Cora Nash Interview 16a October 5, 1982, Diboll, Texas Becky Bailey, Interviewer Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: A Diboll resident since 1919, Mrs. Cora Nash, with the help of her daughter, Sara Brown, recalls for interviewer Becky Bailey her experiences in Diboll as an African-American working woman from 1919 to the 1980's. She talks about her work as a cook in the various hotels and boarding houses in Diboll, including Mrs. Della William's Beanery, the Star Hotel, and The Antler's Hotel (which she calls The Log Cabin). She also talks about the long hours for the sawmill workers, the Great Depression (which she calls "The Panic"), Arthur Temple Sr. and Arthur Temple, Jr.

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): I am interviewing Mrs. Cora Nash, and her daughter Mrs. Sara Brown, and she lives in Diboll, Texas and her current address is 730 Willie D. Jones. I am interviewing her at her home. The date is October 5, 1982. My name is Becky Bailey. Mrs. Nash, where were you born?

Cora Nash (hereafter CN): Ratcliff, Texas.

BB: Okay, what year was that?

CN: 1898.

BB: So you are 84 years old?

CN: Yes, I'm 84 years old.

BB: 84 right. What date were you born?

CN: The 10th of June.

BB: The 10th of June. What were your parent's name?

CN: My what?

BB: Your parents, your mother and daddy?

CN: Oh, Matty Carver and Henry Carver.

BB: Where were they from?

CN: They live, oh they were there, they lived right there in Ratcliff all the time. They were raised right there in Ratcliff.

BB: They were raised right there. Uh-huh, do you know your grandparent's name?

CN: That's who I'm...ah let's see, let's see, yeah, one named Pappy and one was named Muddy.

BB: Muddy?

CN: Muddy.

BB: Uh huh, did you have any brothers and sisters?

CN: I got...ah, no, but yes, ma'am, but they dead.

Sara Brown (hereafter SB): Four sisters.

CN: I got four sisters, but all of them dead but....

SB: But a stepbrother.

CN: Now wait a minute, we all can't talk at the same time. She got, I got...I had five sisters.

SB: Four.

CN: And three of, I had five sisters, but three of them is dead, and there only two of us living.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: Spread out everywhere I guess.

BB: Where do they live? Did they settle around here?

CN: No ma'am, they live around Ratcliff.

BB: Okay.

CN: I came to Diboll in 1919.

BB: 1919?

CN: Been living here 63 years.

BB: Uh-huh. Let's see in 1919 you would have been 21 wouldn't you. Okay, ah I wanted to ask you about your education. Did you go to school in Ratcliff?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Okay, how far did you go in school?

CN: Oh, we had to walk about a mile.

BB: Oh, really?

CN: Yes ma'am.

SB: What grade did you go to?

BB: What grade did you go to?

CN: I went clean to the seventh grade.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: There were no higher grades then.

BB: Oh really? That is all they had?

CN: Yes ma'am. That has been many a year ago.

BB: Huh. Lets see, when you came here...why did you come to Diboll?

CN: I lived in Groveton.

BB: Uh huh.

CN: When I first married I stayed at home for about a year till after she was born. (She, meaning Sara Brown.) Then I moved to Groveton and I lived in Groveton about a year and a half then I moved up here.

BB: Okay, so you married in what year?

CN: I married in 1917.

BB: 1917. And so did your husband find work here? Is that why you all moved here?

CN: Yes ma'am, he worked right at that mill till he died.

BB: What did he do?

CN: He worked on a green lumber chain and then run the edger.

SB: He edged lumber.

BB: He edged lumber?

CN: He, he edged lumber.

BB: Uh-huh?

CN: When he worked hard. He worked on a green lumber chain when he first come here.

BB: A green lumber chain?

CN: Yes ma'am, when he first come here.

BB: What is that?

CN: Well it's...

SB: Pulling the lumber before it's been dried.

CN: Pulling the lumber off; that's what they used to do a long time ago, now they doing the work with a button.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: So much better.

BB: It's a lot easier on them, isn't it?

