

ROBERT RAMSEY

Interview 49A

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Becky Bailey, Interviewer

Susan Schinke and Brandi Clark, Transcribers

Retyped by Patsy Colbert

ABSTRACT: Shelby County, Texas native Robert Ramsey recalls his time as a much loved and respected teacher, coach, and principal in Diboll. In this interview with Becky Bailey, Mr. Ramsey reminisces about coming to Diboll, starting a football team, building sports and educational facilities, working with the citizens and the company to fund the school, and the challenges of running a rural school district with a limited tax base. Mr. Ramsey briefly mentions integration and the African American and Hispanic communities in Diboll. Mr. Ramsey presided over a period of great change within the town and the schools.

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): I am interviewing Mr. Robert Ramsey at his home. Today's date is July 11, 1985. I am Becky Bailey. Present also is Mrs. Rita Ramsey. Mr. Ramsey, where were you born?

Robert Ramsey (hereafter RR): Mrs. Bailey, I was born in Shelby County in a community named Stockman, Texas, in the year 1916.

BB: Isn't that where Lurlene's folks live? In Stockman?

RR: Lurlene Boyette, she is my niece.

BB: Yes.

RR: Okay, I grew up in that community and went to the rural school there up until my junior year and the football recruiter from Timpson High School came down and wanted me to come to Timpson to play football. They offered to pay me board and room if I would do so. And I agreed and went to Timpson my last year in all sports. I also was in the Choral Club at Timpson High School and as the result of this it enabled me later to get a scholarship at East Texas Baptist College. A lady came through Timpson hunting seniors one summer and found out about myself and my brother-in-law that sang in the choir with me. She wanted us to come to Marshall. At that time it was the College of Marshall. C of M. Wanted us to come to Marshall and sing in the choir and we went to visit Marshall and decided we would go to school there and we did. The agreement was that we were to sing in the choir, play basketball, grade papers, along with some other things. So we went to school two years at this Junior College and did that. We sang in the choir, graded papers, worked on the campus, and we played basketball. And after two years we came to Nacogdoches, Stephen F. Austin. I went on after three years of college training, I started teaching. My first school was at Blair.

BB: What did you major in?

RR: I majored in Social Science. Social Studies, and minored in Physical Education.

BB: So they had an education department that you went through for this or was it secondary?

RR: I went three years to college and then I started teaching. My degree...

BB: But you didn't have your degree at that time?

RR: I did not have the degree. I only had three years. I went back during the summer months then and finished up my B.S. degree in 1947. Then following that I continued to teach and go to school during the summer months and received my M.A. Degree in 1951.

BB: That is pretty good. Where did you start teaching?

RR: Where?

BB: Yes.

RR: Where did I start? I started teaching at Blair. This was prior to my marriage to Miss Rita Franks.

BB: Okay, is that like in "Bobo and Blair" with the train thing? That little.....

RR: That was one of the three names, yes. It is located about three miles out of Timpson and I taught two years there. My second year, my girl friend over there agreed to marry me, so I married Miss Rita Franks in 19.....was it '40 or '41, Rita?

Mrs. Rita Ramsey (hereafter MRR): '40

RR: 1940. I forget those dates sometimes, but we remained on and the next year I moved over to another small country school out of Center, Texas, Mt. Herman. And it was there that our first child was born, Bobby Ramsey, who now is a Professor at Stephen F. Austin. And also Nita, who is now Nita Hurley. She was born while we lived at Mt. Herman. We were there six years so my first acquaintance with Diboll, Texas, came during our sixth year by way of a letter that I received from W.F. Pate.

BB: Was he the school superintendent at that time?

RR: He was the school superintendent here. Someone had recommended me to him to come to Diboll and be High School principal and coach. I wasn't too interested, simply because I had never heard of the City of Diboll, knew nothing of it. But I met Mr. Pate a few days after I received his letter and we talked at Stephen F. Austin College about the job and I agreed to come down and visit him. So it was on a Sunday during Christmas

holidays of 1946. I got two of my brother-in-laws, the Frank boys to come with me. And we drove through Garrison, by the way, the reason I mentioned Garrison, it entered into the picture because by brother, Herschel, was teaching in Garrison at that time. World War II had just been over and he had taken a job. A teaching job there at Garrison and I said to the Franks boys, "Let's stop and pick up my brother. He might want to drive down to Diboll." So we did. As it turned out that was a crucial thing as the way things turned out in my life, I guess. Because as we came on to Diboll we looked over the town and it was a sawmill town. Very...just a spitting image you might say, of a sawmill town. Every house had a picket fence around it. There wasn't a paved street here. As we drove around town before we ever got to see Mr. Pate, I wanted to look the town over a little. I wasn't impressed at all. In fact, I was turned off you might say because the town...it was in mid-winter and no trees in buds. Cows and hogs were seen around on the streets and the town, it just looked terrible to me. But we went on and talked with Mr. Pate and he carried us over to the school and then again that school was just composed of a bunch... a group of buildings of wood that was already looking very old. All the buildings were steam heated. You had overhead pipes running from one building to another, but one thing that did appeal to my brother was the place to live. He had a nice little duplex apartment there near the school and it was real nice and it was this place to live that caused my brother to say, "Well look, if you don't want this job, I would like to take it if you will hire me, because I am fixing to have to move in my home in Garrison. My landlord has already told me that I had to move so this will be at least a place for me to live and too, it will be a promotion for me." On the way back that Sunday afternoon, I told my brother, Herschel, "You can have the job if you want it. I don't want to come to Diboll." So he took the job. He came on down and I remained at Mt. Herman in a little old community that I was real happy in. Had my little three-year old boy and a sixteen-month old daughter. And I wasn't interested in moving off.

