

ROBERT RAMSEY

Interview 49C

July 14, 2004 at his home in Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with former student Patsy Colbert, former Diboll High School Principal Robert Ramsey reminisces about his own school days, college at The College of Marshall and Stephen F. Austin State University, his teaching career at Blair and Mt. Herman, coming to Diboll, and the issues facing the district. He discusses starting the 11-man football team, building the football field, starting the band, the transition to independent school district, building the new high school, and integration. Mr. Ramsey recalls Willie Massey and Walter Pate as effective and important colleagues and talks about the support Arthur Temple, Jr. gave to the Diboll Schools.

Mrs. Rita Ramsey is present during this interview and adds to the interview periodically and daughter Nita Ramsey Hurley speaks at the end of the interview.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): My name is Patsy Colbert and I'm interviewing Mr. Robert Ramsey at his home in Diboll, Texas at 414 Carter Drive. Today's date is July 14, 2004. Mr. Ramsey, can you tell me when you graduated from high school? What year?

Robert Ramsey (hereafter RR): 1936.

PC: '36 ok. And concerning your college education did you begin college immediately after your high school graduation?

RR: Not immediately. I worked that summer following high school graduation. I worked on the highway department from Nacogdoches to...from Timpson to Nacogdoches, building that highway between Timpson and Nacogdoches.

PC: And then you started to college that next semester, fall semester?

RR: I worked and then went to college in Marshall, junior college.

PC: Ok. You mentioned in your previous interview getting a scholarship to East Texas Baptist College as a result of your being in the choral club. Did you attend that college?

RR: Yes.

PC: Ok. That was your first college to attend?

RR: Yes.

PC: Two years there?

RR: Yes, uh-huh.

PC: And then you also mention going to the College of Marshall and attending there for two years. Is that correct?

RR: That is the school right there.

PC: And do you remember the year that you went there, the years you attended?

Rita Ramsey: Well the College of Marshall was called East Texas Baptist then.

PC: Ok.

RR: It was College of Marshall then. It is East Texas Baptist now.

PC: So were these the same college that you were referring to in your interview.

RR: Yes.

PC: You went there...you were actually at the same school. So you were making reference to two different names but it is the same school.

RR: Same school.

PC: Ok. That is why I was confused about it then. That is good. And did you transfer to SFA after leaving the College of Marshall?

RR: I went to College of Marshall three years and graduated and came to Stephen F. Austin.

PC: Ok. And do you remember what years those were?

RR: Let's see.

PC: You graduated in '36 and you probably went to Marshall uh....

RR: Two years in '36 and '37, and '37 and '38. I came to Stephen F. Austin in the summer of '38.

PC: The summer of '38, ok. And you attended there for one year?

RR: I graduated. I went one year and I didn't have a choral scholarship there; I worked.

PC: You worked. Did you play sports there at SFA?

RR: No I didn't. I didn't play sports there.

PC: Did you play sports at the College of Marshall?

RR: Yes. I played basketball.

PC: Basketball. And uh...and then after your graduation from SFA, which you said you had 3 years of college between both colleges, you started teaching at Blair?

RR: Yes.

PC: And do you remember what year that was? If you graduated in '38 from SFA, did you start immediately after that?

RR: Yes I did.

Rita Ramsey: Yes

RR: '37

PC: So it was probably about '39 or '40.

RR: '39 is when I went to Blair.

PC: 1939 when you went to Blair. Ok good.

RR: Blair was a two teacher intermediate school.

PC: I read that, yeah. And you had the principal position there.

RR: Yes.

PC: Did you already have your administrator certificate at that time? To be principal?

RR: Yes.

PC: And you got that from SFA?

RR: Right.

PC: Ok. And after you're teaching at Blair you moved to Mt. Herman and you stayed there for 6 years. Is that correct?

RR: Yes.

PC: So I guess then the years at Mt. Herman would be...if you were at Blair in '39 and you stayed there two years, would be '39 and '40 at Blair?

RR: Came on down here....

PC: And then you went from Blair to Mt. Herman. And you were at Blair at the time that you married Mrs. Ramsey?