CN: That is right, they got everything working with a button. Just push a button.

BB: And you got it?

CN: That is right.

BB: Ah, do you remember what kind of hours your husband worked when he first came here? How long a day was it?

SB: From seven, did he go to work at seven, mom?

CN: No, you let me talk some, don't get too fast, 'cause she wants to tape some of this and she won't know what we talking about. I went to work at eight o'clock and I got off at 12:30 when I worked to make a living.

SB: She talking about daddy.

CN: Oh, you mean my husband?

BB: Yes, your husband.

CN: He went to work when we first come here at 6 and he got off at 5.

BB: He worked from six until five?

CN: Yes ma'am, that's when I first come here.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: He had to go out early.

BB: He sure did. Did they work six days a week?

CN: Yes ma'am. Until the panic was. When they had that panic here, well they didn't.

BB: And then he was off more?

CN: Yes ma'am, not ever'day, not ever'day.

BB: How many children did you have?

CN: I had three.

BB: Okay, were any of them born here or were they off?

CN: No ma'am.

SB: Yes, Snookum (Archer) was born here.

CN: No, Snookum wasn't born here, Snookum was born in Ratcliff, now you let me talk, I know what I'm talking about.

SB: Mama, I was born in Ratcliff.

CN: Snookum was borned in Ratcliff.

SB: Littlebug was borned in Groveton and Snookum was borned in Diboll.

CN: That's the biggest tale. Snookum will tell you he wasn't borned in no Diboll. (Interview was ended at this point due to discussion.)

CN: Ma'am?

BB: Did you have him at home or did you go to a hospital?

CN: No ma'am, you had them at home here.

BB: You had them all at home?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Well okay, with three kids at home when did you start working? When did you go to work?

CN: I can't remember what year, but I worked for Mrs. Williams for about 17 or 18 years.

BB: Mrs. Williams?

CN: Yeah, Mrs. Della Williams.

BB: Was this doing domestic help like, I mean cleaning her house?

CN: No ma'am, I was her cook.

BB: You were her cook?

CN: Yes ma'am, I was a cook. The only cook they had.

BB: Was this at a café or a restaurant?

CN: No ma'am. That was at a boarding house.

BB: Oh, okay.

CN: Then I went to work at the Star Hotel and after I quit over at the other hotel, they tore one down. I worked at the Star for about seven years.

BB: Okay.

CN: Star Hotel.

BB: Well, now wait. What is the name of the boarding house that you worked at first?

CN: Ah.

SB: Beanery.

BB: They called it the Beanery?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: And you worked 17 years there?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Um.

CN: I worked seven or eight years for the Star Hotel.

BB: Okay. Where was the Beanery located?

CN: It was located up there by the railroad tracks. Right in front of the railroad tracks.

BB: Was it the one...?

SB: You know where you cross the railroad tracks right there by that big store where it's got southern pines. Well, it was over on this side right there on this corner.

BB: Kind of where the personnel office and all is now?

CN: Over here where the store is.

BB: Oh, okay. Did you have any experience before you started working for them, or did...?

CN: Yes ma'am, before, yes ma'am it had been years ago. Uh-huh.

BB: What kind of meals did you fix, I mean were you the only cook?

CN: Yes ma'am, I was the only cook, I cooked everything.

BB: Breakfast and...?

CN: And we served it on the table in dishes. We didn't serve on plates. We just filled the dishes up and put them on the table. Yes ma'am.

BB: Kind of family style?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Did you cook breakfast, supper and lunch or...?

CN: No ma'am, I didn't cook nothin' but dinner.

BB: Oh, you just cooked dinner?

CN: That's all.

BB: What did the boarders do for their breakfast?

CN: Oh I did. Yes, I did. I cooked supper, too. I had to go back in the evening.

BB: Uh-huh, so you worked kind of a split shift?

CN: No ma'am, wasn't nobody workin' there but me.

BB: Oh. So you went and fixed lunch...?

CN: Ma'am?

BB: I said you went and fixed a big lunch everyday?

CN: Yeah, I cooked dinner and I cooked supper.

