

Oneta Hendrick
Interview 68a
July 12, 1985
Sue Baker, Interviewer
Dorothy Farley, Transcriber
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: Oneta Hendrick describes the realities of farm life from 1922 onward. She talks about her childhood in Burke, TX, later moving to Lufkin, TX, and eventually to Diboll, TX in 1942. Oneta recalls a loaf of bread at 10 cents, waking at 5:30am for chores, and working at Temple White in the handle factory office. She also comments on school life, going to shows, and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp). Persons mentioned include Tennie Havard and Clyde Thompson.

Interview with Oneta Conner Hendrick held at her home on July 12, 1985.

Oneta Hendrick (hereafter OH): My name is Oneta Conner Hendrick. I was born March 29, 1922 at Burke, Texas.

Sue Baker (hereafter SB): Tell me the earliest thing you remember about Burke.

OH: Well, I guess it would be my schooling. I remember the first day I went to school (Sept. 1927). There was 13-month difference between my older brother and myself. Of course, there were 5 of us, 1 older brother and 3 younger brothers. My mother left the 3 smaller ones with my grandmother. She took me to school with my older brother his first day. She was trying to get him situated, not really paying any attention to me. The teacher told me to go sit down, so I went and sat down. They started issuing the books and they gave me books just like they did the other students. When it was time to go home, we gathered our books up and started out the door. At the door, Momma noticed that I had books. She turned around and carried me back and told the teacher that I was not supposed to be starting school, "I just brought her along." The teacher started to take the books away. I can remember just as well, I hugged them real tight and said "no, they are my books." I just threw a little fit. So finally the teacher said, "Well just let her take them home and come to school in the morning. She'll come a day or two and get tired of it, and that will be the end of it." But I never did get tired of it, I just kept going, so I started school when I was five years old.

SB: Did your Mom not notice that you were gone, or did she leave you there on purpose that day?

OH: Well, she just noticed that I was sitting down and wasn't running off so, she was mainly paying attention to my brother, trying to get him registered in school. Of course, back in those days you didn't have to be six or seven. They really didn't have a state law

but they would say you had to be six. They didn't enforce it, so I started at five. I finished when I was just barely sixteen. I was sixteen on March 29 and finished in May.

SB: Did they have twelve grades then or just eleven?

OH: They had twelve, no eleven. We had a primer, then first through eleven. I made the primer and the first grade the first year. Made the two grades. Back in those days there were at least two grades in every room and sometimes three. The teacher taught all grades. She would teach this one arithmetic while these studied, then she'd move to this class and teach maybe third grade arithmetic while the others studied. And really if you paid attention to what the teacher said you could learn three grades in one year. I guess that is what I did because I always excelled in school. I finished two years before my brother did, by the way. He didn't care. School was lots of fun. We had all kinds of activities. We had recess, where you go out on campus, just like you do here. Of course, we didn't have a gym. If it was bad we had to stay inside and play. We had all kinds of balls. I was a good ball player; I played first base on the softball team. I was a good volleyball player. I never did play basketball.

SB: Was your social life centered around the school?

OH: Mainly, the school and the church. Burke did not have a theatre. Burke had about three grocery stores, and by the way, we did have a doctor and a drugstore. The doctor's daughter was my best friend. When he died, we never had another doctor come; he was the doctor and had the drugstore too. We had a post office, we had a general merchandise store (where you could buy overalls, some shoes and socks, and things like that), we had three grocery store/filling station (as we called them then) combinations. They sold gas at the front and groceries inside. Back in those days, the people lived in the back of the store. They stayed open from –all hours, seven days a week, so they could make a living. Most Saturdays we went to Lufkin to shop. We spent the day. We went in a T-Model Ford or an A-Model. I can't remember when Daddy never had a car. Although the roads did get impassable sometimes, and he would come after us at school in the wagon and the team. The roads were impassable for cars. They would take turns, the daddies would come in the wagons and all of us kiddos would get in and one wagon would hold us all.

SB: Kinda like carpooling?

OH: Yes.

SB: Was your daddy a farmer? Was that his main job?

OH: Yes, and we all worked hard. He owned his farm and his house, about 40 acres. Of course, that is not a big farm but it was big to work. We had something growing all the time and we grew most of our food. We grew (or rather raised our) cows and our pigs, you know put our meat away.

SB: How did you put it away, did you have refrigerators then?