So my brother came on down and stayed out the year. Well at the end of the year, Apple Spring's superintendency opened up and my brother went over there and applied for the job and got it. So he came back to me and said, "Bob, this is a pretty good community to live in. Come on down and visit Diboll again. The job is still yours if you want it." So I come on down in May. The trees had blossomed out. The leaves had put on and the streets had dried up. I didn't see any animals roaming the streets. So.....and he said the best part about Diboll is its people. Said it is a good group of people to work with. Kids are nice. People are polite and they will do anything in the world for you. Said it is a real fine group of people. So, I said, well, that being the case and if he still wants me, I will come. So my wife and I and our two little children moved to Diboll in August of 1947, to take over the coaching duties along with being high school principal. And I might say, I was to coach six-man football. A game that I had never seen. I had played eleven-man football in high, but I had never even seen a six man football game. But he told me.... assured me that football wasn't important in Diboll then. There wasn't a lighted field. They played their games in the afternoon out there on the old Miller Park, the Diboll baseball field. And really there wasn't any interest much in football so not to worry about that. Nevertheless, being sports minded myself, I wanted to learn all I could learn about six-man football game. So I bought me a book and studied it very religiously until practice started and we had a season, I don't think I won but one game, maybe tied

another. We were playing Colmesneil, Chester, and Goodrich. I remember those schools that we played that year, but at the end of the season I said to Mr. Pate, my Superintendent, "Hey, let's go into eleven-man football. I know a little about it." Well, he said, "Do you have enough boys?" I said "Well I got eighteen. That will give me a few substitutes." So we rigged up. He said "Go ahead, it suits me if you want to play eleven-man football. It doesn't matter with me." Soam I talking too much?

BB: No.

RR: Okay.

BB: No. I am just sitting here, it's good.

RR: We agreed on eleven-man football team providing I could get enough boys to play. Well, we needed a football stadium. No one could see us play, as I said before, and we needed a lighted football field. Dr. Dan Spivey was our town doctor then. He is now in Lufkin. And he was sports minded too. So I go and talk with Mr. Dan Spivey, Dr. Dan Spivey. And he and I agreed that Diboll really did need a lighted football field here so people could see them play as much as we were going into eleven-man football. So we went to Mr. Arthur Temple. Mr. Temple then had just taken over this company.

BB: This was in '47?

RR: This was in '48.

BB: This was in '48, okay.

RR: So Arthur Temple had just replaced Henry Temple. Henry Temple was head of this company when I came here. Mr. Arthur Temple took over. A very young man and very energetic with a lot of plans and ideas in his head. We went to see him and he said "Well." I never will forget his reply. "Do the people want it?" And we felt sure they did. And he said, "Well, if they want it, they will contribute to it." And he said "Go about town and see how much money you can raise." So Dr. Dan Spivey and I went and talked to the people and we got up.....we got Dr. Dale, I believe, was the biggest contributor we had. He said "I will give \$100." Most of the employees here signed up to give or to allow \$1.00 a week to be taken out of their checks. The company would take out \$1.00 from their check every week to go into this fund for a certain length of time. When we made the rounds, we finally came up with \$4400 that we could account for. Went back to Mr. Temple with it and he said, "Well go ahead and get started."

So the next thing was we needed some light poles. Mr. Bennis Franks, who by the way had come here my second year as my assistant. You see my first year that I came as principal and coach, I was the only coach we had. I had to coach all sports without any assistance. I had football, I had basketball and baseball by myself. So I talked Mr. Pate into letting me hire Mr. Franks, who was coaching basketball up at Mr. Enterprise at the time, to see if I could get him to come down and help me and be the head basketball coach.

BB: Can I ask one thing?

RR: Go right ahead.

BB: Did you have girl's basketball yet?

RR: We did not have girl's basketball at that time.

BB: You know they used to have it here.

RR: We did, we started it up two or three years later. But we didn't have at that time.

BB: Okay, go ahead.

RR: So after we got approval on the lighted football field we had to go out in the woods over here, what is the name of that place? New addition that has been built. It was in the woods then.

BB: Oh where Sharon and them live out there?

RR: Across the railroad track over here.

BB: Oh okay, Lakeview.

RR: All those apartments they have built in the last few years. We went over there and Mr. Franks and I and picked out eight fairly straight tall pine trees. We took a cross-cut saw and we went over there and sawed those trees down and cut them up in sixty foot lengths. Carried them over to the football field and Mr. Franks, myself, and Mr. Schinke, Mrs. Schinke's husband at that time was here and he had a position in the Lions Club that had to do with the youth of our town and their recreation program, or something. Anyway, the three of us peeled those poles by hand and we got them hauled to Lufkin to be treated since we didn't have a treating plant in Diboll then. We hauled them to Lufkin and brought them back and these were to be our light poles. In the meantime we had lights ordered through the company. The lights that we needed to go on the top of these to have the lighted football field. But anyway we got it all under way. And in the meantime, Dr. Spivey was getting people to haul dirt over there where it is at the present location of the football field. That is the site that we picked out together and it was a community garden then. Diboll had several community gardens, at least I know of two. One of them was located where our football field is now located. People in the community wanted a garden and they would go over there and stake them out a spot and have them a garden. And there is another one where our present high school campus is located and that was another community garden at that time. This was in the early.....back in '49, '50.

BB: Now the high school wasn't where it is now. Back then when you were talking about.

RR: No, the high school...

