

FRANKLIN WEEKS

Interview 130b

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Franklin Weeks shows him the sights in Burke, Texas. He points out landmarks like the Masonic Hall, the depot site, the McCall Store site, the churches, school, and cannery. Mr. Weeks reminisces about riding the train, visiting with Miss Ina McCall, and seeing the first airplane that landed in Burke. He shows Jonathan his ancestral home place, built by Felix Weeks, and talks about the early settlement of the Ryan Chapel Community.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): We are riding with Mr. Franklin Weeks down the old Diboll highway, what used to be Old Hwy 35. We are heading north toward Lufkin with the railroad tracks on our left. And let's see, today is December 7th, a day which has "lived in infamy" as FDR said. December 7, 2000. And Mr. Weeks is going to show me where the old Burke depot used to be. Now tell me once again how long did you live in Burke, Mr. Weeks?

Franklin Weeks (hereafter FW): Well I lived in Burke from the time I was born in '15 until I married in '54. But it has still always been home out in what was now the Ryan Chapel community and what was then the Ryan Chapel community. Because Ryan Chapel community existed before there was a Lufkin, existed before there was a Burke, existed before there was a Diboll. So it is an old, old area. My great grandfather came here in about 1870, bought 200 acres of land of which home place is home at the old homestead of Wiley Weeks. And boy when I was a youngster and came out this way and when I came over that low point down there where the bridge was I'd slip up on it and I would speed up. Well let's just go here. It's the same route...

JG: Ok.

FW: This is the route that we traveled. This is the recent...

JG: We are just crossing the Ryan Chapel Road right now. Now we are turning left on what is now called I guess Gandy Street.

FW: Yes it is Gandy Street. This is the route that I walked down when I was in theplaying Diboll.

JG: This road here that we are now on?

FW: Uh-huh.

JG: We just crossed the railroad tracks. What are some of your earliest memories of the depot at Burke? Did you ever ride the train?

FW: Oh yes, yes. I had grandparents and some of her children and grandchildren lived in Groveton. And I recall one time that mother took my sister and I, the three of us went to Groveton. So we go up to Burke and get on the train. And we'd ride the train way down to Corrigan. When we'd get to Corrigan we'd get on another train and go all the way to Groveton. Then we would spend a few days in Groveton and we'd come back and catch a train in Groveton and we'd come to Lufkin. Then we would change again in Lufkin and come back to Burke where we originally started.

JG: So when you came back to Lufkin you actually went through Burke and then came back to Burke?

FW: No we came from Groveton directly to Lufkin.

JG: Oh, ok. So did you come on the Groveton Lufkin & Northern?

FW: That is right.

JG: Into Lufkin?

FW: Yes.

JG: So you actually, the Groveton Lufkin & Northern shared some of the tracks of the TSE from...well from Blix on in. So ok, you just made a circle, made a loop.

FW: That is right. And when I was walking as a youngster there is certain places that I would speed up going home. When we got up here to the church there is so many stories shared about ghosts that I would walk very lightly, but had to slip on by. But I never did get caught by anything. (laughter) It was an experience for a youngster that was just as scared of everything under the sun. (changing subjects) Starting with a great-grandfather that bought the 200 acres of land, he was an early member of this church here.

JG: Now we are at Ryan Chapel right now.

FW: Yes. And his son, my grandfather, also was a member and my father was a member for all of his life and my membership has been there all of my life. Well, good, somebody is picking up the trash.

JG: Somebody is picking up the garbage on the side of the road.

FW: We are entered right now into the Felix Weeks 200 acres of land.

JG: Ok. Felix Weeks?

FW: Uh-huh.

JG: Ok. And that was your...

FW: Great grandfather.

JG: Great grandfather.

FW: And see that road is Felix Weeks Road.

JG: Yes sir. Is that county road 63?

FW: Uh-huh.

JG: Ok. It's called the Felix Weeks Road.

FW: When he came to this country and right inside there he built a little small house.

JG: Just to the north of us here.

FW: Yes. And then he built this house here on the hill.

JG: Here on the south.

FW: And when I was a youngster I walked to Diboll and of course this was barely a plank here and I don't know why nothing scared me like slippin' up on this plank and when I got across that branch I took out for home.

JG: (laughing) You were scared of about everything huh?

FW: Yes. And this right here on the left is the old home place.

JG: Oh ok.

FW: My mother and daddy and I think I was about 6 months old or less when they moved back up over here to that house.

JG: Do you know who lives there today?

FW: Yes I have a renter. Let's see, John Cook.

JG: Cook.

FW: Yes. I was actually born on the old Felix Weeks place in that house right there.

JG: You were born in that house right there. Ok.

FW: All that is the location of where I was.