OH: No, canned it. If you killed some beef, you canned it. You had pressure cookers and canned it. The meat you get in store now days, is bound to be pressured, like salmon. Now of course, the pigs that we killed we made the sausages and stuffed them and smoked them. We had what we called the smoke house. They would hang the hams, the shoulders, and the sausages and smoke them. They would put some kind of curing salt on it and smoke it and it would keep after it was smoked.

SB: Did your mom make the sausage or did several families get together to make it?

OH: No, we made our own. We grew cane and made our syrup. We grew all kinds of vegetables, and canned those. We picked a lot of berries and canned those. We had peaches and pears. We even made our own cornmeal from corn we grew. Now, we did buy flour. My mother made our shortening from the lard, she fried the fat of the pig and it was called lard, not shortening. She would put this down in buckets, then we would use that to cook with.

SB: Did you have any place like a cellar or a place dug out in the ground to keep things cool?

OH: No, we had the smokehouse, where they smoked the meat. Then we had a portion of it that had shelves where we kept all the canned goods. We always had PLENTY to eat. Of course, we grew our chickens, we always had eggs, we had the cows and had milk, butter and cream. You just lived at home more or less. You bought flour, sugar, salt and baking powders, stuff like that. But you mainly grew. My mother even made peanut butter. We would pick the peanuts, shell them, parch them, and she would grind them. She had a grinder for this. Used oil and stuff and this is what we carried in our lunch. She even made our bread, sliced it and this is what we carried in our lunches. Peanut butter sandwiches and they were good.

SB: Did you get jelly or jam with them?

OH: Yes, both. We always had jellies and jams. I think it (doing it all for yourselves) makes a difference in our life later. Of course, I am sure we were considered average people. Nobody had a whole lot, but we owned our home, and owned our farm, and we always had a car, and always plenty to eat. We never had any money to spend, because there wasn't any money.

SB: Your mother didn't make the cloth or anything like that?

OH: No, but she made all of our clothes. She made my dresses that I wore to school. She even made my prom dresses or anything that I had to have in school, the long dresses. She made my brothers' shirts. My mother was a good seamstress.

SB: Did she make jeans?

OH: No, she didn't make jeans. Back in those days, most of them wore overalls. Jeans came in later. But, she even made my daddy's shirts. How mother did it, I'll never know. And my mother is still living. She had five children and she took care of us too. We all worked hard and Daddy always saw that we went to school. We did not stay out of school to do farm work. Although some mornings, we, well, all mornings we would have to get up and do our chores and catch the bus at 6:30. Our old home place is where the airport (Angelina County) is now. That is were I grew up. My daddy sold the farm to the airport and he bought the land next to the airport. But we lived off the main road about ½ mile, and we had to walk from our house on what we called the lane to the main road to catch the bus. As the bus went up, if we hurried we had time to get up there before it came back. That's the way we usually operated because we had chores to do then. Lots of afternoons we would come in and put a cotton sack on and pick two rows, one down and one back. I have even done that in the morning before I went to school.

SB: Tell me what went on during the day at school.

OH: I don't remember a whole lot about the younger days in schools. Except, my first teacher was Miss Gladys and she is still living and lives at Burke. She could really tell you a lot about Burke. She was single and I can remember when she got married how the children teased her. Of course, she got married and left Burke, going down to around Beaumont. I had Mrs. Tennie Havard, she is Clyde Thompson's sister. Mr. John Copeland and Emmett Sanford taught me, and they both still live at Burke. That's about all that I remember that are still living. I had other teachers, but there was not a discipline problem in school. The teacher had the upper hand, especially in the lower grades. At one time, Burke had a high school. I can't remember the years, I don't know what year they started sending to Lufkin and just have the elementary school at Burke. It was during my schooling there. Because we used to go in a two-story school, then they tore that down and built the school building that is there now. It is where the Senior Nutrition lunch program is now. We had wood heaters and they boys had to bring the wood in and keep the fires going. The teachers were responsible. We had to keep the campuses clean. There were no janitors. The children had to do it. We had to keep the campuses clean. We would all have like a work period and all go out and collect paper and take weed cutters and cut the weeds. We didn't have lawn mowers. But we had to keep the campuses clean. That was a rule and they were kept clean. We had the outdoor privies. Because there were not bathrooms, no plumbing. But, we did have electricity. We had lights. We had big blackboards. The whole wall was a blackboard. The classes were small, at Burke. I'd say eight or ten in each class, but like I said a teacher taught two or three grades. She still had a good many pupils.

SB: When did you get married?