Rita Ramsey: Yes.

PC: You said in your interview ya'll got married in 1940.

Rita Ramsey: That is right.

PC: And you stayed at Blair another year.

RR: Yes.

PC: Which would have been '41? So do you think then you went to Mt. Herman in about 1942, or 1941?

RR: In '36 wasn't it? My first teaching job was at...

Rita Ramsey: We are talking about Mt. Herman though, Robert. Bobby was born in '42.

PC: And you were at Mt. Herman.

Rita Ramsey: And we were at Mt. Herman.

PC: And you stayed there until you came to Diboll in '47.

Rita Ramsey: That is right.

PC: And you were there...it said you stayed there 6 years so that would be from '41 to '47 probably. Does that sound correct?

Rita Ramsey: Yes.

PC: Ok. So you graduated in '36 and you went to the College of Marshall from '36 to '38 and then SFA uh, '38 to '39. And then you started teaching at Blair and from Blair to Mt. Herman and then to Diboll?

RR: Yes.

PC: Ok.

Rita Ramsey: Of course in the meantime at Mt. Herman he got his masters degree by going to school at SFA in the summer.

PC: Yes that was one of my questions. You stated that you came to Diboll in '47 and that you received your BS Degree in '47. So had you already received that before coming to Diboll?

RR: Uh...

PC: You're BS Degree?

Rita Ramsey: Yes. Yes he had...you saved your BS degree before you came to Diboll. But then after we moved to...down here you went to Nacogdoches.

RR: Got my masters degree.

PC: You traveled back and forth during the summer to get your masters?

RR: Yes, right.

PC: Ok. You stated that you received your masters in 1951 attending college during the summer. So you were teaching in Diboll and you were going back and forth to SFA during the summer and working on your masters?

RR: Right.

PC: And how long did it take you to get your masters? Like how many summers, do you remember? Did you attend every summer until you received it in '51? Or was it just like...

RR: I don't remember how many summers it took but I got my masters in '51.

PC: In '51, yes sir. I was just wondering if it was two or three summers or was it shorter then to get your masters than like it is now. That was the reason for my question. If you went one summer or two summers or...?

Rita Ramsey: Well I imagine he went more than one summer.

PC: More than one summer, ok. And when you came to Diboll in August of '47 was the school a twelve grade school system at that time?

RR: Diboll was twelve, yes.

PC: Twelve grades, ok. Some of the smaller schools you know at that time, they might have only had eleven grades sometime. So that was why I was asking that. I love the story that you tell about the eleven-man football, getting that started at Diboll. And I believe it was the 1948 season. You went into detail about that in your previous interview. Like I said I enjoyed the story of you telling about raising the money to get the

lighted football field and the community support as well as Mr. Temple. Was that correct?

RR: Yes. (laughing)

PC: And you were able to get help with constructing the new field and you got lights and you said the boys helped you build the fences and built seats. After you began playing that football did the school have a set budget to support the athletic program like they do today?

RR: They didn't have it then no.

PC: No money. So how were you able to maintain your...

RR: Through donations and people in Diboll that liked to play football, liked to support the program. They all liked football so I got it mostly through donations from individuals.

PC: Ok. You mentioned Dr. Dan Spivey was one of your donors.

RR: Yes.

PC: Did he support you several years there?

RR: Well he wasn't here but a couple of years and he moved on to the medical field in Lufkin I believe.

PC: Can you tell me anything about the football field that was built later in 1954 when they got the new field, which is now the old field, over by The History Center? That's not used today, but I read an article where they built that field in 1954. Do you remember any details about that?

RR: About building it?

PC: Was it funded by the school or was it a community project?

RR: Well mostly by a community project. You know this was a baseball town, Diboll.

PC: Right.

RR: And they...people didn't get enthused about football until later years.

PC: Until later. Yes, you know you talk about the Miller Park and what a nice park it was. But they didn't have the football field, which you created, when you first came for the eleven-man.

RR: Right.

PC: And you worked really hard on getting that field...

RR: Exactly.

