

**Rivie Vansau**  
**Interview 091a**  
**February 20, 1986**  
**Marie Davis, Interviewer**  
**Dorothy Farley, Transcriber**  
**Retyped by Elaine Lawrence**

**Abstract:** In this interview with Marie Davis and Vivian Warner, longtime teacher Rivie Vansau reminisces about growing up in Emporia, Diboll, Camp #2, Walkerton, and Bald Hill. After she graduated, Ms. Vansau taught school for 42 years all around East Texas, including Diboll, Lufkin, New London, Iola, Zavalla, and Channelview, to name a few places. She discusses life in a lumber camp and going to school in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Marie Davis (hereafter MD):** Today we are talking with Miss Rivie Vansau. She lives at Route 2, Box 3610, Lufkin, Texas, which is in the Bald Hill Community. Today's Date is February 20, 1986. My name is Marie Davis and with me is Vivian Warner. Miss Vansau, when were you born?

**Rivie Vansau (hereafter RV):** I was born in August of 1902, and so far as I know, I was born in Emporia. There was a big family of us and I was the next to the youngest of a family of nine.

**MD:** Would you like to name your brothers and sisters?

**RV:** The oldest of the family was Lorena. She married Dee Scarborough and had nine children. Ettie was next and she married Jess Scarborough and had two children. My oldest brother was Tom and then Port, Em, Dick Moye, Me and Bill.

**MD:** And what were your parents' names.

**RV:** My father was Tom Vansau and my mother was Jenny.

**MD:** Were they native to Angelina County?

**RV:** No. My father was born in Louisiana and his family came to Texas when he was about seven and settled around Liberty. There his father was killed. And then they moved to Mineola. When he was 13, his mother was killed by a falling roof. He had one sister. They drifted to Tyler County, down to Chester. My mother was born in Leon County. Her maiden name was Wallace. She said the thing she remembered about them moving (she was a small girl) was that they had to cross the river in a ferry and it scared her very much. That is where my father and mother married, in Tyler County. They came to Angelina County, I imagine, in the '80's. They settled around Burke and the location down where the Renfros live.

**MD:** Down toward Shawnee Prairie?

**RV:** Down below Beulah Community and down where Granddad Renfro lived in that area. They were friends with the Warners and Fairchilds.

**MD:** Your father went to work for Southern Pine when in started, didn't he?

**RV:** Yes. I have heard them talk about that he started there when the mill began to be built. And then after it was built, he went to work in the woods in the camp areas, where the logs were being cut.

**MD:** What was his job?

**RV:** I don't know where he ever sawed logs or not. I never heard him speak of it. They are called flatheads. He mostly worked in directing how the wood was to be cut. You know they laid it off in sections so one sawyer would have a certain place to saw and not get all mixed up. He scaled logs, too, and helped purchase land, and looked over for buying new area. That is mostly what he did.

**MD:** He worked with Mr. Kenley?

**RV:** That was in securing land, working out problems, lawsuits and things like that that he worked with Mr. Kenley.

**MD:** Probably surveying land?

**RV:** Yes, mainly. I guess when they would go to buy it, somebody would go and inspect it. They had lots of trouble with people who claimed land that they claimed. There were a lot of problems there.

**MD:** And then you lived at the camps?

**RV:** Yes. The first camp I can remember living at was Camp No. 2. It is in Trinity County and the post office was Iris. It was not a big camp, I don't think. We lived in cars in a row, and we got our water from a railroad car tank that they hauled in there. I don't remember too much about that. I remember that is the place where my mother had her teeth pulled. She lost her teeth when she was young. I can remember the dentist coming to her house and pulling those teeth.

**MD:** Did they have a doctor at that camp?

**RV:** Oh, yes, Dr. Talley moved there with his bride. We thought Mrs. Talley was the prettiest thing in the world. She was pretty. They built them a little house. I don't know if it was a little house. We went to school when we first went there where the natives (the people that lived there ) had their school. It was a mile or more (I don't remember exactly) to the school. They had a church and a cemetery there. I can remember the

cemetery. It had lots of colored glass on the graves. That was the first time I had ever seen that.