OH: I got married in January of 1941, January 25. We were married in January then Pearl Harbor was December 7th of that year. The wedding was held in the parsonage at the Diboll Methodist Church. I didn't have a big church wedding, we just were married in the parsonage. I wore a suit. I was eighteen. When I finished school [High] at sixteen, I went to Satterwhite's Commercial College, which was the business school in Lufkin. By

the way, my daddy sold a pig to pay my tuition and then (sold some pigs, I'm sure he had to sell more than one) he had to pay \$100 and I had to agree to pay \$100 after I went to work. The course was \$200. It was a two-year course but I finished it in a little over a year. I lived at home and rode the bus. The school bus carried the children to the high school (in Lufkin) and then it went on out to Keltys to pick up the Keltys students and brought them in. It did a double duty I guess you'd say. It had to pass right by the business school so all of us that took a business course got to ride the bus. Of course, my daddy was one of the trustees and that might have helped. They told me I could not get a job because I wasn't eighteen years old. But, I got out and started looking for a job and it just so happened that my old school superintendent at Lufkin High School hired me for his secretary. So I did get a job. For the interview I just wore a good dress, hose and shoes, no gloves. In those days we did wear hats and gloves to church and places like that. That has been a long time ago.

SB: I like the more informal dress that we have today.

OH: Me, too.

SB: Had you known Dick all of our life?

OH: No, he's from Alto, grew up in Alto. His brother came down here and got a job with Temple. Dick couldn't get a job, so he went in the 3 C's [Civilian Conservation Corps] when he got out of high school. And went to Arizona and New Mexico and I think he stayed maybe three years, I'm not real sure. When he came back, there were still no jobs except farming. His brother told him to come down to Diboll, he thought he could get him on, so he did come down here and got on at the mill. He worked as a planer. I met him here, a friend of mine was dating a Diboll boy so they fixed us a blind date. Dick was the boy's friend; they worked together. She and I were friends. Dick is a little over five years older than I am, five years and about three or four months. Dick was supply sergeant in CCC camp, he worked and issued stuff out of the supply room, he loved it too. [Sue had mentioned her father was in CCC in New Mexico also] There was nothing to do. When Dick and I got married we lived in Lufkin. I was working in Lufkin, Dick did not have a car. The man he worked for lived in Lufkin not far from us. So Dick rode back and forth and I walked to work. Then we moved to Diboll when I got pregnant later. We moved in 1942 in April and Don was born in July. We lived over on Hamner in a little old house. It is still there.

SB: Do you remember how much you had to pay for it?

OH: Oh, not very much I'm sure. Maybe \$8 or \$9 a month. When we moved in this one we paid \$12 a month. We bought this house from Temple later on, after renting for a long time. When we moved here no one owned a house, everybody rented, then Temple sold and we bought this one. We paid \$2400.00 for house and lot and we have about ½ acre.

SB: You have added on to your house. Describe it originally.

OH: It was four rooms, a living room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms and 1 bath. This, from about where this lamp is out (about 6 feet) was a front porch, an open porch and the living room was just this size left (about 10 feet by 15 feet). This was the kitchen, and behind that was the back porch there. Of course, we have built the dining room on, and the utility room with carport. In fact, we have just about gone all the way around it. We had the front bedroom and a bath between the other bedroom. We have added another bedroom (off the back one) and a bath and a huge walk-in closet. Then we took that bedroom and extended it and made a big den. I have a big sewing room at the end of the dining room.

SB: Do you think that you have at least doubled the size of your house?

OH: Yes, I am sure that we have doubled the size of it. We only lived over on Hamner for a few months. This house came vacant, and Dick's brother lives next door and he found out about it so we got it. We were living here when both my children were born. We have two children, Don and Gary. Gary lives out in the country, in what they call Beulah or what is called Prairie Grove.

SB: Did you work while you were carrying your children?

OH: Yes.

SB: Do you think you would have worked if we had not been in World War II?

OH: I went to work because we felt sure...when we moved down here from Lufkin I quit, and I was pregnant. I did not go back to work then until after Don was born. We were in the war and we felt...Dick has his papers for his physical...so I had an opportunity to go to work. We decided it would be best if I worked, while he was gone, to maintain the home. You didn't get much money, about \$30.00 a month or something like that. You couldn't pay house rent and utilities although they were small and live though. He never did pass the physical so he never did go to the service.

SB: Who watched the children while you worked?

OH: When I first started it was my sister-in-law next door kept them but then I had a neighbor over here keep them. I always had somebody; I was not one that left mine at home.

SB: You didn't ask your mother to baby-sit?