BB: And then went back...what did the boarders do for breakfast?

CN: They all worked here at this mill, all of them worked here. There was a gang of them.

BB: Okay.

SB: Mama, she said, "They didn't eat breakfast," you fixed breakfast, didn't you?

CN: No, I didn't, Mrs. Della always fixed breakfast. I didn't.

BB: Oh, oh, that's who fixed breakfast. Okay.

CN: Mrs. Della fixed the breakfast. I cooked dinner and supper. That's all I cooked.

BB: At the boarding house was it mainly just men that stayed there?

CN: Ah. Yes ma'am, and Mrs. Williams and her daughter and her husband.

BB: What year was this that you went to work, can you remember?

CN: No ma'am, I sure can't, that was many a year back.

BB: Was about 1920, I mean was it fairly soon after you moved back to Diboll or was it later?

CN: Somewhere along there. It was directly after I come to Diboll 'cause Snookum was a little bitty, little old thing and my cousin Lena used to take care of them.

BB: Oh okay. So you were working there when the Depression started in 1929?

CN: Yes ma'am. I think I was.

BB: Okay.

CN: I know I was.

BB: Did you...were you cut back any hours or anything like that?

CN: No ma'am. No ma'am...no ma'am.

BB: Do you remember what they paid you back then?

CN: Paid me four or five, four dollars a week.

BB: Four dollars a week?

CN: And they paid me six dollars and when the boarders dropped out, she paid me four. Mrs. Della was a good woman.

BB: Uh-huh. So you lost a lot of boarders during that time. Did they go somewhere else to work?

CN: I guess they left.

BB: I guess so.

CN: Some of them left and some of them didn't.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: They still had quite a few.

BB: Do you remember what they paid your husband during that time over at the planer?

CN: About a dollar and fifty, about a dollar and ninety or ninety-five cents.

SB: A dollar and ninety-five cents.

BB: A dollar ninety-five a day, now is this for a day?

CN: During that Depression it was a dollar ninety-five a day.

BB: Um-huh. Okay how many days did he get to work?

CN: He worked ever'day.

BB: He worked, they worked them everyday?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Okay. All-right. What kind of housing did you live in during this time, was it a company house?

CN: Yes ma'am. Lived in a company house.

BB: Where abouts was it located?

CN: Up there by the lumberyard.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: Didn't have no street numbers here then. None of them was numbered.

BB: What kind of house was it, was it in pretty good shape?

CN: It was a wood house.

BB: How large?

CN: I had...ah, I had, let's see, four rooms.

SB: Four rooms.

CN: I had five rooms 'cause I had a kitchen, a dining room and a little side room and two big rooms. I had five rooms.

SB: You had that room added on, mama.

CN: I don't care that's what I lived in, I had it. And I had a bathroom, had my commode and everything in it.

SB: Yeah, but it was a long time before you had that.

BB: But it was later, wasn't it?

SB: Yeah, it was a long time. We lived in going out to the privy a long time.

CN: That's right.

BB: Right.

CN: I know we had that when we lived up there by the lumberyard.

BB: Okay.

CN: Now they moved all those housed up there, and moved them down. Down yonder, what they call that down yonder, sister?

SB: Uh-uh(meaning I don't know.)

CN: Where they moved them to?

SB: On the ranch.

CN: Yeah, down, they moved all them houses on the ranch.

BB: Oh, on the ranch.

CN: They tore some of them down and burnt some of them up and sold some of them.

BB: Right.

CN: But they moved everybody's house what was in it just like it was.

BB: So you lived there all those years then before you moved here?

CN: Yes ma'am, I lived right there until I moved over here.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: I been living over here about 24 years.

BB: Oh, I see.

CN: I was the first one got this house, when there wasn't nobody moved over here, but my two nephews.

BB: Was there ever a time during the Depression that your family went hungry?

CN: No ma'am. Not them.

BB: They had, you always had you always food for everybody?

CN: Yes ma'am. I ain't never been hungry in my life, I've always had food, the Lord has blessed me that far.

