonathan Gerland who is in charge of the Temple Archives has arranged to record this because there is a lot of things he probably needs to know as well. And I understand that you also have a taped interview with Mr. Chandler. But Mr. O'Hara Chandler is here to talk to us today. And he told me at the time, he said, "you know, I don't do many things like this any more, but for you I will." So I really appreciate that. I was working in Diboll myself many years ago, as it turns out now, even before when many of his family members were still here. And some of us at least remember Mrs. Jimmie Ferguson, and Rhoda Faye Chandler and I remember their mother, his mother, who was living with the girls at the time, before she passed away. And, Jimmie and Rhoda were O'Hara's sisters. You will also probably know that he is the father of George Chandler, and the grandfather of Wright Chandler, two prominent attorneys in Lufkin. And, but this graduate from Diboll High School told me coming down he said, "you know people never did, weren't sure they were ever going to go to college when they were in a little town like this." And frequently that was the case. And Keltys was the same way, that is where we were from. Mark and I both were from Keltys, are from Keltys. But anyway, he did graduate from Diboll High School. He went on to receive his PhD from Baylor University and he has had a long and distinguished career in education - about 46 years of it as it turns out. And another distinction about this gentleman is that he was a Rotarian for 42 years. And, so it's nothing like having really a good, good friend, and a good walking buddy, and a really wonderful neighbor to come speak for us today, O'Hara Chandler.

O'Hara Chandler (hereafter OC): Yes, I was a Rotarian for 46 years. I served hard for the club as President at Victoria. But, Howard, my family came here before the train stopped at Diboll. It stopped at Emporia, and my grandmother, a demanding old woman,

she talked the conductor into stopping momentarily so she could get her three children off. That was in 1898, so you'll see the Chandler's goes way back. My grandfather blew the first whistle that was blown in Diboll. And talking about whistles, Gerland, when I was coming up we lived by the whistle. The first whistle blew at five o'clock in the morning. And that was to get up. It was my job to build the fires, so at six o'clock we had another whistle that started the mill. We had an eleven fifteen. You still have the eleven fifteen whistle? We called it the cornbread whistle, that was to put the cornbread in. But anyhow, I have nothing but pleasant memories of Diboll. I'm so sorry my throat is all stopped up today.

I brought something here that, this is all we used for actual money when I was coming up. I was born, and I want to give that to the museum. But, the whistle was very important. And my father worked seven days a week, 12 hours a day. He never had a Sunday off. He had to clean out the boilers on Sunday. But, I'm real proud of Diboll. I've talked to the Rotary Club here, the last time I talked about going to the Amazon River, my experiences on the Amazon. I was the only one on the tour. But I've got so many happy memories of early Diboll.

Life was so simple during the days that I was coming up. I was born in 1908. So that is longer than most of you. I'll soon be 92 years old. But anyhow, I'm going to tell you some early memories of Diboll that impressed me. We used to have an old man named Cox, unusual fellow. He came through once a year, and it was his job to clean the stacks. And I've often wondered how he got that hook up on top of those stacks. And, he cleaned – he just toured the country. But he was an interesting old man to talk to. He wouldn't work on Thursday because he had fallen twice and both of them was on Thursday, and he just didn't work on Thursday. (laughing) But he was a great philosopher. And I remember one time we had the two hotels in the early days of Diboll. One called The Star and the other The Beanery. And he stayed at the Star Hotel. And there was a phrenologist came into Diboll. A phrenologist, most of you don't know what that is, the guy that feels of your head and tells your fortune. Of course I didn't have any money, but he charged fifty cents to do it. And I borrowed fifty cents from old Pop, and about a month later I hadn't paid him back. He said "O'Hara you know sometimes you have sense enough to ask for money, I've got sense enough to ask for it back." So I dug up fifty cents.

We used to have a field here named Copes field. You never did know about that did you Howard?

HD: Is that where Copestown came from?

OC: No, this was the south part, it was named after the same person. Mr. Copes, could have been named Diboll, you know this town, he was the one that owned most of the timber and sold it to Temple. But, the old Copes field is not very far from where we lived. And they always had a carnival once a year that came into town. We all looked forward to that carnival. And, I learned a little scientology myself at that carnival. It was my job to water the elephants. The Methodist church had a little deal that, across from

where we lived, where they had running water. And they would bring those elephants over there.