BB: It was over at the elementary campus, right?

RR: All the grades were taught there. We had the Temple High School where the colored people went, located where the Junior High is.

BB: Right, So you had quite a ways to go to practice and that sort of thing.

RR: Yes, the black people didn't have a gymnasium. They played all their basketball games over in ours. We had the old gym, which we still have over there.

Okay, that summer I took the football players that I had and we built a plank fence around our football field and built some old rough board lumber seats that would seat maybe two, three hundred people. Built them over there on the east side of the football field. Didn't have any on the visitor's side at all. So that fall in September of 1948 we opened up our first eleven-man football season against Lovelady at night. We had the field in condition that we could play on it. It wasn't fully grassed over. We had tried to get it all grassed over, but there was a drought was on. Would you believe that the fire department had to run hoses all the way from the present Elementary school across the main highway over there to the football field so we could water it? There wasn't any fire hydrants across on that side of the highway.

BB: Highway, oh no.

RR: So they did, they did that and we watered that field in August and got a little grass growing so when we played...played Lovelady that first game. We won; nineteen to two was the score.

BB: Nineteen to two.

RR: We won our first game. Okay, Diboll School, back to that. We had good schools then and we weren't like we are today. We didn't have near the course offerings in the high school as we have today. We didn't have near the course offerings in the high school as we have today. We had the basic courses. We had English, science, math. We had typing and shorthand, history, vocational AG, homemaking, and that was just about all course offerings we had, the basic courses. We had eighteen credits required for graduation. But kids that went to our school then went on to colleges and did quite well. I remember one or two students, one down in Lamar College. One of our boys went down there and majored in Geology and he came out with the highest record of any student that had ever been through Lamar College and that was quite good news to us.

BB:

RR: We were proud of it. Okay, what other questions do you want to ask me?

BB: I got caught up in listening and I wasn't taking any notes. Well I want....let's go back to what you thought about Diboll whenever you first came. You were living in Mt. Herman. What kind of a community was that? Was it a farming community?

RR: It was a farming community located ten miles south of Center in between the Center, Nacogdoches highway. Most people in that area grew watermelons and cantaloupes.

BB: Well, did the town look a lot different than Diboll?

RR: The town I left? It wasn't a town there. It was just a wide place on the highway, just a community. You see, back then Mrs. Bailey, we had in Shelby County and all over East Texas, the law was you had a school every three miles in the county. That was because people had to walk to school. There wasn't any school buses and all kids had to walk. This was just prior to the, right after World War.....or just prior to World War II and during the war. There just wasn't any school buses in operation then. So there was a little school. Following the war the big trend toward consolidation took place and that pretty well wiped out all those little small elementary schools that you saw in all the counties. In Shelby County where I grew up, as I said, there was a school about every three miles. Up and down the road.

BB: So there were plenty places just to go and.....

RR: The grades taught.....we had in Shelby County. Center had a twelve grade system. Or eleven grades then. Timpson was a high school and Shelbyville was, Joaquin may have been, I don't recall. Teneha, Center and Timpson were the large schools in Shelby County and you would go out to these little schools and finish maybe the eighth grade and lot of the time that would be about all the schooling you would get unless you were able to go to a high school. Your parents were able to get transportation for you. Now we started....

BB: For new teachers. That is where most of the new teachers taught too, wasn't it?

RR: Right

BB: In those small rural schools that had two or three grades in a class?

RR: Yes. I taught... I started out as principal of the Blair school.

BB: You started with three years of college?

RR: We didn't have but two teachers, see. But I was classified as a principal. I taught the upper grades and I was responsible to the school board. We would have our meetings and I would meet with them. The other teacher didn't do that, see. And by the way, I got paid five dollars a month for being principal.

BB: Five dollars extra a month?

RR: Five dollars extra a month and my salary when I first started was, after I took teacher retirement which had just begun then, after teacher retirement I brought home about ninety seven dollars a month as principal. And the last two salaries that was for nine months, by the way.

BB: Oh, for nine months.

RR: Number eight and number nine vouchers had to be discounted if I cashed them. Ten percent.

BB: Now what does that mean?

RR: Well, if I wanted my money right off, see the state run out of money along about the last two months of school every year. Every year they would run out of money.

BB: They would run out of money? What in April or so?

RR: You would go to the bank then and say, "Hey will you take or buy this voucher?" They would take ten percent off. That is how we would get our money.

BB: Oh?

RR: We had to discount our vouchers, our paychecks.

BB: Did this happen in Diboll too?

RR: No it didn't.

BB: By that time things were picking up.

RR: It was picking up. The state, the Gilmer-Aikin School Laws, you know came in. You may have heard of the Gilmer-Aikin School Law. Maybe you haven't?

BB: I have heard of them, but it has been a long time.

RR: It happened, I believe in '49. That was right after we came down here. That did a lot toward the betterment of education in Texas. Just a whole lot in that it gave more money to our schools and our teacher's salaries were increased somewhat. Nothing like... it increased about three or four hundred dollars a teacher a year and that was a big increase. Oh, I believe my salary when I came to Diboll as principal of this high school was \$1800 a year and that was considerably more than I was making up in Shelby County. For that I was to be principal and coach and taught about five classes a day. Now you can imagine what kind of job I did in the classroom five hours a day and handling the disciplinary

problems of our high school and then go out at 3:30 and coach until six. When I got home I was drained.

BB: And you didn't have a lesson planning time at school either, did you?

RR: No you didn't have any periods at all.

BB: You didn't do that.

RR: I may have had a period or two but that period was taken in handling problems of our school, administrative problems.