BB: Well, that is good. Did you know anybody around here that went hungry during the Depression or was everybody able to eat.

CN: Everybody was able, all our people, nearly old people that was nearly dead. All of them. Like Carrie Smith.

BB: Uh-huh, I talked with him.

SB: Oh, you have?

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: And, ah, Amos Harry. I know him, Amos Harris. And Mr. Finnis Henderson and...who else, Mr. Finnis Henderson, and sister, who else was here? Can you remember?

SB: Naw, all old timers.

CN: I can't remember nobody left but me and Carrie and Mr. Finnis and the name I just called.

BB: Okay, Mr. Harris.

CN: That's all I can remember.

BB: Well, was clothing in short supply or anything like that?

SB: Did you have plenty of clothes?

BB: Did you have plenty of clothes? Did you have lots of clothes to wear?

CN: Yes ma'am, had plenty to wear, sure did.

BB: So you really didn't suffer that much during the Depression did you?

CN: No ma'am, sure didn't. Lord let us live through it just fine. Like He's going to do this time, I think maybe we will make it.

BB: We we'll make it, right?

CN: I hope so.

BB: Did you have a garden?

CN: Yes ma'am. Had a beautiful garden.

BB: When did you have time to work it?

CN: A friend of mine what lived next door, he worked it. A man.

BB: Uh-huh.

CN: His name was Roosh, Levi Roosh.

BB: I see. Well, did he work it, it was your land and then ya'll split the produce?

CN: That was the company land.

BB: Oh.

CN: He worked it. I had a garden on the company land.

BB: I see.

CN: I had a garden on the company land, he worked my garden.

BB: I see.

CN: He didn't have no place for no garden, I had a big place for a garden, two places. I raised sweet potatoes in one and a garden in the other.

BB: I see. Did you have much of a variety of food to eat during this time or was it mainly just your garden that you ate out of?

CN: We ate out of the garden and the store together.

BB: Oh, okay. Did you trade at the company store?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: At the commissary?

CN: Yes ma'am. Mr. Ed Day, he was in there then. Mr. Fred Nelson was the man that issued us the checks.

BB: Okay, now this was your husband's payroll then, right? With the checks.

CN: Ma'am?

BB: What did you get paid in? Did you get paid in checks, too, or did you get money?

CN: She paid me in checks. When she had money, she paid me in money, but she didn't, she'd send me over the office and swap them checks and get money.

BB: Oh, I see. I didn't know anybody else did...?

CN: Everybody couldn't do that, but she could do it.

BB: I see.

CN: If I needed money, she sent over there and got it for me and we didn't have to pay a discount. It was a 10 cent discount on a twenty. Ten cents on the dollar above discount. If somebody else cashed it. But Mrs. Della she run that boarding house and cashed hers for nothing.

BB: I see. Okay. Were the prices at the company store just about the same as you could buy anywhere or were they cheaper?

CN: No, they's about the same. We not about goin to Lufkin tradin'.

BB: Okay, oh, you didn't go?

CN: No ma'am. Never go to Lufkin about tradin'.

BB: I see. Ah. Mrs. Nash, did the company store let you have credit, could you get things on credit there?

CN: Yes ma'am, yes ma'am.

BB: So during this time they'd let you charge if you had to?

CN: Yes ma'am. Until the panic was on and when the panic was on you couldn't get no credit.

BB: Okay.

CN: And the men worked there ever'day and they couldn't get nothin' in the office. What they hadn't drawed out of the office, all they could get. Ain't no checks anywhere, just white horses. Just a paper, you know wrote on, how much money you had. That's all you could get.

BB: Okay, what year was this? Do you remember?

CN: Naw, I sure don't.

BB: Was it 1930 or something?

CN: Naw, I really don't remember but it's when the panic was.

BB: Okay.

SB: It was along about that time.

BB: About that time and they had whitehorses?

SB: Uh-huh. Whitehorses.

CN: It is sheets of paper.

SB: A receipt-like book and he would sign it for so much and put a mark, his initial on it in red ink.

CN: Ever so much was marked was all he could draw.