And one interesting thing, I learned a lot about wrestling. They always had a wrestler at these carnivals. And the guy taught himself, Pete Brown, I don't know what his name actually was, but I helped him put up his tent. And, he was crazy, and he said, "young fellow, you are a pretty good size man." And I was a senior in high school. And he said, "I need somebody to start off the audience of getting the people to come and wrestle. And how about you coming and starting it off tonight." I said, "Mister, I know nothing about wrestling." He said, "well you will know by the time I get through with you." So, he taught me a lot of tricks, how to get out of holds. And he said, "now, I'm going to punch you but I'm going to offer \$10 if you can stay with me for ten minutes. But, I'm not going to pay you \$10 I'm going to pay you two and a half." That is what you'd make in the sawmill. So that night, my sister, Jimmie, was in the audience and when I got up on the stand he said, "Listen, if I break your neck, if I break your arm, if I break your leg, I'm not at fault am I?" "No sir." But anyhow I didn't stay with him that ten minutes. He punched me. But, a boy that I played baseball with named Clayton Kelly, and Clayton and I wrestled for a little while and he knew he could whoop me. So he said, "boy make an easy \$10. Go in for a chance to serious wrestle." So the next night Clayton got up there. Old Brown really had some fun out of Clayton. In five minutes he had him screaming and hollering, "quick, quick, quick right, quick." And then the next night old I.D. Green, I.D. was a great big fellow, and he said, "listen here, you boys, I'll show you how to whoop that guy." So I.D. got the same deal that Clayton got. I just wanted to tell you that because that made a hero out of me. (laughing) Kids would come up to me to see my muscle.

But anyhow, I've had a lot of fun as a parent too. This son of mine he was a lawyer here with Ward Burke and Philip Leach, way back there before most of your days. Anyhow, George had a stroke when he was 28 years of age. And he was in New York when he had it. He and Charles and Frederick and wife were on the first vacation he ever had. But anyhow, they had him in the Methodist Hospital in Houston for over a month. But anyhow, tell you a story, I had my Rotarian badge on, and this little fellow sitting in the corner and I thought he was a peon. The second day I walked over and I said, "how are you doing?" "Oh, I'm being blessed." I started talking to him. He was from El Salvador, and he was a Rotarian, but he didn't know how to exchange money. He had never been in a cafeteria and I just befriended him in many ways. George had more flowers than we knew what to do with. We even put some up under his bed. And everyday I'd take his son, whose name was Jose, a flower. And he got to thinking, he was a very devout Catholic, and he believed in saints, and he got the idea that I was a saint, that God sent him to me at the time that he really needed help. And when I went back a while ago, I found out that he was a general in the army. And he sent me pictures of El Presidente and he had a great big guard who protected him. But anyhow, I hated to answer his letter. It was so beautiful.

But, the folks when I was President of Victoria Rotary Club, we had about 200 members. At Guatemala had a concentration camp in Central America, South America, and South Texas, so I went. And I learned to really admire those Guatemalans from El Salvador.

They are the most patient people I've ever seen in my life. The children were from the mountains and they would stand for two hours waiting to sing. You know they were just like the Mexicans are here.

But, what was our entertainment? On Sunday we had a baseball team of blacks. And they were the most interesting people you've ever seen play baseball. Many of them, whether they had been to a league, they were really good athletes. I remember there was one colored man named Picken – he was a catcher. And he sat on a bucket and he was the most interesting thing. He was ready to climb.

But, I remember the first national convention I went to. Did any of you ever know Bud Barrett?

HD: Yes, Bud Barrett.

OC: I went to New York to the National convention. And who should I sit down by but Bud Barrett. And there were 20,000 people there. It was real interesting.

But, do you have any questions you want to ask about early Diboll?

Question: When you went off to college in 1926, what about your education and your experience with that?

OC: That is real interesting. In 1924 we had a man here by the name of E.C. Durham. He was an educated man. He was President of the TSE [Texas Southeastern] Railroad.

Question: Is that Paul Durham's father?

OC: No, Jake and Ed were the two boys, they both made lawyers, but they never did practice law. But anyhow, in 1924 we were accredited. But before that if you went off to college you had to go to Lufkin you know to finish high school. But, in 1926 very few boys from Diboll went to college. Most of them, I've got some pictures over here from the second and third grade. There were a lot of kids. By the time we got to high school there were only eleven in my class. I started to work at 19 years of age in the sawmill. I had a neighbor named Hamner. Ten hours work standing on your feet, and I knew then that wasn't what I wanted to do for a living. So I was telling Howard that I was valedictorian of my school class. I had no background for college, none of my folks ever went to college. The only man on Silk Row, (that is what we called it) that had any money besides the bosses was an old doctor. And I went to him and I said, "Listen I've got a scholarship and it is good for any accredited school in the United States. Where would you suggest I go? I want to be a doctor." And he said "I went to Vanderbilt." I said "Vanderbilt, where is that?" And he said, "It's in Tennessee." It was just way out, he said, "well, if I was you, I'd go to Baylor University." And I did, but I was one of the few of the people in my graduating class. I am the only one living and they've all been dead for a good while. Mrs. Turner, Hazel Turner, did you know her?