BB: Did you ever have a supervision certificate or anything like that or was it....

RR: Did I have what now?

BB: A supervision certificate. Now they go... you have to have a master's in supervision before you can be a principal. Was there any such...?

RR: Well there was... there were requirements then as there is now. But you had to have certain courses in college to qualify you to be a high school principal and have your administrative certificate, we called it.

BB: Oh, okay.

RR: And I had that. I had to get the administrator's certificate. I could be principal or superintendent either. My credentials were so that I could...

BB: I think back in the '30's, I was talking to Mr. Bush and he said you didn't have to have anything special. I think he just got to be principal just because.

RR: He relates farther back than I did.

BB: Right. So at some point during that period, that ten, fifteen-year period, they changed it.

RR: It came along pretty fast once it got started. I had two older sisters. In fact I had three older sisters of mine that made teachers but they only went to college at S.F.A. for something like three months.

BB: Three months?

RR: It wasn't long. They didn't have to go very long to get a certificate.

BB: Did they have to take a test or anything to...?

RR: I don't recall about that. They may have had to take a test but you could become a schoolteacher pretty easily back then.

BB: But the schooling part was...?

RR: It didn't take a lot of college work. Diboll has come a long ways. I don't think, as I said a while ago, our schools were good then. We had good teachers and the courses were basic. But good kids would come out of our schools and go to any college and do well. We didn't have any failures in college then as we don't now. I think it is primarily the big thing is your teachers, is the teaching staff. It doesn't matter what kind of principal or superintendent you have as long as you have good teachers. That is what is important.

BB: They can't hurt it too bad.

RR: No, they can't hurt it too bad.

BB: At this time, when you came down here, were we still associated with the county?

RR: We were a common school district.

BB: With the whole county?

RR: Yes. We went to the county school superintendent for our official business. It was in 1952 when Diboll voters voted to go independent.

BB: So that is just a local decision that you could make?

RR: It was a local decision. They voted on it.

BB: To break away?

RR: Right, and then we had our own. We were responsible then to the state for the conduct of our school. Mr. Wilbur Pate served here, I don't know how many years. I believe he came in '42, somewhere along there.

RR: But I always thought a many times, if we hadn't stopped in Garrison that afternoon, that Sunday afternoon, and picked up my brother Herschel I wouldn't have come here. But we did, we picked him up through just kind of an accident that he would come with us. He came down with us and looked it over and decided that he would come and after he came and stayed from December until May, then he encouraged me to come back and have another look.

BB: Why did he leave? If it was so good, why did he leave?

RR: See he was young and he was on the way up. Herschel had a lot of ambition. He is younger than I am. He thought that was a big stepping-stone. He went to Apple Springs

and was there about three years, I guess. And Garrison school came open and he goes back as superintendent, he left there.

BB: Oh and Garrison was bigger still at that time.

RR: Yes much larger. So he went there as the Superintendent of Schools at Garrison and that was the school which he left to come to Diboll and he was just a classroom teacher. As I said, he had just got back from World War II, had been in England for many, many months. Didn't see his own daughter for... she was three years old before he got to see her.

BB: Oh no.

RR: Okay.

BB: Well, tell me how things started changing around here. I mean how long...

RR: When Mr. Arthur Temple took over the town itself started a drastic change. In that, you see, the company owned all these houses that is why I said it was strictly a sawmill town. Rent was cheap, \$13.00 a month is what we paid for rent on our house. The company had a crew of carpenters, paperhangers and they... when I wanted a new paper job, I applied to Mr. Jewel Brown, I believe it was. I made application, put on a waiting list and when the carpenter crew got to me, they would come and paper my house and no charge. It was a company owned house. Any facility that I wanted changed, I could go to the company and get any repair. Most people had washhouses outside in the back yard – a place to do their washings. Let's see, telephones. Rita, did we have telephones in Diboll? I believe we did right after we came.

MRR: Yes I think we got a phone.

RR: Water, it was terrible. It stunk like you could hardly stand it. We would go up to Lufkin to get water to make our coffee in.

BB: Oh really.

RR: Everything was black. The water had a terrible scent to it that came out of your hydrant in the kitchen. Terrible scent and tasted terrible.

BB: Was it brown, like Burke water is or was it...?

RR: No.

BB: It looked okay, just smelt bad?

RR: As I recall, it looked all right but had a terrible odor to it. But shortly after we came, I believe in '50 or '51, the little loop was built around Diboll by the highway department.

BB: Now, wait is this the....

RR: The little loop that turns here at the Gulf Station and goes up close to the railroad track loops on and then comes back into the highway over here.

BB: Oh okay.

RR: That was the first paved street other than the old Diboll highway that came through. That is Hendrix Street now.

BB: Okay.

RR: It came around by the elementary school that was the main highway to Houston.

BB: The main highway.

RR: And that evening I came to Diboll. That was another thing that turned me off. Okay driving from Lufkin to Diboll on that Sunday afternoon, meeting all that traffic. It was heavy then on that little old narrow road. It scared me to death. I thought I was going to be knocked off the highway before I got down here. Meeting all that heavy traffic. The highway was narrow, rough, beat up and it just looked awful. I was scared of it so it wasn't long till we got this highway that we are using now built into Lufkin. I was here when that was done.

BB: By this time did the local school district have any special rules that they had for teaching here? They had, I know way way back yonder, they had things like you know, the women couldn't be married, or you know, that sort of thing. Were all those extra rules gone by the time that you came here in the '40's?