PC: ...with the lights for the boys to play. But now Diboll is certainly a football town. So I think you played a part in getting that.

RR: Right. I feel like I had a lot to do with the way we got the program started.

PC: Yes sir, I do too. Do you remember if the funds from Diboll...1953 was the first Diboll Day, and it makes mention in an article about those funds being used on that field, the new football field in 1954. Do you recall anything of that nature of that being correct?

RR: Well I'm not following you now?

PC: Diboll Day began in 1953.

RR: Ok.

PC: And Louis read an article referring to the money that was raised in 1953 Diboll Day, that it was used to support the building of that new field in 1954. Do you recall anything of that nature?

RR: We got some donations from Mr. Temple.

Rita Ramsey: I guess Diboll Day funds did help to fund it.

PC: To fund it, ok. Do you remember when you stopped coaching and just took on being a full time principal? You coached for several years.

RR: Well let me...give me a little time on that, just how long I coached. My wife might be able to help me there. Do you know how long I coached?

PC: In your previous interview you mentioned about teaching and being principal and coaching and you put in long hours, you know.

RR: I sure did.

PC: And then we know at some point that you just became a full time principal and gave up the coaching and the teaching. And I was just wondering if you might remember?

RR: Yes, J. B. Carrington...Mr. Pate, I ask him if I could get someone. I had such a load I didn't feel like I could do it all and do a good job of it. He and I began to find someone to be head football coach. Now what year was that, I'm trying to think? I'm not sure. Do you know? J. B. Carrington came here as head football coach replacing me. And Bennis Franks was his assistance.

Rita Ramsey: I think he coached just about 3 years didn't he?

RR: Yes I coached 3 years and then J.B. Carrington took over. And he coached, how many years?

PC: So he took your place as coach and then you just...did you give up teaching at that same time?

RR: No I stayed on to teach.

PC: You stayed on as teacher and then was principal as well as a teacher for several years. Do you remember when you quite teaching and just became full time principal? Does that stand out in your mind?

RR: I never had that (laughing) privilege. I always had done both jobs.

PC: Oh you always did both.

RR: Yes.

PC: Ok. Ok. Can you share with me some of your proudest moments as a coach? Is there anything particular that stands out in your mind more than the eleven-man football I guess, getting that started? Is there anything else that you would consider a proud moment as a coach?

Rita Ramsey: I think probably Robert, when we beat Groveton with Bobby and Charles Havard. (laughing)

PC: (laughing) That was a highlight!

RR: (laughing) Well that was a very memorable night all right. We had played Groveton. They beat us pretty soundly the first year or two. I don't know what year that was, but we went over to play Groveton and Bobby and Charles Havard, was running our backfield. Bobby was a halfback and Charles Havard was his quarterback.

Rita: Well he was the quarterback.

RR: So that night we went over to Groveton. And Groveton had been beating everybody including us for two or three years. They was in football a long time and we had just started. So we weren't too well up on the profession of eleven-man football. But that year we went over there expecting, hoping to at least stay in the ball game. And Bobby and Charles Havard connected. Havard was a...I figure he played the end position that night, but anyway we started off real good. Bobby threw two touch down passes to him and before we knew it we had a fourteen to nothing lead. And before the half was over we had them down twenty-one to nothing. And we held onto that lead until the end of the

game. Not that much, it was twenty-seven to twenty I believe is where it ended up. But that was our first big victory when we beat Groveton.

PC: First big win!

RR: Yes.

PC: And what year was that?

Rita Ramsey: Robert that must have been the year that Bobby was a junior. Well Bobby and Charles were juniors. I don't think Charles was here his senior year.

PC: Ok.

RR: Do you know what year that was?

Rita Ramsey: Well Bobby graduated in '60.

PC: Ok. It would be 1959 then.

RR: Yes.

PC: '58-'59 school year. Ok. You saw many changes during your career as principal since you came in the late '40's and you retired in '74 I believe it was. And you also saw many improvements of the school system as well as the campuses and new programs. As I mention some of these can you give me some insight of any chain of events that you might remember or when new curriculum was added to the system? For instance the band began in the 1949-1950 school year. Whose idea was that to begin a high school band?