**Vivian Warner (hereafter VW):** Do you remember the name of that church and cemetery?

**RV:** No, I don't. I wish I did.

**VW:** It was in Trinity County?

**MD:** And the post office was Iris?

**RV:** Yes, the post office was Iris.

**MD:** How far was it from the camp?

**RV:** I don't remember where the post office was. I was rather small. In a year or two, I don't remember how long, they built a school up close to the camp. I don't remember whether the country children went to that school or not. The families that I remember there were the Estes, the Whites, the Bowmans and the Perkins. When the locality was cut out, they moved the camp to Walkerton. It was in Houston County, I believe it was. They told us they were going to move on a certain day and that we would need to prepare some food. I can remember Mrs. Bowman having some cooked liver hash and it was real good. They loaded our houses on flat cars with the steam loader and moved us over to Walkerton and we got there at night. They set our cars down and we slept that night in our cars. It happened that our car was set in the wrong place and we had to move.

**MD:** And they picked it back up?

**RV:** No. We moved out of the car into another one up front...up close to where the commissary and water tank were. This water tank was a big wooden one, and they hauled the water from the river.

**MD:** What did the house cars look like? Can you describe them?

**RV:** Well, they looked much like a trailer house now, only they were better built. They were substantial. They had small windows and not too many windows in them. They were painted a red on the outside, not a bright red. Inside they were not painted, but they were sealed completely.

**MD:** Were these real boxcars that they had made into houses?

**RV:** They were made like them, but I don't think they were ever meant for boxcars.

**MD:** They were made that size so they could carry them?

**RV:** They were well built, so they could move them. When they cut over an area of land, they had to move their camp. From that camp there were spurs that ran out into the timber. The trains went out and carried the men out and brought the men back and hauled out the logs. Most of the work in the woods was done with teams. That is where they bunched the logs and had the steam loader and put them on cars. One of the main things when we lived at Walkerton was the trains. I guess they came and went pretty often. To us kids, the heroes were the engineers.

**VW:** Would they blow the whistles on the train for you?

**RV:** Yes. They blew the whistles. We knew by the whistles which train it was. There was one train they called "The Old Shay". It must have been an old one. One of the engineers – I think he was an engineer – was Les Inge. He was Bert Inge's brother.

**MD:** How would you get supplies out there?

**RV:** We bought everything from the commissary. And the supplies to the commissary came from the mill. They were brought in on a train.

**MD:** From Diboll?

**RV:** From Diboll. And anything that was special ordered, they brought in on the train. In the commissary, we had everything that people bought in stores. At Christmas time, they had the toys, and in ball season they had whatever it took for that. I can remember they had a fourth of July celebration one time and they had barrels of beer. To me, it was barrels. We were not a beer family.

**MD:** Did you have ice and ice cream?

**RV:** Oh, there was a regular icehouse. We could buy ice. As far as I know we did not have any refrigerators. But we could buy ice cream at the commissary. If you wanted more than just a cone, well, you could carry a bowl down there and get you a bowl full to bring home. I remember we had a flowered bowl. I think it had roses on it. That is the one we took to get ice cream in.

**MD:** I guess it was about the right size.

**VW:** And pretty.

**MD:** Did your mother ever go out to Lufkin or places like that?

**RV:** At certain times of the year or when someone was sick, we would go and we went by train. The children would usually stay at home unless she was going to visit somebody. I remember she went to town one time. I don't remember how she got to the train or anything, but she came home with a big wooden box full of dry goods. I remember once my sister, Em, had crossed eyes and they wanted to straighten them, and

they had the idea that she could go and have surgery and straighten the eyes. They took her into Lufkin, but they couldn't do it and she was awfully disappointed. I imagine she got a lot of problems with people criticizing her eyes. But that is something that people cannot help.

I remember that when we lived at Walkerton another family was the Chisum Family and the oldest one of them was Mae, who married George Thompson. Mae was deaf. When she came, (She was a friend of Em's), they had to talk on their fingers. One of Em's chores was to Churn. When Mae came, Em couldn't churn, as she had to talk to Mae. It fell my lot to churn. I didn't like that. I had to churn one day and I didn't want to and I cried. I said that I wished the old churn dasher would break and I wished that I would die. So it happened the churn dasher did break, and then I got afraid I was going to die. There wasn't much for entertainment that I know about except the children played together. And I think now that if children just got a chance to play together instead of having all the toys that they have now, they would enjoy it. Someone had given me some money and I used it to buy a rope to build a swing. It was put way up between two tall pines. That was one place we played. The older ones, the teenagers, played there, too.

**VW:** A good place to court.

**RV:** Yes. They courted I am sure. The schoolhouse at Walkerton was built across a branch up on a hill – I would say about two or three hundred yards. The seats in there were long benches with desks on the top, and they were hand made. They had one plank that was the top of the desk. It was not in two pieces, it was one plank wide. We had to sit at the long desk. Mr. Lee Holland was the teacher there. He was very strict. He told us if he caught us talking three times, he was going to paddle us. He caught me twice, and I was afraid he was going to catch me again.

