

Mamie Massey
Interview 096a
March 24, 1986
Marie Davis, Interviewer
Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In this interview with Marie Davis, Angelina County native Mamie Warner Massey reminisces about life growing up in the Ryan's Chapel and Burke communities. She recalls living on her family's farm, walking to the post office and McCall store in Burke, attending school, raising and killing hogs, and raising crops.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): Today I am talking with Mamie Warner Massey; she lives at Route 2, on Ryan's Chapel Road in Diboll. Today's date is March 24, 1986. My name is Marie Davis

Mrs. Massey, when were you born?

Mamie Massey (hereafter MM): June 28, 1901

MD: Where were you born?

MM: Ryan's Chapel Community.

MD: Whom did you marry?

MM: Bill Massey.

MD: What are the names of your children?

MM: Farris Massey, or Bud Massey and Myrle Sue.

MD: Who was your father?

MM: William Warner, Bill Warner.

MD: Did he have another name, too?

MM: Yes, William George Washington Warner.

MD: I had read that in a book. Who was your mother?

MM: Ann Lawrence Ryan.

MD: So you are kin to the Warner's and the Ryan's. And they were all early settlers?

MM: Yes, very early.

MD: Do you remember when your mother came to this part?

MM: No, I don't, I guess she was born here.

MD: Your grandparents, do you remember when they came?

MM: No, I don't. I imagine it was right after the Civil War.

MD: Where did your grandparents settle when they came here?

MM: I just don't know; they lived in West Texas for a long time, that's the only place I remember.

MD: You were telling me something about when they – they lived at the Ryan's Field?

MM: Yes, my mother lived there. I don't know if she was born there or not but I guess she lived there when her and Dad married.

MD: And that's where Ryan's Lake is today?

MM: Yes, down in the old field.

MD: That's the reason they call it Ryan's Lake because the Ryan's settled out there?

MM: I don't know, I guess, but they called it the old Ryan's Field.

MD: That's the reason I'm sure – because they settled out there. Did your parents ever tell you any stories about things that happened around here or their travels?

MM: No, they just told about how they would go to West Texas and visit the folks or when they lived in West Texas, they would come back here and visit the folks.

MD: How would they travel?

MM: In covered wagons.

MD: If they traveled more than one night, would they stay somewhere?

MM: They would camp out at night. Oh yes, I imagine it would take several days to come here in a wagon.

MD: Did they ever tell you what the country looked like, your mother or daddy, the way they remembered it?

MM: No, only just open country with mesquite bushes on it, in West Texas.

MD: Did they ever talk about the big pine trees?

MM: They said there used to be large pines, scattered around, you know.

MD: Where did you grow up? When you were a young girl where did you live?

MM: I lived up at the old place.

MD: Not far from Ryan's Chapel Church? How far was it? Did you walk to church?

MM: Oh yes, we walked to church. Not a mile, it's not very far down there.

MD: Probably half a mile east of the church?

MM: No, I don't imagine it would be half a mile.

MD: Almost right at the church?

MM: Yes.

MD: What did your daddy do for a living?

MM: He farmed.

MD: How many acres did he have, do you remember?

MM: No, I just don't, it was a big old field though.

MD: Did you help work in the field?

MM: Oh yes, all of us children worked.

MD: What are some of the things you raised?

MM: We raised corn and cotton, peas, peanuts, sugar cane.

MD: Did you sell this? Did you sell the cotton?

MM: Oh yes.

MD: That's the way he made his living?

MM: Yes – we had cattle.

MD: You told me about tobacco.

MM: Yes, we'd have just a small place somewhere, he didn't do this all the time but a lot of people would just plant a little place in the back. When it got up real high, they would cut it and hang it up in the barn or stall or someplace to dry and when it cured, a lot of people would take theirs and twist. They called it cotton bolt twist.

MD: Would they chew that?

MM: Yes, sometimes they would. I don't think my dad did. He smoked a pipe.

MD: He could put that in his pipe, couldn't he?

MM: Yes.

MD: What about – did he cure his own meat?

MM: Yes, we cured our meat.

MD: How would he do that?

MM: He would butcher the hogs and cut them up and salt them down on a big old table in the smokehouse – let it stay until it would take the salt and then he would take it up and wash it and put it out on the rooftop to dry. When it dried he would put it in a barrel, put a layer of meat and then corn shucks, cover it up with corn shucks, until he got all the meat in the barrel, then he covered his barrel up with a cloth.