BB: I see. And then you could use that at the commissary like that?

CN: Yes ma'am. And when you got what was on that paper, you couldn't get nothing else.

BB: I see.

CN: They stopped crediting then.

BB: I see. When did you think things started getting to be a little easier, around here? When did it seem like business picked up and things got back to normal?

CN: After Mr. Arthur Temple came here.

BB: That was in '47, wasn't it?

CN: I don't know when it was but it didn't pick up until he come here.

BB: It was after the World War then, huh?

CN: When he come here, Mr. Henry Temple first, was the president, I mean was the superintendent. And he died. He died and then they elected Mr. O'Hare for, ah, one, and he died. And then they elected Mr. Straus and the last one was Mr. Farley when Mr. Farley got off, Mr. Temple come he used to live in Texarkana. And he used to come down here and I cooked for him at the Star Hotel. And he'd eat over at the hotel and stay

over there in a house they had over there. An office he had over there at the bottom of the street.

BB: Uh-huh, I know where you're talking about.

CN: And, ah, when he first came here, he had us all meet at the school house and he had a talk and he said this: he said, if ya'll go up, I'll go up, but if I go down, ya'll go down. And he said, I want ya'll to stick with me as long as I'm here. We gonna have paved streets in Diboll and better houses to live in. And we done have them. Sho' done have them.

BB: We sure got a lot better.

CN: Yes ma'am. And he has really loaned a lot of money to people to send their children to school. His daddy sent my daughter to school.

BB: Oh, really?

CN: Sho' did. He liked me very much. I liked him, he was a good man.

BB: Still is. Oh, your talking about his dad?

CN: Ma'am?

BB: You were talking about his dad? Henry, I mean Arthur Temple's dad?

CN: Yeah.

BB: When did you go to work for the Star Hotel?

CN: I can't tell you what year, but after they decided to tear that old hotel down, they tore all of them down that I worked, at every one of them. They tore that old Star Hotel down then they wanted me, I mean, they tore the Beanery down. Then they wanted me to work at the Star. I went over there and cooked over there.

BB: Well, now was it set up like a boarding house, too? I mean you did the same kind of serving, family style?

CN: Yes ma'am. They kept boarders, too. Yes ma'am. They kept boarders, too.

BB: And you did the same kind of serving, family style? About how many people would you serve everyday?

CN: Oh, some days I served about 90 or 80.

BB: My word! That many?

CN: And over at Mrs. Della's, sometimes I would serve about 40 or 50 because the pipeline was runnin' through here, and she had all that pipeline bunch workin' for her. And the other hotel I worked for, called The Log Cabin.

BB: Okay now, that was the Antlers right? The Log Cabin?

CN: Yes ma'am, yes ma'am. I worked there.

BB: How long did you work there? Was that...?

CN: Oh I worked there about for Mr....about five years.

BB: Okay, was it brand new or was it at the same time that these others...?

CN: No ma'am, they tear every one of them down.

BB: They'd tear one down and have another one built?

CN: Yes ma'am. All they done tore at least two down. That the reason why I went to cookin' at The Log Cabin.

BB: Uh-huh, I've heard about that. Kind of describe it for me. Why do you call it The Log Cabin?

SB: It was built out of logs.

CN: It was built out of logs.

BB: Everything?

CN: That was the name of it. It was beautiful, had some of the prettiest heads in it, you ever seen in your life.

BB: Heads?

CN: Deer heads, and bear heads, and every kind of heads. Prettiest things you ever laid your eyes on. I used to have a picture of it or two, but it got away from me some way or another. I used to have pictures of it. They's pictures sold as postcards.

BB: Did they have the same sort of set up there, too, as far as, you serving, I mean. Or was it more of a restaurant?

CN: No ma'am, ah we served...

BB: Family style or...?

CN: Up until The Log Cabin. We served on plates, we didn't put it on the table.

BB: Served on plates?

CN: Uh-huh, they ordered what they wanted.

BB: I see.