While we lived there, I don't know whether you want this in here, is when the Christies and the Durhams had their killing. The road from Crockett came out to the camp in front of the schoolhouse. One day there was a team came in there and one of them was a gray mule, I believe. This team came in running, and it hung up on a stump – the wagon did – and it broke the team loose. Of course, everybody from the camp went up to see what it was. We ran up there and about the time we got there, Carl Durham rode up on a horse and rode around and looked at the wagon. Mrs. White said, "He's dead." It was Mr. Christie who was dead, and the man rode away. He said that there were two more up the road. That night they laid those men out up in front of the school house on planks, one end on a log and the other end on the ground. There were three, twin brothers and the father.

**VW:** Were they the Durhams?

**RV:** They were the Christies that were dead. Their mothers, I understood, were sisters.

**MD:** We have heard that mentioned.

**RV:** Well, anyway, one of the Durham Brothers and his wife, Carl's brother, spent the night at our house that night. There was so much trouble. They were in trouble. There wasn't any trouble in camp.

**MD:** Did you buy your books when you went to school at camp?

**RV:** We had to buy our books and all of our supplies. There were not too many at that time. People didn't have many books. It is not like now, so many books you can't read them. If we wanted to buy something other than what they had at the commissary, we had trouble doing it and there was no way to go. There was a store at Drusoe, a general merchandise. One Sunday in the spring, I went out there with my father. If I remember, I really wasn't going out there to buy shoes, but he let me buy a pair of shoes. I was a little girl and I bought a pair that had heels and they were white. I got back home and my family told me they were not appropriate for me to wear, but I had to wear them.

**VW:** They were your shoes.

**RV:** We lived by Mrs. Paul Durham, too.

**MD:** Did they have a boarding house in Walkerton?

**RV:** Yes, that is what I'm talking about. It was up towards the commissary. I guess they had a place for people who didn't have families – to sleep. I am sure they did.

**MD:** After you left Walkerton, where did you move to?

**RV:** Bald Hill – to the farm.

**MD:** Your father kept the farm all the time?

**RV:** Yes we moved to Bald Hill – went to the farm. He was away from home a great deal. We would come home and farm, run the farm, and he always kept a hired hand. That is the way we lived.

**MD:** How did you move? (From camp to farm)

**RV:** In wagons. One time we moved – don't remember where we were moving from – must have been the first time we moved. We moved in a wagon and crossed the iron bridge over here across 94. There was an artesian well on the road somewhere out there. I had never seen one before.

**MD:** When you moved from Camp No. 2 to Walkerton, how would the family get there? Would you ride the train?

**RV:** I imagine we did – rode in the caboose. I have ridden in the caboose more than one time.

The first teaching I did, I got my certificate by examination. It was in the latter part of the year and my brother was running the corral in the woods out of White City and this corral was close to where Brookeland is. It was at what they called "Powell Town." I taught there a half-year and the schoolhouse I had to walk down the railroad to get to the schoolhouse. I lived with my brother and his family. The kids would come in from around Powell Town. I taught about three months or four.

**MD:** How old were you?

**RV:** I imagine I was about 21.

**VW:** How many children did you have?

**RV:** Oh, I imagine I had about 15. Some of them were named Powell. I can't remember the rest of them.

**MD:** Did you teach them all in one room?

**RV:** Oh, yes. They all came to one room. They knew as much as I did, I think.

**MD:** I doubt that.

**RV:** Then I started going to school. I taught 2 years out at Bald Hill. The next year I taught at Fastrill.

**MD:** How did you get to Fastrill?

**RV:** I went to Rusk on the train. That was the only way you could go. There were no buses.

**VW:** Whom did you stay with?

**RV:** I stayed with my brother.

**VW:** Oh, your brother lived at Fastrill?

**RV:** Yes, the one that died when he was 31. It was a 2-teacher school. Miss Little was the Principal. That is when Minnie Durham and her older sister went to school there. They were in Miss Little's room. The only one I taught that I remember was Louise – her mother was a Jordan. (Louise Wells)

**MD:** She married Bennie Rector. We know her as Louise Rector.

**RV:** Yes, I know.

**MD:** You taught here one year?

**RV:** One year.

**MD:** And then where did you teach?

**RV:** I think the next year I was in college. I went to school at Huntsville. And to get there I had to catch the train over to Groveton and then on to Trinity and spend part of the night in Trinity, catch the “Sunshine Special” and get off at Phelps. Or I would have to ride the train up to Jacksonville over to Palestine, catch the “Sunshine Special” down to Phelps.