MD: Now this was pork? What did they do about beef?

MM: They have butchered the calves; they would dry the meat. Later on if he killed a calf he would can it in cans.

MD: How would he dry the beef, like he did the pork?

MM: No, he would more or less smoke it some way, I don't know how. I remember he would have it up on a place, you know, and the smoke down under it.

MD: Did your father raise sugar cane?

MM: Yes, he would raise the cane and then when it got mature in the fall, he would cut it and we would all strip the cane and he'd haul it to the mill, to the cane mill. Then he had great big barrels he would put it in; then later on we got to using buckets.

MD: When he put it in the barrels would it turn to rock candy?

MM: Yes, along the barrel, the candy would stick to the inside of the barrel.

MD: And you would get to eat that later on, I guess?

MM: Yes, the children.

MD: Did you grind your corn for meal?

MM: Yes, he would carry it to Burke to the gristmill.

MD: How would he save it and keep the bugs from getting in it?

MM: They just didn't bother it much. Sometimes they would, well, we would wet it up then and feed it to the chickens or hogs.

MD: Or to the dogs? How did people make lye?

MM: Lye? They would have a barrel, but now I don't know how it was made. They would have planks or something, sloped down into the water and they would put ashes in the barrel and pour water in the barrel, you know. It would drip out and that would make lye.

MD: And then they used that lye for lye soap?

MM: Yes, and then they would take that and make soap.

MD: Did your mother make lye soap?

MM: Yes, she used to, long years ago.

MD: That was real good to wash your hair with? A lot of people like to wash their hair with it. Did you ever make hominy? How would you make that?

MM: Oh yes, I don't remember exactly but we would shell the corn, put it in a tub or wash pot and pour this lye water over it and let it stay a while. Then they would take it up and I've seen some of them take the rub boards and rub the corn and rub the eyes off of it and wash it real good and put it back and cook it a while, put it back in clear water and make the hominy.

MD: Would it keep?

MM: Yes, it would keep.

MD: Without canning it?

MM: No, well, sometimes my mother would but we just never would make too much at one time.

MD: Did you have an orchard?

MM: Yes, we had a peach orchard, apple and pears.

MD: Did they ever dry their fruit?

MM: No, I don't – well, yes, my mother dried peaches and apples.

MD: Did you ever hear of people drying their fruit?

MM: Oh yes, lots of people did.

MD: Did you ever see anybody drying fruit?

MM: Oh yes, I've seen it laying out on scaffolds, you know, planks out in the sun. When it would get dry some of them would take flour sacks and hang it up in a cool place.

MD: Oh, and that way in the winter time they could make fried pies, good stuff like that. Did the ladies around have quilting parties?

MM: Sometime they would.

MD: Tell me about how they would prepare their cotton for their quilts?

MM: They would have it ginned at the cotton gin and they would have so much and they would usually put it in a cotton sack, when they would get ready to quilt they would get enough out, they called it batts, I believe and take the lining and lay it down, then take these batts and lay them in there.

MD: Would they make their own batts?

MM: With the cotton? Yes.

MD: Did your mother or grandmother or your husband's mother or anybody that you know of, did they use a lot of home remedies? You know, in the springtime would they give you a tonic?

MM: Oh, everybody used sassafras tea, and I still love it.

MD: Makes a pretty good drink, doesn't it? How would they prepare that?

MM: They would go and dig the roots and wash them, cut them in pieces. You would dry them and boil it in water, then strain that when it boiled. I always put milk and sugar in mine.

MD: If you cut your toe, or foot or something like that, what would they do? Everybody had some home remedies.

MM: I just don't remember that.

MD: You don't remember anything about the home remedies? Poultices, like a mustard poultice?

MM: Yes, and some kind of weed they would take and make a poultice. If your hands had swelled up and sore, I believe it was sage grass.

MD: Did you ever wear asafetida?

MM: Oh yes, I thought it was a necklace. Yes, everybody nearly wore it [to] keep diseases off the children.

MD: Where did you go to school?

MM: At Burke.

MD: How would you get there?

MM: We would walk.

MD: How far was it?

MM: Oh, a mile, I guess.

MD: Where did you go to church?

MM: At Ryan's Chapel.

MD: Did they have a lot of meetings in the summer time?

MM: Oh you had, I don't know what you call it, protracted meetings or something every summer.