RR: I think so. I don't recall any such rules or marriage requirements or residency requirements. We had people coming out of Nacogdoches teaching here.

BB: In '47 and '48 they would drive all that way?

RR: Yes. Mrs. Adams drove up to...who was that teacher Rita? That one that...?

MRR: Mrs. Clifton used to ride the bus.

BB: Rode a bus?

RR: She rode a bus some but then later she got a car. Yes we had teachers that drove out of Nacogdoches, quite a few of them that drove to Diboll and taught. No, there wasn't any special rules as far as I remember when I came in '47.

BB: Okay, what were some of the advantages over being a local? Voting to be local school district over being associated with the county still. What were the...?

RR: Oh I think it is just being independent. Preferred independence and you could run your own school and school board and superintendent of schools had full jurisdiction and responsibility of operating the school. Otherwise you had a county school board you know, and county school superintendent that had jurisdiction over your school. And if they wanted to impose any particular rule on you, you had to abide by it. So it was kinda like....

BB: Does it make any difference in the tax structure here or not?

RR: Yes it did. We had to depend on our local taxes for the support of our local maintenance and things of that nature. By the way our tax, our evaluation in Diboll then was, as I recall, Mr. Pate saying about three million dollars. Two and a half to three million dollars and now I don't know what it is. It must be what fifty million? I know one thing, we didn't have any money. Our football players had to buy their own shoes. The equipment was terrible when we finally, when we went into eleven-man football I was able to buy eleven helmets, only eleven. Those helmets was the suspension and the helmets before them, the helmets that the football players wore would fit right down on top of the head. Like a skullcap, any lick on...

BB: Weren't they leather?

RR: Yes, they were leather and see any lick on the head would jar you just like you had been hit on the head with a fist. But then they came up with these new plastic helmets with suspensions in them. So we were able to get eleven of those when we started in 1948 for our football team. When a boy wanted to substitute he had to pull off and find a helmet that would fit him.

BB: You had to be careful who you substituted, didn't you?

RR: We didn't have any money locally to spend.

BB: I guess the teachers didn't have anything over base?

RR: No.

BB: There was no such thing back then?

RR: Didn't think about that and I didn't get paid for coaching.

BB: You didn't get anything extra for coaching? You got the same as a classroom teacher?

RR: That's right. I got a principal's pay. Principals got paid more than teachers, but that was part of the deal. I don't think, Mrs. Bailey that you could find a person in Texas or

the United States that would come and go to a school now to be the head coach, coach by himself, no matter what size school it was. Have no assistance and not be paid anything and teach five classes.

BB: And be principal.

RR: And be principal. I don't believe you could get them to do that.

BB: I don't think you could do it.

RR: But then it was different. People...well, you just had to have a job. And I wanted a job and that was about the only way you could get it was to accept those types of things. But I enjoyed it, I really did. I kept busy, real busy. But I meet up with those kids now that I had back then, they just seem to think the world and all of me. They call me "Coach."

Don't see many of them, lot of them gone. I have outlived quite a few of them.

BB: Describe Mr. Pate for me. What kind of man was he? He was here a long, long time wasn't he?

RR: Very conservative. He had to be because we didn't have any money here to spend. He had high morals; he was a devout Christian, I think. He went to our Methodist Church and his wife went to the Baptist Church, which it worked out fine. They had this one child, Billy Frank Pate, and he grew up along with my.... when I came to Diboll he was a youngster. So I had him, I was his principal all through high school and they... I have heard them say several times during that time, which ever church Billy Frank would decide to choose after he grows up, whether it be Methodist, Baptist or whatever...that they both would go to that church. But that never did happen. Billy Frank really went on to the Baptist church with his mother and I believe and maybe joined that church. Mr. Pate remained on in the Methodist church.

He was a civic leader. He belonged to the Lions Club; he was a hard worker. He spent lots of hours that no one knew about in the schools interest working late at night. He was well liked by his teaching staff, very helpful, cooperative. I don't know what you could say, he was just an all around good person. I think he ran a good school with the amount of money he had to operate on. He could have run a better school if he had had a lot more money I know. He would have implemented more programs for our kids. He just didn't have the money. The company heads here didn't want their taxes raised.

BB: I started to say the tax base...?

RR: Yes the most of the tax money for our school, I would imagine sixty percent or better came from the Southern Pine Lumber Company. It was called Southern Pine Lumber Company then.

BB: Nobody owned their houses or anything so they didn't pay any taxes.

RR: A few farmers around out here in the country owned farms and they didn't want to pay the taxes either.

BB: Whenever they were campaigning and wanting to be independent, was there much opposition from the company, or not?

RR: Well the farmers were worried about it.

BB: Were against it?

RR: Those that lived out and they fought it. Those that owned a little land outside of Diboll, outside the city limits, they were opposed to it. They thought their taxes was going to go away up high. But they paid so little taxes then and so did the company. They didn't want it. Mr. Temple wanted Mr. Pate to operate this school just as cheaply as he possibly could and Mr. Pate had to go along with whatever Mr. Temple wanted, just to be frank with you about it. And I can see Mr. Temple's point of view too, because the company wasn't making all that much money at that point in time.

BB: They weren't as diversified then were they?

RR: They weren't as diversified. That is right.

BB: Was it just the sawmills?

RR: Primarily. They had a handle factory. It is still in operation and the lumber. At one time they had a box factory here, but it burned. That was a year or two before we came to Diboll. That employed a lot of people, but it burned, burned to the ground.

BB: About how large a school are we talking about? How many people did you have in high school?

RR: We graduated about thirty-five to forty students a year in '48, '49 and '50.