**MD:** How would you get to Huntsville?

**RV:** Well, they had a track out from Phelps. They had a train out of Huntsville. I got in Huntsville, oh, about four o’clock in the morning. You could also get a taxi out of Phelps.

**VW:** It would take you part of 24 hours to get there, wouldn’t it?

**RV:** One time, I was teaching at Oakhurst. Oakhurst is right out of Phelps. I was going home and I got into Trinity. I caught a bus, I believe, over to Trinity. I had to stay all night at Groveton. I got a taxi and I wanted to go to a hotel. The taxi driver carried me to this place. I didn’t know where the hotels were and didn’t know them. He carried me to this place and I didn’t like the looks of it. When I got to my room, I couldn’t lock the door. I went down stairs as I was going to leave. It was dark. When I went to tell the person at the desk, I had to go through a dark room and a man caught my arm. I caused a commotion. Then I was carried over to a regular room. I was scared to death!

**VW:** Was the taxi a “T” Model Ford?

**RV:** The next, I came to Lufkin. If there wasn’t someone to meet me up town, I had to get a taxi out (to Bald Hill). If they knew I was coming, someone would meet me. You know there were not many roads the cars could travel on.

**MD:** Especially in wet weather.

**VW:** Do you remember the first car that your father had for the family?

**RV:** My daddy never owned a car. The first car I remember seeing was I guess when – it must have been when we lived at Bluff City, and Mr. Jackson had the car. I can remember these weeds growing up that have the little blue flowers across the fields. That is where he was driving it.

**MD:** This Mr. Jackson...do you remember what his first name was?

**RV:** I believe he was J.E.

**MD:** The Bowmans...Do you remember what Mr. Bowman's name was or what her name was?

**RV:** I can't remember her name. His name is right on the tip of my tongue, but I can't say it. We always said "Mr. and Mrs." and so we didn't hear names. (later she said his name was Charlie Bowman).

**MD:** What are some more places you taught?

**RV:** I taught at Oakhurst, and I taught over out of Corrigan at Benton Springs...a one-teacher school. It was way out across Piney Creek towards the river. I had twelve or fifteen pupils. I walked two miles to school and it might have been further. We carried our dinner and ate dinner. The long leaf pines grew around the schoolhouse, and we piled long leaf pine burrs up waist high.

**MD:** They are so pretty.

**RV:** We had a spring we got water out of. And one time the house caught on fire. The heater was in the middle of the room and the pipe ran up through the middle of the roof. It caught fire up there. We moved the single desks out of the school building. We emptied the buckets and we had a bucket brigade. I stacked the chairs on top of the desks so I could reach somebody, and the kids would bring the water, and I would hand it up to somebody. We put the fire out.

**MD:** You didn't panic then.

**RV:** No. You know everybody got out. Too, people had goats and the kids would get lost. They fed around the school. We would try to catch the kids and get them a mama goat. Sometimes we didn't. One time we went picnicking off down towards the river. There was a chalk branch in it...real chalk. We had wieners and hot dogs. They were nice people...good people. Then I taught at Iola for two years. It is in Grimes County out of Navasota and Huntsville. I taught at New London 12 years. There is nothing like teaching in an oil field. The people were good people. They were gracious, generous people. Of course, we had everything we needed in school. We did not want for a thing. I taught in Lufkin, and I taught down at Zavalla. I taught in Robstown. I taught in Channelview and I taught in Diboll.

**MD:** How many years did you teach?

**RV:** I taught 42 years.

**VW:** That is a real record. Your teaching time at New London – how did it come – was it before or after the explosion?

**RV:** I went there the fall after the explosion. That was unusual. Talk about parents being concerned about their children, and you could not blame them. My brother's son, Moye

Vann, was in the explosion. He was in the building that exploded. He had brain damage. He had a place up here out of his brain. The little boy ahead of him was killed. The little boy behind him pulled him out of the desk. His daddy worked for Humble, and when the explosion happened, you know everybody went. As Moye was going into the wreckage, he met someone coming out with Moye Vann. He recognized him by his hair and his boots. Of course, they had to carry them to a certain place before they could send them in. He went in to Mother Frances Hospital in Tyler. They opened it. It was about ready to be opened, and they opened it early for that. He wasn't as badly injured as some of the rest of them. He was not the first one to have surgery on his brain, his head. A Dr. Dericca did the surgery. This place was left open. They didn't put a cap up there and he got over that. Some people lost their only children.

**END OF INTERVIEW**