CN: Had it on a paper, they ordered what they want. I had a file setting there, sometime that file would be so full I couldn't hardly get them on. And I done all that work by myself and now they got two or three cooks in the kitchen.

BB: I see.

CN: I done all that work by myself.

BB: That sounds hard.

CN: That's right. It was hard, I worked hard all my life, just about.

BB: Well let's see. Where were you working when they put the social security system into effect?

CN: I was working right in The Log Cabin for Mr.

BB: When they put the social security system in?

CN: Yes ma'am. She came in, and called us all in and told us, had to take a penny out of every dollar we made. I made ten dollars there.

BB: You were making ten dollars a week?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Okay.

CN: Took a penny out of that, and the dishwasher A. Z. and L. C. made. Ah they got three dollars a week.

BB: I see.

CN: Corrine Hobson, she got three dollars a week, she worked there. Mable Pyle, she cleaned up, she got three dollars a week.

BB: And they worked as many hours as you did?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: My word.

CN: Sure did. They had to clean all them dishes up and the kitchen up.

BB: After you got through messing it up?

CN: Yes ma'am. I didn't have no dishwasher in either place.

BB: Oh me.

CN: They had men washing the dishes. My husband washed dishes over at the Beanery.

BB: Oh he did? And the dishes all of...?

CN: He helped wash dishes over at the Beanery. He washed the cook buckets and Joe Bailey and another man, let's see, James Clark and Joe Bailey washed the dishes, then the...

BB: He'd do that after he got off work at the planer?

CN: No ma'am. No sooner they get through waiting, get through eating, they had a waiting room. Mrs. Della always brings dishes in. They had that kitchen cleaned up by time they had to go to work.

BB: Oh, I see.

CN: Sure would. When they get through eating she go and pick up the plate and carry it in the kitchen, I mean, in the dish room for me, to wash it.

BB: Do you think a depression like happened in 1929 can happen again?

CN: It already on, what you talking about. It already here.

BB: It gets worse every time I interview somebody.

CN: And ah, this President said, I mean ah the television say we got three years of it.

BB: Three more years?

CN: Yes ma'am. Three more years of it.

SB: The President won't be there that long. He ain't going be there no three more years.

CN: I don't care.

SB: Haven't he been there more than a year?

CN: No, he haven't.

BB: I think he's got two left.

CN: Huh?

BB: Yeah, he's got two left, 'till we decide again anyway.

CN: They tell me they trying to get someone to take his place 'cause he done messed up everything, and now he wants to put it down.

BB: Do you think people will be as accepting of the bad economic situation as they were back whenever you were experiencing it in '30? In the '30s?

CN: No, I don't think so.

BB: What do you think will happen? If things get a lot worse?

CN: A lots worse, a whole lot, lot worser, they will.

BB: Do you think people will accept it like they did then?

CN: Got to, can't do nothin' else, so many people out of jobs and things now. Wasn't quite like that before. People got jobs and things. That first President or what you ask me about on there. Well, he's the one that put the Depression on and the next President, he's the one that took it off. He made things better, it's on that paper, my daughter read that to me.

BB: Let's see, I didn't ask you that, did I. What did you think about Hoover? That was President Hoover you were talking about. What did you think about him?

CN: Was that the first?

BB: That was the first one.

CN: Naw, he the one that put the panic on.

BB: He caused it, huh?

CN: Yes, ma'am.

BB: And I assumed you liked Roosevelt?

CN: Yes ma'am.

BB: Okay.

CN: He brought us a mighty long way.

BB: Were you involved, or any of your people involved in the WPA projects or the CCC projects around here?

CN: No ma'am.

BB: Okay.

CN: Wasn't all that in school when I was growing up. When we was at home.

BB: Okay, I see. Did you want to tell me anything more about Mr. Temple?

CN: Well, no more than his daddy was a fine man, and he helped all the time and, ah besides he used to live in Texarkana. And when they came down they always used to eat at the hotel and stay over there at that place across the railroad tracks, a rooming house they had over there. And Mrs. Farrington she used to work in the store and she used to come and eat with us too. She was a lady and she used to eat over there, too.