BB: So it was basically one classroom per grade.

RR: Yes we didn't have too many sections. Primarily one section of English I, one section of Math, Algebra and one section of Geometry, now they have multiple sections of those I am sure. We were having them before I left. Had to have several sections of different subjects to take care of the students.

BB: Well basically a student could begin in the first grade and just stay with his class because it was...

RR: Pretty much the same all the way through.

BB: Same all the way through, yes.

RR: Right. When they got into high school they had a little choice. Of course we didn't have girls taking Ag and boys taking homemaking. You had all girls in the homemaking department and all boys in the Ag department. And too typing wasn't necessarily a boy's course either. Not too many boys went into typing. Lot of girls did and bookkeeping, we had bookkeeping classes. But we would go in that school on cold mornings, and in 1953 we moved down here where they are now, 1953. But in those five years...

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

RR: The school buildings over there, the kids would have to hover around those radiators, as I said before, had steam heat and the pipes ran from across, overhead from one building to another. And old Oscar Davis was the janitor and he was supposed to have fired it up every morning, you know. Sometimes those things would freeze up when a real cold spell would come through. I recall a February 2, 1949, we went out to the school, Mr. Pate and I did, to our little old office that was located right on the highway and he said "Everything is froze up." Temperature was two below zero. It had come a snow and about an inch of snow on the ground and it was frozen hard as ice and he couldn't get those boilers to, had no steam to circulate and we had to dismiss school that day. But let me tell you this, there was a ditch that ran through that campus over there, that the elementary school is on now. It was an open sewage ditch that ran right by my office and we had a, we had a bridge built across it. It was about twelve to fifteen feet across that sewage ditch. It meandered around and went on under the highway and on down toward the football field. But before we left that campus, Mr. Arthur Temple, I am sure it was he, had J.D. Winder, who was the big engineer here to build a concrete culvert all the way across that campus and we were able to cover that ditch up. That was, I would guess, I am bad on dates, I would say around '51, '50 or '51.

BB: And so there is concrete all the way underneath there and it is just covered up?

RR: Yes.

BB: Oh I didn't know that. I thought they just filled it all in.

RR: No there is a concrete culvert and it is about four feet I imagine, four by four feet. The depth you know.... inside measurement.

BB: Well surely by the time you were here they had indoor toilets and that sort of thing didn't they?

RR: Well it was indoor and outdoor combination deal. It was outside.

BB: Oh it was outside?

RR: It was outside in a little building there, but they did have flush commodes.

BB: It was modern plumbing.

RR: But it was anything but sanitary. It was a nasty, nasty, stinky place as I recall. Nothing like we have today. It was wet, water running in there and the floors were always wet, muddy.

BB: Oh yuck.

RR: It was just a bad place to go to.

BB: At least the kids, you didn't have to worry about them staying long, did you?

RR: No, they didn't stay long. They didn't have a warm comfortable place to go and hide, but we...

BB: Was there much opposition back whenever they were going to build the new high school and all? You know, we have had such a hard time trying to get a bond issue here lately.

RR: No, I think everybody saw the need then more so than ever before. We really did need a new school building and everybody was aware of it.

BB: Were you all overcrowded at that time?

RR: It wasn't so much overcrowded. It was the condition of the old buildings over there. And too, we needed to separate the little ones from the big ones. That was another big issue. We had the elementary and high school there together, you know, on the same campus. And it was a feeling of all of us that they should be... and when we did finally get the new building down there and it just a vanilla type building, I mean it looked more like a little old motel.

BB: Now this is the high school that is now?

RR: Yes, now. But we have added to it. We have added the library, two or three classrooms, several classes behind it. The gymnasium has been built since.

BB: So you are just talking that first little building. That was it.

RR: Yes that's right. That was all that was there and no grass. When we first moved in, no grass and kids would track in that dirt and sand and it was really a problem to keep out. And then the worst part about it, Mrs. Bailey, we had to walk across that highway back over to the Elementary school to eat lunch. We had no cafeteria. We did that for how many years Rita?

MRR: Oh, gee I don't remember.

RR: Three or four years. Had to carry all those high school... we just had to turn them a loose and they were on their own. Walked across that busy highway to the elementary school campus back to that old cafeteria. They didn't have the money and didn't build a cafeteria down at the high school. That was the worst, that was a bad situation. Couldn't keep up with the kids too well, they would scatter everywhere.

BB: I bet the elementary principal wasn't happy about being high school principal for part of the day either, were they?

RR: I don't remember them giving them any trouble, but they gave me a lot of trouble. They would go downtown, go to the Dairy Cream, or what have you. People would come and...so and so is over here. So and so is having a fight over at the football field.

BB: A little bit too far for you to do too much about it.

RR: You know.

BB: Well tell me about the elementary campus now before you moved. How was it arranged? With the... is the high school gone that was your high school?

RR: The old buildings are all gone except the gymnasium. The gymnasium is the only thing that is left and where you all have your bicycle racks down there, that is where the community center was located and that is where we served lunch. That building is gone too.

BB: Oh so that was a cafeteria?

RR: That was the cafeteria. That is where we all got lunches where the present cafeteria is, was built several years later. And again I can't recall the dates these things were built, but I remember, I remember when your present elementary school was dedicated on Sunday afternoon. We had it on the back porch there. Mr. Arthur Temple and I don't know what dignitaries were there; just a small group had it officially dedicated. Rita do you remember that? It was there on the back porch facing the present lunchroom in that little old area right there.

BB: Yes, yes.