OH: No, my mother always lived at Burke and always lived on the farm and worked hard. They farmed after I was married; they were still farming. They eventually just really quit farming, but they raised cows and grew hay, and things like this. Mother still has her farm, she still has...well, she had 102 acres but she sold ten acres to the airport about two years ago. They are going to build a road from Hwy. 59 straight in. It will come right to the back of her house, right back of her place. But she still leases her place and she lives there. I wanted to tell you some more. You said you wanted to tell your

boys about working. We had to get up at about 5:30 and as I said do our chores before we went to school. But in the summer, we had to work all day HARD. We cut wood. My daddy made ties [railroad] and sold them in the summer. He carried us to help saw and peel the ties.

SB: Did you do that on your own place? You must have had a lot of equipment.

OH: Yes, we did it on our place. You do a lot of it by hand, I mean you had equipment like axe and saws. But nothing electric. It was hard work...nothing power. We used to cut wood and sell it to make extra money. Everybody had to have what we called stove wood, for the cook stove and then fireplace wood for the fireplace. During the berry, when berries were ripe my mother would take us five children and we'd go into the woods and pick berries by the washtubs full. People would come buy them for 10 cents a gallon...10 cents a gallon. We would stay in the woods all day, if we made a dollar or two that was pretty good. Back in those days it would buy a lot. Like a loaf of bread would cost 10 cents, bacon was 19 cents a pound. Everything was in accordance of what you made. I had the four brothers and I had to work just like they did. When they went to the field, we pulled peanuts and chocked them in chocks. I had to go right along just like one of the boys. We would gather our corn, we would take the team and wagon and everybody would get rows and break the corn off and pitch it into the wagon, then put it in the crib. I worked just like the boys.

SB: Did you have to work extra in the house?

OH: Well, as I said my mother worked like we did. We all went to the field and worked. When we went home, now momma and I went in the house to work and they (the boys) went to the barn to milk and feed the animals, gather the eggs, and bring in the wood. We still all had chores to do. I made my boys, as I have said we had to do this, keep their bedroom and their bath...and it had to be clean before we went to school. Lots of mornings they say oh, I'm going to be late and I'd say that's just tough luck. You know what you have to do and you have to do it before you go to school. When they got their work done, we went to school. They soon learned that they had to do it before they went to school.

SB: How did you discipline your children? Did you have any problems with them?

OH: Sure, don't all parents? Parents had better control of their children because there were very few cars, no drugs, very little money to buy alcohol and go to shows and so forth. We made our own entertainment. When my boys were growing up they did have the show. My boys were not allowed to go to the show during the week, Monday through Friday, unless it was something special. It had to be something special because we made them stay home during the week. I gave them an allowance and they had to make it go. If they wanted to go to the show they had to save their money. If they poofed it off at school, they didn't get to go to the show.

SB: What could they have spent it on at school?

OH: Oh, they had candy machines and coke machines. They had a little candy store, a little place that sold candy at first before they put the machines in. But they have always had it. It's bad for the children, some of them won't eat breakfast and their parents give them money. That is their breakfast and then they don't want lunch. My boys were average boys, I would say, they were good boys. There is five years difference between them, both of their birthdays are in July and a week apart. There lacks one week being five years difference, and they were never really close. Probably on account of that, but Don was born premature and he was always slow, very slow. He was born in July, and as I say being premature, I should have kept him out a year. He struggled or we struggled until he was in about the 8th or 9th grade. Then he finally caught up with his age group. He never failed but we worked awfully hard. He has a hearing problem that he was born with. He reads lips and if he's not looking at you he won't hear you. He definitely reads lips, which is how he got through school. I never had any problem with him sitting on the front seat in school, so that made him a better student. Because if he got in the back he couldn't hear and he couldn't see the teacher's lips. He weighed about 3 ½ pounds when he was born. They told us before he was born that he would not live. But he lived. They didn't think that he would live. He was born in July and we had to burn a heater to keep him warm. Of course, they kept him in the incubator. They let me bring him home when he was like 4 ½ pounds, about three weeks. I had to stay, I stayed till he came home. A woman did not get up the next day like she does now. Gary was, well both of my boys were fairly smart, they were both in the National Honor Society, by the way I was too. I always made good grades and excelled in school. I loved school. Both of them went on and finished college. Don went to Sam Houston and Gary went to Tyler Junior College, then SFA, then University of Houston Pharmacy School. He and Ken Reese have the Timberland Discount Pharmacy.

SB: Where did you work in Diboll once you had Don?

