

FRANKLIN WEEKS

Interview 130a

No Date

Self Interview

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Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In this self interview or speech, Franklin Weeks tells stories about Hoshall, a former sawmill in Angelina County between Burke and Lufkin.

Franklin Weeks (hereafter FW): More than 65 years ago, this country boy came to town from my home near Burke. Those were the days before good roads and automobiles.

I can recall at least two such trips to Lufkin, once in a buggy and the other in the family wagon. ‘Old Tom’ and ‘Old Fox’ pulled the wagon. We came through Hoshall – and to me – the sawmill must have been the biggest in the world.

All of us are familiar with the old Houston Highway 35. Today most of us are familiar with Farm Road 324 that goes out Bynum, Southwood, and under the loop. The Farm Road out Southwood more or less follows the same route as the road of the ‘long-ago’. Just after crossing 35, there is a small road to the right that leads to the Bloomer McCall home and the McCall family cemetery. The Hoshall to Burke road would follow this road in front of the McCall home and then behind the Lee homes just west of the Havard Horse Farm then toward the new Hwy 59 to near the Drive-In-Show entrance. The road followed the present road between the Brannen place and the place belonging to the late Miss Ina McCall. This would carry you near the railroad and then you would follow the railroad south to Burke. Soon after starting to work for the Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company, I met the late Guy Croom. For many years our Foundry Round-up carried his articles. “Sawmill Towns I Can Remember,” was one of them. In May 1980, Guy wrote, “Hoshall,” a lot of you will remember it, four miles south of Lufkin. Before the Diboll Highway was paved, you remember the mud hill in the edge of the mill town, and how in wet weather it was almost non-negotiable in an automobile. Hoshall is now just a memory!

Good roads are wonderful but for me the coming of the Automobile and highway 35 left me with little or no reason for going down by the sawmill in Hoshall. Two things stand out in my mind.

- 1) Going down Hoshall Hill in a Model T. Coming from Burke, I viewed the ‘Hill’ from the top and knew that no car could go down that hill without turning over. I hit the floorboard and was surprised some time later that we were still on all four wheels.
- 2) Another thing I remember was Jim’s Filling Station – which was the hub of activity for the community and passing traffic. So many of our parents ‘filled up’ the cars with gas and the kids with soda water there. The site of this early filling station is located at the intersection of Farm Road 324 and old Hwy. 35. In recent

years, I have started going through Hoshall on Farm road 324. So many times I passed through and thought of all the history being lost forever. A burning desire within me seemed to say and say again “You can help re-capture some of this town’s history!” It seems that over several years dozens of people have been asked, “Do you know anything about Hoshall and hundreds have said, “I lived there,” or “I worked there.” All of that history has not been lost!! It has been so much fun and today my challenge is extended to you. Have fun, and help recapture the story of other places in Angelina County that generations yet unborn might come here to read of places, people, schools, churches and events that happened in once-prosperous areas of our county.

If by the Grace of God, I am given enough time and reasonable health, I hope to come again to present a folder on “Burke” the town that should have been the biggest and best in Angelina County.

There was Bitterweed before Hoshall

Several years ago Mr. Howard Walker told me about an early school named Bitterweed. It seemed to me that this was an appropriate name for the Burke School. My hands still hurt from helping pull the bitterweeds up by the roots in the fall. Bitterweed Flat must have had a church and school from the very first. A building located in this area was used for both church and school purposes. Two early preachers were Rev. William D. Forsythe and Rev. Jesse Brookshire. By the time the sawmill was built, the school had been moved and the church building falling down. Few remember a church building, but they do remember the pews moved out under the trees and having services there. One person said, “In good weather the place would be covered up with buggies, wagons and a few Model T’s.”

We only have the names of five early teachers – Henry Rye, Dick Card, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Lewis, and Frank Squyres. Frank Squyres was also the preacher. Certain stories about school at Bitterweed Flat seem too good not to share. One little boy living where the Garden of Memories now is was just old enough to go to school in about 1915. I asked him if he walked all the way, he said, “Oh no, no, I walked a little and my sister carried me a lot. She would put me down and walk on a little and call back. Come look at this little rabbit or come here and see this pretty flower.” His sister says her hip still hurts from carrying that kid. He had a cousin, who was older than he, also going to Bitterweed School. One evening the teacher sent the older cousin out to hitch her horse to the buggy, when she got ready to go home she went out and the horse was all hitched up in the shafts backwards, with its head looking into the buggy.