JG: Do you know who lives there now?

FW: No I don't. It belongs to James Ritchie. It is a renter. I really think that he is related to the young lady who works at the office. I think they are related. The Felix Weeks land was on either side of the road and we are nearing the end of the point of his property. They extended, it goes through this place here and through this place here. It's a long deal and really and truly after my grandfather bought some land where my home is that...he built this road. This was not in the early days the road to Burke. The early road to Burke came back of the Felix Weeks place and it came right through here by...

JG: Now we are crossing I.D. Weeks Lane.

FW: Uh-huh. And it went straight to the railroad track and then turned to go to Burke.

JG: So the I.D. Weeks road kept going straight there?

FW: Yes.

JG: Kept going south.

FW: Yes.

JG: Tell me a little bit more about what your memories are of the trains and the depot there at Burke.

FW: Well of course everybody wanted to go to see the trains and go to the depot. And of course several different times we would go and catch the train and go to Lufkin. I don't recall ever using the train to go to Diboll. And of course the depot was a place that people came to enjoy. And I recall perhaps one of the early depot agents was a Mr. McCall.

JG: Yes I found him in the census quite a bit.

FW: Yes. And of course that is still.... We may miss something right here because we're in the heart of...

JG: Downtown Burke.

FW: Downtown Burke. I don't want to block any one's progress. I don't know if we will be able to get out there much cause it looks like it's pretty soupy.

JG: Ok. Now he is talking about Mr. McCall again.

FW: Mr. McCall was an early depot agent. His daughter was the mother of Ward Burke.

JG: Oh ok.

FW: So the Burkes and the McCalls were closely intertwined and then right over there the other side of 62 [County road] was a big two-story building that was truly the Masonic building. The Masons had their headquarters upstairs and they rented out the lower portion of it to the McCall and Burke store. And in the Burke and McCall store was the depot and the agent was McCall's daughter, Mrs. Ina McCall. And without a doubt she was one of the greatest serving individuals that ever lived in anybody's community.

JG: What was her first name again?

FW: Mrs. Ina McCall.

JG: Ima, I-M-A.

FW: I-N-A.

JG: I-N-A.

FW: Ina McCall. And she at one time had the only telephone in this area.

JG: Now that was at the depot or at the store?

FW: At the store.

JG: Now was this before there was a depot here or after?

FW: Well...I assume that they must have come into existence about the same time when the railroad came in. And anyways, she would get off, I don't know whether at five or six o'clock, lived just a short distance down here on the other side of what became Old Hwy 35. And whether it was 10 minutes after she got home, one hour, two hours, midnight, one or two three o'clock, a death message or somebody seriously ill, without any questions "I'm just so happy to go and let you in and use the telephone." She did that all her life. And you couldn't take a picture of her if you wanted too. She'd turn her back and all you could get was her back. (laughing) But that was undoubtedly one of the greatest individuals that ever actually came along.

JG: I want to get that picture again that shows the depot. About what year was this picture made? Would you know about the approximate year? Did you say Ward Burke has that picture?

FW: Well I think the picture came from Ward. But the dresses of the individuals indicate that that was a pretty early picture.

JG: Yes. Do you know when the depot was no longer here? It was here as long as you remember right?

FW: Yes. I was away in school and I think at that particular time they had discontinued the depot here and it became an inactive place. But as, of course, this is taken with the track on the left.

JG: Yes. Are we standing where the depot was?

FW: Yes we are right in the big middle of the depot right now.

JG: Ok.

FW: In the “big middle of the depot.” And of course the trains are here and there is an old Justice of the Peace that lived a short distance down there in which the Rush’s...what is the girl’s name down there?

JG: Patsy?

FW: Patsy’s Daddy and Mother now own the place. But the Justice of the Peace lived down there. The barbershop was just over here a short distance. I’ve seen him in there with his face all lathered to get shaved and the train would blow and he’d jump up with the lather on his face because he’d go meet the train.

JG: Who was that?

FW: I.D. Clark.

JG: I.D. Clark.

FW: He was a constable all those years. And he used to say...I mean the Justice of the Peace. And people would come to get married and he’d take the marriage license and he’d say, “By the authority of this I hold in my hand I pronounce you man and wife.” He’d hold out his other hand for the money. (laughing)

JG: And what is the connection with Patsy’s dad?

FW: Patsy’s dad bought the old Judge Clark house.

JG: Oh ok, ok. If you don’t mind I want to get your picture standing here looking the same way the photographer was when they shot that picture.

FW: Well I guess the photographer would have to be that way wouldn’t he?

JG: No this is looking south. So if you think this is about where the depot was I’ll go back this way and get your picture.

FW: Yes, all right. This is the point.