OH: My first job, at Temple White, the handle factory office. I worked from when Don was about two I believe, when we thought Dick was going into the service. I worked about two years, and then I decided I wanted another child and I quit work. Then we had Gary, I did not go back to work then until he was five years old. I went to work extra for Clyde Thompson, in the Timber and Land Department. It was just an extra job, I really had not planned on going back to work until Gary got in school. But Mr. Thompson wanted me to work six weeks and I told him that I would. Then before that six weeks up, that was when they moved the Texarkana office to Diboll. They moved one of the secretary's from here to Texarkana to close out over there. They wanted me to work in her place so I went to work until she could get back. Then before she got back, Mr. Temple called me in and asked if I'd be interested in working for Temple-Associates as bookkeeper. I went to work for TA as their bookkeeper; I worked for about 6 ½ or 7 years for Temple-Associates. I went back to Temple-White and worked twenty-three years. I had thirty years service, full time service. I worked for two or three places in Lufkin before I came to Diboll. I started out with Perry Pontiac Company, which was the Pontiac dealer. He went out of business. One of the salesmen over to the Oldsmobile place, he got me a job over there. Then, they went out of business. We were in the building with Squires Truck and Implement, so I moved over with Squires Truck and

Implement. They went out of business because of slow sales, really no business. Then I quit Squires Truck and Implement because it was just too much, I couldn't do it. It was more than I could do. I went to work for W.H. Johnson Frigadaire and worked there until I moved to Diboll.

SB: Did you like working?

OH: Oh, I loved working. I wasn't happy staying at home. I wanted to work. I guess that I had problems with my boys more than I would have. I was lucky with my boys I always had someone to see after them. I never left them alone. They were not the rowdy type boys. We were fortunate that they were never mixed up with the law or never came home drunk or any of these things that a lot of parents had to put up with I'm sure.

SB: You are Methodist, you were married here in the parsonage, have you been Methodist all of your adult life?

OH: Yes, I joined the Methodist Church at Burke though. Then I transferred down here. Dick was Baptist though.

SB: I'm sure that you must have been very good at your job. If you liked school and if you excelled so well, usually that type person will do better in a job. Also wanting to work would make you better at it.

OH: Gary's wife is a teacher and has taught several years. Right now she is, they have three adopted children and they have one that is not in school. She is four. They all go to Angelina Christian School. The oldest little boy has learning disabilities. He wants the little girl to go with him, so they are both up there now. Martha plans to send the least one to four-year-old Kindergarten this year. She plans to go back to teaching there. She knows that she can get it [a job]. Whether she teaches this year or not she is going to help out with the math there. The oldest one has problems with math; she is going to volunteer to help with his math group.

SB: Have you been called on a lot to baby-sit your grandchildren?

OH: Yes and no, Sandy got her education after she and Don were married. In fact, she only had nine or twelve hours. Her mother and daddy separated and she couldn't go back to school, then she and Don got married. Don went one year after they were married. They both worked and Don sold the car and bought an older model and sent Sandy to beauty school with the difference. She was just working at Perry Brothers and he was working in a drug store making hamburgers and things like that over at Huntsville. She got her beauty license and went to work in a shop over there. When he graduated he went to work for the prison system, while he was in college he worked for them too. They moved back to Diboll when Don got a job here. She started out as a teacher's aide and she made up her mind if she was going to do the teacher's work she might as well get paid for it. She went that way for several years, then she finally quit. During her schooling I kept Laurel at night for her to study and on week-ends. I sometimes kept her

all night but not when I was working...not during the week. Sandy had a busy time. Of course, she just had the one but she was like two to five or six during Sandy's schooling. I did a lot of babysitting then. I don't do much anymore now. Martha has not worked. She worked after they got the first little boy. After they got the second one from Buckner Orphanage, they requested that she stay home with them. It was the same way with the last one. Back when they got their children you couldn't hardly get them, the rules were so strict. She has not worked since they got the children. They wanted an infant and waited a long time. They put their name on the Edna Gladney list and put up a big deposit and waited like two years and they sent them their deposit back. They got the oldest little boy from the State Welfare Department, the second one from Buckner, and the third one from Charity something in Houston.

SB: Do you feel any different about the adopted ones?

OH: No, we all just love them to death. The least one probably does not realize that he is adopted but the two older ones know. Martha has always told them that she picked them out above ALL the other children. She makes the little story so sweet to them. They couldn't have any so this is the way they got them. Martha's sister has a little adopted boy.

THE END OF INTERVIEW.