This same boy is credited with an encounter with an early automobile. A man came driving his car down the main part of Hoshall. The road was narrow and had trees and bushes growing very close to the road. As the car neared the site of the sawmill, this lad charged down the hill and fell down just in front of the car. The driver got out to see about the boy. The boy got up and hid in the bushes. The driver got back in and started up his car and again he fell in front of the car. This happened several more times before his sister ran into the house hollering, “Ma, come quick, Harlow won’t let the car by!”

The members of the community were at the church on Sunday afternoon July 6, 1919 singing. The boys were swimming in the millpond when the chilling news came, "Virgil has drowned." All efforts to revive this 19-year-old boy were unsuccessful. Lee Frost carried this coffin in his wagon to the cemetery in Jonesville, cutting some trees to make the journey on the route he chose to take. My wife and I visited this marked grave early in 1987.

For a period of time the only church there was the Black Church over in the Quarters. The white people were invited to attend. Their preachers were Rev. Henry Evans and Rev. Joe Knighton. Knighton's wife Lizzie taught school as well as Leona Hoskie, Dora Vinson, and Willie Mae Williams. They reported up to 35 pupils going to school at one time. The Blacks even had a Masonic Lodge there. They met in the church. Monroe Johnson was a Mason. Then in the 1930's McKinley Chapel was built. It was a Congregational Methodist but all denominations met there. It continued to serve the community long after the sawmill cut out. We have names of many preachers for this church, including two sons and a daughter of Rev. Forsythe who served the Bitterweed Flat Church. They were Rev. Willard Forsythe, Millard Forsythe, and Rev. Mrs. Lola Forsythe Lane

It happened in Hoshall

A few days ago, we had a telephone call from a wonderful lady who said, "I don't know why I called you but I lived at Hoshall over 60 years ago and have not been back since and have nearly forgotten it." In the exchange of questions and answers, she told about as a young girl she and her family lived in the old commissary. Her father was night watchman at the sawmill. During the night, her Father came for them and their quilts. There was a terrible storm, lightning, thunder and the works to the north. All I can remember about Hoshall is that we slept on the sawdust pile the rest of the night! She had an old newspaper clipping telling about the twister that hit Lufkin.

One week after the tornado had killed one woman the Lufkin Daily News ran its headline "Second Death from Tornado Occurs" Miss Frankie Burkett dies at 2 a.m. This lady said while living in Hoshall she was told they had a new drink – Nehi. She and her sister went to the store and she said, "I want a Nehi!" When the clerk asked what kind she just melted down. "I thought Nehi was all I needed to tell them."

This was from the Lady that just lived at Hoshall and didn't know why she was calling.

Many of our old towns and settlements have had name changes through the years. A very well written article gives the name of Hosa St. Clair as the person after which the town was named. Another good reason for the name Hoshall comes from the recorded timber purchase by W. E. Hoshall recorded in 1913 – some 4 or 5 years before the day of the sawmill. Some people report that the saw logs were loaded to be hauled to other sawmills. The railroad had to have a switch to load the logs – thus Hoshall Switch.

Do you want your foot to hurt just a bit? Maybe, more than that? A man's widow that worked at the sawmill told, he was working and jumped from an elevated place to the ground – only to land on a large nail. The nail went through his foot and the point could be seen just lifting up the skin on the top of his foot. He was carried maybe to Dr. Treadwell. Iodine was poured on a swab and see-sawed back and forth through his foot. He lived, though he just knew the treatment would kill him.

Then, we have the Hoshall murder.

Andy Sulsur, the commissary operator, was shot and killed by Booker T. Williams. No one needs to be told what happened around the courthouse and jail the night they brought him in. I think all the men and boys were there except one and his Daddy told him he could not even so much as get out of the house that night. Andy Sulsur was killed February 26 1924. Williams was tried and found guilty March 1, 1924. He was electrocuted in Huntsville, April 4, 1924, just 40 days after the murder. He was the first person to be electrocuted from Angelina County and the seventh in the state.

“The House on the Hill by the Sycamore Tree”

This old tree has a lot of tales to tell if it only could. You would expect many injuries at the sawmill during these early days. One employee lost some fingers. He carried his cut-off fingers up the hill and buried them under the tree. A family lived on the hill, and the mother had a 1,000 white leghorns. She also had 7 Jersey cows with real Jersey horns. She was severely injured by one of these Jersey cows, and died as a result. It took 42 stitches to sew up the wound. Another family lived a short time at this beautiful site. He told of helping Mr. Walker strip sugar cane. He was paid \$1.50 a day. His daughter said, “And Mr. Walker shot at me when I tried to borrow some of his cane to chew.”