JG: Ok. Mr. Weeks was just telling me, we just...are still here at the old depot site, a train just came through heading south and what did you say, "People used to come out of the bushes?"

FW: They'd come out of the bushes. Everybody would come to town because they wanted...to Burke, because they wanted to see the train coming.

JG: Wanted to see the train come. And that was probably in the days of the steam engines huh?

FW: That is right. Oh yeah.

JG: Everybody liked to see the train and those old steam engines.

FW: That is right.

JG: That one was moving on wasn't he? (referencing the train that just passed)

FW: Yes that one was moving on. He didn't know he was coming through Burke.

JG: He probably didn't. (laughing) He didn't know we might be waiting to catch the train. He just kept on going.

FW: That is right.

JG: Yes this is the County Road 62 crossing. I see it there on that little maintenance building. They call it the, whatever that is.

FW: Now really and truly of course it is a tragedy, but they will put up signs right there on that post and used to be two signs. One of them this-a way, the Felix Weeks Road, and the other going by the Baptist Church on around is the Alf Tidwell Road. But those signs, every time they put them up somebody gets them before they're hung. And what a tragedy, because if somebody says, "Come over the railroad track and take Alf Tidwell Road..."

JG: They don't know what they're talking about. Well is this one 62 also, this road here? I see the sign there. What does that one say?

FW: Well what did that say down yonder at the crossroads?

JG: It said 62, I thought. Oh, no, 63 is what this one says. This one says 63. Maybe that one did say 63. I might have forgot, got them confused. Ok so that is the 62 crossing.

FW: And I can recall during much earlier days before everybody would go to Lufkin or Diboll at night, Saturday nights around Uncle Bob's place there would just be cars after cars after cars. He didn't sell groceries but it was just a place for people to meet and talk.

JG: Just for the sake of the train that came through, it's now about 10:35. So that was the 10:30 through Burke I guess.

FW: The 10:30 through...

JG: 10:30 a.m.

FW: Well, were you wanting to go down and see Mrs. Lee, Catherine Lee?

JG: Well you can just take me and introduce me to her maybe. I...what I really want to do is we have got a bunch of pictures that they had donated. And I was wanting to sit down with her with those pictures. But if you've got a few minutes we can just run down there and say hello to her.

FW: All right. Ina McCall would open the post office and pick up the mail and pick up the paper and then one time there was a beautiful, beautiful perhaps February or March day, just beautiful, and an airplane which was a novelty in that day, just circled and circled and got lower and lower. And I could tell that it was going to have to land. And as a youngster possibly at 10 years old, I took out across that field and it was coming right on down. And it wasn't a wreck he just landed. I don't know why, whether he ran out of gas...

JG: Just right over here in this field. Just north of us, northwest of the tracks

FW: Just north of us. And I got over there and I was just...[panting noise] and he says "Son where am I?" And I says, "You are in Burke." And he says, "Where under the sun is Burke?" So he landed and the ground was wet and a couple of hours later he tried to take off and when he did he didn't do it and it kinda turned up on his nose and broke the propeller. And it stayed here from Sunday until the following Saturday. And the following Saturday in fact a Mr. Rush, which is the grandparent I guess, yes grandparent of your helper, he took his team and pulled the airplane out over this road over the railroad track and took it down here to the Brannen place. Took the first airplane out of Burke. (laughing) So they just think the airport over here is first but it...

JG: Do you remember about what year that was?

FW: I can't find out from anybody but the story would have to be in the paper, but I would assume it was about 1925 or 26.

JG: '25 or '26. Ok. The first airplane in Burke.

FW: Uh-huh. And of course as I told you this is the location of Old Uncle Woods store [corner of Tidwell Road and Felix Weeks Road, on left across from the old post office]. And he was a fine old gentleman. Of course...

JG: Now we are going down 62 west.

FW: ...the Baptist Church has always been there. And over here to the left is the Burke School. And that has been there for ages. And when I was a youngster going to school here it was a two-story building. But it crumpled out and of course that is the location of the Burke Cannery, which was a vital thing during the depression days.

JG: I think you had given us some copies of pictures of that.

FW: People did that. And just before we got here, there was a log church.

JG: So the cannery was right across from the school here on the north side of 62.

FW: And a church there and they didn't call it The Church of Christ, it was the Cambellite Church.

JG: Now we are going to see Catherine Lee. Is that who...?

FW: Catherine Rush Lee.

JG: Ok. And tell me once again how she is related to Patsy?

FW: Well let's see, Patsy's daddy...

JG: Was a Rush.

FW: ...and Catherine were brothers and sisters.

JG: Oh ok, so this is Patsy's aunt. Ok.

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END OF INTERVIEW