RR: And we had the dedication there, but that building that you all are in was an old wooden building. They replaced it, tore it down and built the one that is there now, made out of logs notice.

BB: Yes, right.

RR: That was Mr. Temple's idea.

BB: They had a big write up in a paper. Miss Bea showed it to me about, “We can use Southern Pine” and all this.

RR: We don’t make brick here, you know, we make lumber. But it was along time before Arthur Temple would agree to have anything made of brick in Diboll.

BB: Well now the high school is brick isn’t it?

RR: The high school was and he didn’t like it, but he finally consented. Well it isn’t all brick, not all.

BB: No it is about half, isn’t it?

RR: And the rest of it is wood.

BB: If this is the elementary and gym, where was the old high school before it was torn down?

RR: Well, okay my office, we will start with it. You know where the buses drive in off that Hendrix Street to pick up the kids and back into the street? Right there is where the office was.

BB: Oh down on that end of the campus.

RR: Then you walked across that bridge, that ditch ran across there. Okay the high school was between there and your present building?

BB: Kinda like where the cafeteria is? In that area?

RR: Well no it was back north of that.

BB: That, oh okay.

RR: There wasn’t a whole lot of room in there, but there was two...there was the homemaking department and the science lab was located there. Then just there was a break. Another building here and a study hall and an English room and typing room was in one building. Then they built, that was the high school, wasn’t it? Then the Ag building it was over there kinda on the very extreme corner of the present campus. Let’s see how I can explain where it was. The gymnasium is here and this is that street, one way street that comes out in front of your school. That Ag building was stuck right up here in this corner.

BB: Oh.

RR: There is nothing there now. That was the gym. Okay the homemaking buildings would be right here.

BB: Oh they were separate?

RR: Well it was homemaking one end and we taught math here and science here and homemaking here. It was three departments. Okay, and this building, the English room was right there, typing room was right there, another room was here. We had a pretty big room for study hall here and we built the annual in that room. So we did have an annual room so we called it, an Ag building and our office right over near the street, Hendrix. Our little office was located right here and that ditch meandered around like that up toward the railroad.

BB: And where was the elementary?

RR: Elementary was right over here.

BB: Oh you all were just right together weren't you?

RR: Yes there was just a little space between the buildings.

BB: Oh.

RR: And the old lunchroom.

BB: Over there.

RR: It was a two story. Woodmen of the World had the upper story for their meetings and later they built a room for the first graders and they kept having to add little wooden buildings over here.

BB: It looks like our campus today with those portables.

RR: A little bit, but then later we moved one or two of those down on the high school campus for the band hall. One of them became the band hall down on the high school campus. And we had high school band there for a while. When we first went down there we didn't have... what did we do for a band hall?

BB: I started to say, when did you start having band?

RR: We had band at this old campus here. We first started it here in 1950 I believe.

BB: Oh okay. So when you first came here, you didn't have a band?

RR: No, no band. We sure didn't. The first band that we had we had little blue jeans and red jackets that they made themselves, you know.

MRR: I imagine it started in '51 because here are some pictures of it.

RR: What?

MRR: Yes. No the second year it started.

RR: Who was that first band director? I can't think of that old man.

MRR: Harvey Matthews.

RR: Matthews, Mr. Matthews, old, old man. I say an old, old man. I guess he was in his sixties and he started our band. Directed our band that didn't have store bought uniforms, just homemade ones and if you would like to see a picture of them I have an annual that shows them.

BB: How far back do your annuals go?

MRR: As long as we have been here.

BB: So they were publishing an annual whenever you started here.

RR: Well the first hardback annual was published in '47 and '48. The first year I was here we had our first hardback. Before that we had...is this the first one?

MRR: No this is the first one.

BB: This is '51.

RR: Okay this is...

BB: Okay it was even called "Southern Pine." When did we become the "Lumberjacks?"

RR: Well it was the "Lumberjacks" when I came here. I don't know who gave them the name.

BB: Oh it was just...

RR: There was my football captains.

BB: Oh these are terrific. Could Megan come and look at these?

MRR: Yes.

BB: Because I don't think the high school has annuals this far back.

RR: Do you want me to mash this on pause for a minute?

BB: Okay say it again.

RR: Oh, about our Athletic Program. When I came here, Diboll was quite well known for its town's semi-pro baseball team. They played in the Houston Post Tournament one time and they... oh about the first year I was here I helped dig holes for the light poles. They lighted the old Miller Park down there... they put lights and we played night baseball there for a long time. Long before or before we had a lighted football stadium.

BB: Where is Miller Park?

RR: The place is the present, is between, the location would be between the, well, including the bank on over to the present high school. In that area there was located the old Miller Park. And it had a covered stadium. It would seat I would guess, somewhere around fifteen hundred people and it had a roof over it.

BB: You are kidding!

RR: And it was well, well maintained. Well built and one of the best baseball parks round in East Texas at that time. They went out big here. Diboll was an old baseball town. Had lot of interest in baseball and so we had some real fine baseball teams.

BB: Did they go in big for the Little League and that sort of thing?

RR: It was before Little League. Little League started in 19... around 1950 or '51. Mr. Pate and I got that started. When Little League baseball first originated we had, we went out there and built some Little League parks.

BB: Whereabouts?

RR: Would be where the old Miller Park was. We moved it two or three different times. Do you remember where any of them was? Of course, you know where the present complex is. It is real nice but at first we had one right along the highway about where the bank is now. We had a Little League park there. Then we moved it a little deeper where the football field is now. It was a nice Little League baseball park built there. Then we didn't have... but we had to rake and scrape to have four teams – enough boys to have four teams. Now you know a lot more.