The Powell family was the first to live on the hill by the Sycamore tree. They are buried there in the Powell Cemetery at Hoshall. Many children have lived on this hill and had their swing hanging from a large limb.

The road from Hurricane Creek to the mill could be something, during the winter. A story is told that so many people got in the bog, Mr. Wright told the loggers, no more cars were to be pulled out. Mrs. Wright was driving her Model T to the mill one day when she bogged down. She walked over to where one of the loggers was working and asked him to pull her out. He told her no. She asked him if he didn't know who she was. He still said no. Can you guess what Mrs. Wright told Mr. Wright when she did see him that night?? Mr. Black, the logger, was not fired.

During the dry season, this same road could be just as bad. One evening two couples from Burke went for a “Sunday Spin”. The driver spotted the sand bed and requested the three passengers get out and walk so as to not over load the motor. I wonder what Uncle Bob's wife told him when she got him home.

One lady said they moved into a place that had been the gamblers hangout. They found enough coins under the floor that had been dropped through the cracks to buy groceries for the family for a full week.

One said they could catch a ride to Lufkin with Bowlegged Robinson when he went for supplies for the commissary. He picked up a load from the Harry Abram Store and others. Only two could ride back and the rest walked the railroad track. He drove so slow they beat him home anyway.

One remembers riding with her mother in a buggy peddling chittlings in the quarters. Her brother sold his opossums and coons there.

Another remembers her Mother ordered a boxcar over in Nacogdoches, loaded all her furniture and belongings in it and moved to Hoshall. She and her Mother rode in the boxcar too.

One man said his stepfather ran the first transportation between Hoshall and Lufkin. And was the first licensed taxicab driver in Angelina County.

Another lady remembers a pretty green dress her Aunt made for her with material, lace and buttons purchased from the commissary.

One preacher said some of the best whiskey stills in the county could be found between Hoshall and the river bottoms.

A courthouse timber deed dated Jan. 2, 1913, called for all timber of every kind and character, except the mulberry, to be cut and hauled to the railroad and they were given 3 years to get it out.

Trains from Houston and Shreveport met in Lufkin where they had a 30-minute stop. They often caught the train into Lufkin – had 30 minutes to shop – then back to Hoshall on the Houston bound train.

Going through Hoshall the conductor called out, “Hoshall, ladies get your handbags and babies.”

Several told about a Black Man bringing in a log so large they had to take the top or roof off over the carriage to cut it.

Another told about a gum cut into 16 foot logs and was too large to load. (The stump is still there.) **(The words in parenthesis are crossed out)**

One sawmill house is still there and being lived in. It has been moved twice.

One man remembers going through as a kid in a wagon. He saw the sign and pronounced it ‘Hos-Hell’. His brother, Jody, has never let him forget.

When a family moved out and before the next could move in they had a dance in the empty house. Then they had a dance in homes that were not empty.

One man left a job paying \$2.50 a day to go to work at the mill as an oiler making \$4.00 day.

Much later in the 30's another told the pay scale was \$1.50 for a 12-hour day.

One man walked the railroad track to work each day and boarded at the boarding house. He asked if his wife could come down and they could spend the night. He was told they could. When night came, they were given a quilt to sleep on the floor.

The mill must have burned more than once. One man remembers during a lightening and thunder storm seeing a man running through – opening the door to the kiln – then to the dry shed – pouring gasoline and setting it afire as he went.

One lady remembers filling up the cars with gas and oil at one of the first filling stations in Hoshall. Gas was 11 and 12 cents a gallon and oil was 15 cents a quart or 2 quarts for a quarter. She also remembers the Model T had two petcocks. You opened the upper petcock and if no oil ran out you needed quart of oil. If no oil ran out the lower petcock when you opened it, you needed two quarts. If it still didn't run at the top you needed three quarts. Now, the hard question: When was the last time you checked the oil in a Model T??

A retired professor from S.F.A. wrote he lived on Tulane Street and his Daddy raised watermelons and he would go with his Daddy and a load of melons to peddle in Hoshall. He also sent a drawing of the typical sawmill tent house.

Several have told about the plane crash. H. W. Harrison said it just missed their home and landed in the field behind his house. The pilot, Lt. Joseph Kovarik was killed May 3, 1953. We have the newspaper clipping in the file.

(The dialogue stops here)