HD: Yes.

OC: She was in my class. And she was the last one that died. But after two years my scholarship run out and I didn't want to go back to that sawmill. So I, Mr. Kenley, Dave Kenley, back during them days you didn't have to have a college education to teach school. And my first job was high school principal, coach and taught six subjects at Corrigan. And I got accreditation for it.

Question: You didn't complain about it either did you?

OC: No, I didn't complain, made \$75 a month. Do you have any questions about early Diboll?

Question: We have got two streets over there, one of them is named Chandler, is that named after you?

OC: Yes, sir after my family.

Question: Do you have one named after you?

OC: Well, Mr. O'Hara was one of Daddy's best friends. And he was one of the bosses.

Question: So that is where you got the name O'Hara then from your father's friend.

OC: Yes, I'm named Charles O'Hara, they named me from a guy by the name of Frederick from Diboll. But Chandler Street is named after my family.

Question: There are a lot of streets named after old families.

OC: Yes, Mr. Temple and Clyde Thompson are responsible for that. I don't know if any of you ever knew Clyde or not. Clyde was a wonderful guy. He was married for years. But gentleman I'm sorry my throat was so messed up here today.

HD: I forgot to mention, and I didn't do it. He got up this morning with a sore throat. He is going to the doctor. I wanted to ask you a question about some of the early days. You were telling me way back about when you were a little boy and what you used to carry the water to the job or to a group working somewhere? You were called the water boy, or you mentioned something about carrying water...way back when you were little. It may have been that you were watering the ducks.

OC: I got paid fifty cents for watering the ducks. Fifty cents was a lot of money back then.

HD: When you made two and a half a day.

OC: That dollar there, there wasn't very many dollars, most of them was nickel and dimes, quarters and fifty cent pieces. But my sister had sent those when she died. That is the reason I have them.

Question: Rhoda Faye?

OC: Yes.

Question: Talking about those chips. In those days you got paid in chips, but what if you wanted to go to Lufkin and therefore you wanted to save you a little money to buy you a suit, it would be discounted wouldn't it?

Unknown: People could use their own checks, but Lufkin would take them. I don't know if they did Diboll's, I guess they did.

Group discussion: (unintelligible) Did they have a system for exchanging them?

OH: There was an old man, and I can't think of his name, behind the quarters we called it, that would for ten percent, he would discount them. And I don't know how he got his money back.

Group discussion (unintelligible) Well we could get money.....

OC: Well very few people had money. In the store they charged and at the end of the month you had very little left.

Group discussion: (unintelligible)

JG: There was little in circulation because no matter what you made, you know all your necessities went back to the company. So they would take, just like FICA and things today, they would take it out before you ever got to see it, just like your rent and you would go in to the office and filled out a little deal that...

HD: I can remember when I was a little kid, if mother needed something from the store, but didn't have any of the checks to buy it with, I could go by the office and draw a dollar or a dollar and a half and then go to the store. Of course that automatically came out at that moment. So, that was pretty much a location system.

OC: There wasn't much money involved.

JG: I've talked to some people and they will say that periodically, about once a month you could cash them in for cash or the company would actually pay in cash. And some of the people would say they would always go to Lufkin to spend their cash because it didn't do any good to spend it in Diboll.

OC: Yes, we had a town in Camden. It used to be a pretty good size town. But, the Carter's would not allow people to go out of town. They had those rules, but there was one interesting character that I want to mention, his name was Cherry. And he lived on what we called Cherry Hill. If you know where Arthur Temple has got his cemetery, it is a hill. And old man Cherry was half Indian. And everybody thought he was rich. I had a good friend named Minor Cohen. He and I loved to go up there and talk to old man Cherry at night. And he could come up with some of the most weird tales about early days, you know. The snakes were so big as a log and you'd sit down on them, and stuff like that. But I told Arthur about that, what an interesting...when that old man died there were a lot of people that went out there and dug trying to find money that he had buried.

Well gentleman, there is a small crowd here, but you can tell everybody, that bald man that there is a lot of visitation that has been going on. I remember talking to this group one time and there were 25 people here.

HD: Is there any more questions from anybody. Appreciate him coming.

JG: Thank you Mr. Chandler.

(clapping)

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END OF INTERVIEW