BB: Yes. You know the park... when I first moved here the park that was over... well almost next to where you all live. Where the Temple office is now, was that park in existence when you came here?

RR: Yes, I guess it was. I can't recall.

BB: Yes, I am looking the wrong way.

RR: The old Scout House was located there.

BB: Right. Was that park? What was there?

RR: There wasn't anything there except the old Scout House.

BB: When you first came here, they were there.

RR: When we first came here there wasn't anything. There wasn't any tennis courts. You know later they built a tennis court. Let me tell you about that.

BB: Okay tell me about that.

RR: We didn't have a tennis court in Diboll. Don't many people know this, I don't think, but I kept wanting our high school kids to have a place to play tennis. We just didn't have a tennis court in Diboll. So I saved up ahead. Saved up about six or seven hundred dollars out of our school activity fund. So I proposed to Mr. Pate and the higher officials that I use part of that money to build us some tennis courts across the highway there where the present landing place for the helicopter.

BB: Oh, there, okay.

RR: Let's build us a tennis court in that little park over there and it will be available to high school kids as well as the town's people. Well, everybody was all for it. So I go see Mr. Arthur Temple. And he is a tennis fan at that time and he said "Oh yes, we need one, be get it going. You have my blessings." And I said, "Can we use that place over there across from me." And he called Horace Stubblefield in and he said, "You help him get this going." Horace Stubblefield said, "Yes, I think we can get the county graders to come down and grade us off and they won't charge us nothing." So you know what it resulted in.

BB: No.

RR: They took it over and built it themselves and I didn't have to spend my...

BB: You didn't have to spend your money.

RR: Didn't have to spend the activity or coke money on that tennis court. He got most of the labor donated by the county. Politics, I assume. They graded that up and when it was finally finished I got a roll of adding machine tape, you know, and I went to every room in the school and I had kids to sign their names to it thanking Arthur Temple for those tennis courts. And I carried it up there to him – a whole roll of signatures from kids all over the school.

BB: Oh how neat.

RR: Presented it to him and he was real impressed and he had Paul to make a picture of it. I don't know what ever happened to that picture, but he had a whole signature, a whole roll of typing, or rather adding machine paper.

BB: Paper.

RR: With signatures of from first grade on through high school.

BB: No, no, wait a minute. In thumbing through here I see exactly one Mexican-American family, the Guerrero's, during that time. Was that...?

RR: Pancho Alazano was a good high school athlete when I came here and there just wasn't very many here. The ones that were here were old settlers.

MRR: Martinez.

RR: Martinez was one of them.

BB: Martinez?

MRR: Malanders.

RR: Malanders, Malanders was another very familiar name.

BB: But as far as families, there were only just a few.

RR: Say three.

BB: Three. Okay, we have heard also there were Italians here way back then. Like in 1918 or so. Was there any, you know, separate Italian population here?

RR: I don't know of any Italians that we knew in school when we came. Most of the high school, and let me say this, when I was examining the school records in high school, I noted on all their permanent records cards born in Fastrill, born in Fastrill, born in Fastrill. I got so frustrated and I said "Mr. Pate, where in the world is Fastrill? All these kids were born in Fastrill." And he said "That was the logging camp up near Alto or somewhere."

BB: Yes.

RR: Weches, Texas.

BB: It was up there near Alto.

RR: They operated a big camp over there. Said they had a whole bunch of houses, streets, and what have you. I said they had a little town over there and when they finally broke the camp up and moved them all back here and they moved the houses back over

here where a lot of them live now in the Baptist church area. All that area in there. They moved a lot of those houses, since then they have changed a lot of them up. Added to, rebuilt them and all. But they had a whole neighborhood of those shantytown shacks over there they moved from Fastrill.

BB: They didn't look all that good?

RR: No they didn't. But it was real funny that all these kids were born in Fastrill, Texas.

BB: Oh me.

RR: We did have girl's basketball in the early '50's at Diboll High School. I don't recall how many years we had girl's basketball. We had it for two or three. They had problems winning any games and as a result no one ever come out to see them play and being such a poor school and all we didn't have money enough to pay the officials, you know. The officials would charge us something like twenty to twenty-five a game and our gate receipt would be something like maybe five dollars. So we had to dig into school funds to pay the officials and finally they just said if no one is interested that much in basketball, no way. And no one comes out to see them play. Bless their little hearts, they couldn't beat nobody. So we dropped it. They didn't seem to mind. The girls didn't seem to mind. They liked to play volleyball and other sports and we did try to have basketball. I think if we had started again when we integrated with the girls coming from the black school over here, we could have had some winning basketball teams and probably would have put up with...

BB: Well, I honestly wonder how they get away, get away with not having it now. You know, with the emphasis on equality in sports.

RR: Probably because no one has protested it too much since they carry on a good volleyball and track for girls down here, you know. They win pretty consistently in volleyball and also track. We had a state championship last year, didn't we?

BB: Yes.

RR: And they just.... I guess they like those sports even better. When they first integrated I heard some complaining on the part of our black girls for not having basketball because they did have it over at the old Temple School.

BB: Yes, Miss Wallace was one of the coaches, I think.

RR: They had some good teams, I am sure.

BB: Yes they did.

RR: Because they had some real tall girls. I am sure they were good athletes. They came over here with all the other frustrations and we didn't start basketball. We had...

BB: Had all you could handle.

RR: We had all that we felt like we could handle with the boys and we just let the sleeping dog sleep. On this table....

BB: Yes I started.....

END OF INTERVIEW