MD: How long would they last?

MM: Oh, usually a week.

MD: People would come in their buggies?

MM: Yes, wagons.

MD: Would some of them camp out there?

MM: They did long years ago. I don't remember it.

MD: You have probably heard your mother and Daddy talking about it?

MM: Yes, they would camp out there.

MD: So you could walk to church, couldn't you?

MM: Oh yes, we would walk.

MD: Do you remember the first car you ever saw?

MM: Yes, I believe it was a Ford.

MD: Where were you, do you remember where you were?

MM: I was here, I believe. Mr. Crager had it, I don't remember, somebody in the country, there weren't too many cars.

MD: Mother said the first one she ever saw she was at school and the teacher told them to sit down, but she said they didn't sit down, everybody jumped up and went to the windows. Do you remember what Diboll used to look like when you were a girl?

MM: Well, it was a lot smaller than it is now.

MD: What did the houses look like?

MM: Well, I don't know, there were a few fancy houses but they were just most all plain old houses. I don't think they were painted.

MD: Did your husband ever work at Diboll?

MM: Oh yes.

MD: What did he do?

MM: Worked at the sawmill.

MD: Did your father ever work at the mill? Cut logs or anything?

MM: No, he used to be a log hauler, or cutter or something.

MD: Did that on the side from farming?

MM: Yes.

MD: I think a lot of the farmers did that.

MM: I think so, that's the way Bill would work. When he would lay his crop by he would go to Diboll and get a job and work 'til time to gather.

MD: How did you celebrate Christmas?

MM: Oh, we had all the folks home and we'd have a Christmas tree, we all had just a wonderful time.

MD: You didn't have many toys?

MM: Oh no, of course, we were all little girls, we'd get a pretty doll, some times a little piano, not very much.

MD: Not like the kids do today?

MM: No.

MD: And probably what you got you took care of, didn't you?

MM: Yes, we sure did.

MD: When you went to school at Burke, can you remember some of your teachers?

MM: Yes, there was Miss Mattie McCall, Miss Agnes Woods, Miss Ola Johnson and there was an old man. I believe he was the principal. His name was Jim Cherry, I believed, walked on crutches. We were all afraid of him.

MD: Did they ever have a school at Ryan's Chapel?

MM: Yes, long years ago.

MD: What it in the church?

MM: Yes.

MD: Did any of your sisters go there?

MM: Yes, I think about three of them.

MD: How many were in your family? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MM: I had nine sisters and one brother.

MD: If you had to go to town to buy anything what did you consider town?

MM: Lufkin. Yes, we have gone to town in the wagon. It would take about all day to go and come and buy what we wanted.

MD: What about the stores at Burke, did you go up there and buy things?

MM: Yes, a little bit, oh yes, they had stores but I don't remember who they were.

MD: You don't remember going to Miss Ina McCall's store?

MM: Oh yes, lots of times, we went there often. The post office was in the store.

MD: Had you always gotten your mail out here?

MM: No, for a long time there wasn't a route. We would go to the post office.

MD: You had to go to the post office?

MM: Yes, we had to go to the post office.

MD: When you were growing up what did you do for recreation? Did you have parties or anything like that?

MM: Yes, sometimes we would have parties; we would go to ball games.

MD: Where would they have the ball games?

MM: Sometimes they would have them at Burke, and sometimes in Diboll.

MD: What did the kids do at parties back then?

MM: Oh, we played just little old games.

MD: Did you ever square dance?

MM: No, I can't dance.

MD: Square dance, did you ever square dance?

MM: Oh yes, some of them did, you know.

MD: You would have a caller, somebody to call?

MM: Yes.

MD: Did you walk to Burke a lot?

MM: Oh yes, we didn't think it was far.

MD: When they would have meetings at Ryan's Chapel, would – did they have shouting in the church?

MM: Oh yes, Aunt Becky Ryan, she would get up and shout. She would wear long dresses and she'd have her dress on one side pulled to her knees and a big old handkerchief in the other hand, she'd go all over the church house shouting and us girls, we would sit back there and say we wished we could go home. We wished she wouldn't do that. It scared me and my mother when she would shout. She would scare me and I would go and get her by the hand and tell her, "Mama, take me home, I'm sick".

MD: You didn't want her shouting?

MM: No, I didn't want her shouting, it scared me, made me nervous.

END OF INTERVIEW