RR: Me! (laughing)

PC: You. And what was the reason for that. Did other schools in the area have a band?

RR: Every football team needs a band. I felt like every school that had a football team always had a band. That is why I felt like we just had to have a band.

PC: Was Diboll the only school in the area that did not have a band? Did the other schools have a band?

RR: As best I remember they did, all the schools that we played.

PC: Did you have a budget for this? Or how were you able to fund?

RR: We had a lot of donations from Diboll people.

PC: Donations again, huh? Well Diboll has always been a giving community that is for sure.

RR: Right.

PC: Diboll became an independent school in the fall of '52. This enabled the school board and the superintendent to have full authority of operating the school. Is that correct?

RR: Yes.

PC: And can you tell me how things changed on the administrative level. Was it different answering to the school board and to the superintendent as the difference in answering to the county superintendent?

RR: Before then it was a county operated school. Because it had a county school superintendent and he was in charge of all the schools that weren't independent. Diboll wasn't independent at that time. So we operated under their authority. This one we went independent, I used to know the year we went independent.

PC: 1952.

RR: '52.

PC: Yes sir. I also noticed that the school board members became a seven-member team instead of just three. Was that better for the school system?

RR: Well I think so.

PC: Did the superintendent just answer to the state then?

RR: He had to answer to the school board too.

PC: And to the school board. Did this change enable the school system to receive monies from the state to help support programs or extracurricular things? Did the change bring forth more monies from the state?

RR: I don't recall getting any more money from the state. I know we was short on the funds for a long long time. Mr. Pate had a bad time getting enough money to operate his school system. We were short on funds to buy school equipment, football equipment, basketball equipment. He was short handed on all those things.

PC: All that. So it was a struggle for you and him to keep things going.

RR: It sure was. Went by in (unintelligible) of us. Didn't think that was very fun.

PC: So would you agree that he...do you think that he handled the school money very well in making it stretch to the maximum capacity that he could, as far as Mr. Pate?

RR: I know he did. Mr. Pate did very well with the amount of money he had to operate on. He did a great job.

PC: Good. So most of the school money came from the tax base?

RR: Yes it did.

PC: And was this the means in which the company, Southern Pine Lumber Company, supported the school or did they support it other than just tax base money?

RR: Yes. Well Mr. Pate went to Arthur Temple several times for funds for various reasons. And he was very generous with it. Mr. Pate got a lot of money out of Arthur Temple to operate our school.

PC: And that was above the normal tax money they were required to pay.

RR: Yes it was.

PC: Well good.

RR: He would run short on funds for various projects and he would go to Mr. Temple and Mr. Temple would give it to him for what he needed.

PC: Somehow that is what I figured had happened because he has always been very generous. The new high schools were built in 1953. You got the new campus for the high school white students and then the new school was built for the black students as well, the H.G. Temple School.

RR: Well it wasn't built for whites; they was already built. We just separated the students. The blacks went over there that was their neighborhood.

PC: Well you know previously before that, all the high school and all was on the one campus.

RR: Yes.

PC: And then in '53 they built the new school, which is now down here, the Junior High. And in your previous interview you tell about how ya'll needed to separate the high school kids from the elementary kids. And at the time that they built the new high school they didn't build a cafeteria and you had to get the students back across the street to the cafeteria.

Rita Ramsey: Oh yeah.

RR: Right.

PC: So they built a new campus for high school.

RR: Right.

PC: Did this improvement bring on the need to hire more teachers when you separated the two campuses?

RR: Well I don't think we were allowed any more teachers. The number of teachers we were allowed was based on what the enrollment was.

PC: On enrollment...so your enrollment figure is how you were able to justify hiring new teachers.

RR: Hiring teachers, yes ma'am.

PC: Ok. And did you add more subjects to the curriculum when you got the new campus just for the high school students?

RR: Just when we added...I can't remember any details.

PC: Were you involved with the building project when the new high school campus was built and the H.G. Temple School was built? Were you involved in those building projects?

RR: Well Mr. Pate handled all the contracts.

PC: You don't remember anything about the...that you want to add as far as the building project. I'm sure you were excited to have your own campus for the high school.

RR: Yes.

PC: Did someone take over as principal of the elementary campus when they separated the two campuses?

RR: Yes I think we had someone....

Rita Ramsey: Well Bea Burkhalter I guess. Wasn't it Mrs. Burkhalter?

PC: Yeah I think you are correct.

RR: Bea was elementary principal.

PC: Ok.

RR: She remained over there.

Rita Ramsey: A long time.

RR: And Jerry Gartman I believe was the start of Junior High Principal.

PC: Ok. And several years later then they added the cafeteria to your campus. I guess that was a big relief to not have to chase the kids down and get them back to the campus by a certain time. I'm sure that was quite a nightmare.

RR: Yes, crossing that highway with those kids. (laughing)

PC: Now, I found an article, actually it was in the annual, where Elsie Martin wrote the fight song in 1953.

RR: She did. She did.

PC: Was that a contest or did she just come up with that on her own?

RR: We just came up with that on our own.

PC: And it stills stands today. Well that is something for her to be proud of.

RR: Yes.

PC: Mrs. Poland, she was over the student council program, which began in 1954. Can you share anything with me about that program starting?

RR: Mrs. Poland?

PC: Mrs. Ruth Poland. It says she was over the student council program and that program began in 1954. Was that something that other schools had and was that ...I was just wondering if you remember anything about how that got started?

Rita Ramsey: He probably doesn't.

PC: That is fine. In your previous interview you talked about integration. And you stated that it was mandated by the government and that you recalled a board meeting where two guys from Washington, D.C. came. Do you remember who they were? Did they represent the state or the courts or...? Can you tell me who those guys were with?

RR: They were in charge of integrating the white schools to black...to an integrated school.

PC: An integrated school. Do you remember any specifics about the mandate?

RR: Well let me see. Wait a minute. What we had to do?

PC: The integrate....that ya'll were mandated to integrate when they attended that board meeting that you spoke of preciously. I was just wondering if you remembered any specifics about that board meeting or if you remembered any specifics about what they were mandating for the integration.

Rita Ramsey: That was too long ago. (laughing)

PC: Too long ago. Well it was quite a transition you know for Diboll and campuses. And I know that was a big responsibility for you to shoulder as principal to over see that. And you talk about it going pretty smoothly but you had a few bumps to cross over. But for the most part the transition went well you would say?

RR: Pretty well mainly. Of course we had conflicts between the whites and the black kids. They didn't get along well at first. They couldn't get used to being with each other. We had some problems between the whites and blacks. But it wasn't all that serious, we lived through it.

PC: Right. And Mr. Foster was superintendent at that time when the schools became fully integrated in 1968.

RR: Right.

PC: And they had Freedom of Choice in 1965. Do you recall very many students choosing from the black school to attend the white school before it was mandated to be integrated?

RR: We had quite a few who came from over there to here.

PC: You did.

RR: The first year.

PC: And you had some boys, I read, who came over to play football. And Coach Simmons was really excited because they started having a winning streak. But at that time you just had 4 or 5 senior boys to come over?

RR: Senior black boys that was real good athletes.

PC: Was that the most of the black students that attended that year before the full integration? You just had those 5 students to come over?

RR: Well we had more than 5.

Rita Ramsey: I think we had some good girls. I can't remember right now.

PC: Oh ok. Good.

RR: Some of the girls...(laughing).

PC: Now at the time of... when the schools were fully integrated, in your previous interview you mention that only two black teachers came over to the high school.

RR: Yes.

PC: Were all the black teachers offered a new position and they turned it down or did they move to other campuses or what was that situation?

RR: Well they wanted to stay over there. They wanted to teach over there.

PC: They stayed at the black school.

RR: Yes.

PC: Ok. So you only had two to come over and one of those was Mr. Massey?

RR: Right.

PC: Ok. Can you tell me a little bit about Mr. Massey?

RR: Mr. Massey was a good help in integrating our kids I thought. He helped me control the whites and the blacks and their conflicts with each other. We had quite a few of them but he and I would work it out.

PC: Good. Now I know he declined the assistant principal position that first year and taught math I believe. And then later on the second year then took the assistant principal position. So would you say you had a good working relationship with him?

RR: Yes.

PC: Good. And did he have a big impact on the black students?

RR: Well I think so. I think so.

PC: Sounds to me like he must have had a good relationship with them and he was able to help them in the transition.

RR: He talked to them quite often and got their (unintelligible) at school and what they had to do to maintain the relationship with the whites. We worked together on that a lot.

PC: Good. You know I could just imagine that was a real time of fear for them.

RR: Oh yes.

PC: They weren't in their, you know, security...normal setting and so it took good role models to help them make that transition.

RR: One thing that bothered me and him too was these blacks had big old combs. Do you remember them?

PC: Oh yes sir, (laughing) in the '70's.

RR: They would put in their hair and they were weapons. And they were used as weapons on some occasions.

PC: They looked like rakes instead of combs.

RR: Yes.

PC: Yes sir I sure do.

RR: That was a problem for us.

PC: We have had several inquiries about the whereabouts of the H.G. Temple trophies, some of the Temple Tigers trophies. Do you have any recollection of what happened to those trophies when the school, when they fully integrated?

RR: I believe one of those coaches went to Lufkin.

Rita Ramsey: What, trophies?

PC: The trophies, some of the trophies that they won. You think some of the coaches took them with them?

RR: Went to Lufkin, yes.

PC: Ok. In looking back what do you consider your greatest accomplishment while serving Diboll Independent School District?

RR: Whew.....it would be hard to say, pick one thing.

PC: You had a lot of them didn't you? When you first came to Diboll you rented your home from the company, is that correct?

Rita Ramsey: That is right.

RR: Rented what?

PC: You rented one of the company houses?

RR: Yes.

PC: And did you purchase that home from the company when they began selling the homes.

Rita Ramsey: No.

PC: No. Can you share any memories of shopping at the commissary store?

RR: Yes. We shopped there didn't we?

Rita Ramsey: Oh yes.

RR: It was right down the street from where we lived.

PC: It is quite different than the way we shop today isn't it?

Rita Ramsey: That is right.

PC: Do you remember going into the meat market and the post office and...?

RR: Oh yes.

PC: Do you remember some of the people that worked there?

Rita Ramsey: Didn't Dorothy Farley's daddy, Mr. Farley, work up...didn't he work there?

RR: Who?

Rita Ramsey: Mr. Farley, Dorothy's daddy. Didn't he work at the commissary?

PC: Yes he did.

RR: Yes he did.

Rita Ramsey: And Mr. Hines, who was the...

RR: Glen Hines.

Rita Ramsey: And who was that lady that was the postmistress?

RR: I can just see her but I can't call her name.

Nita Ramsey Hurley: Weeks, now you're talking about more recent right? Weeks.

Rita Ramsey: A long back years ago.

PC: At the commissary store, way back.

Rita Ramsey: Years and years and years ago.

RR: You were young then, maybe you can remember back then.

Nita: Sure (laughing) sorry Daddy.

PC: When you helped develop the little league program in Diboll, did the community support that financially?

RR: Sure did.

PC: Just donations again?

RR: Well we were very happy over that. Mr. Pate and I both went together on that.

PC: Good. Do you think some of the Diboll Day fund raising money supported that in the early days when you started that program?

RR: The main support came from Mr. Temple.

PC: Mr. Temple, again Mr. Temple. (laughing)

RR: Yes.

PC: That is good.

RR: Oh he was a big backer of the little league program we had.

PC: Ok. Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't asked you about?

RR: Well Patsy, I wish I could tell you a lot of things, I just can't remember. (laughing)

PC: That is ok. I just want to thank you for being a good role model to me 'cause you've always been a real special person to me and I always enjoyed seeing you at school and I'm honored that you still call me "one of your kids" so. And I'd like to thank you for sharing with me today and I'd like to thank you Mrs. Ramsey for joining in with us today on this interview.

END OF INTERVIEW