

O'HARA CHANDLER

Interview 148a

June 18, 1999, at 903 Jefferson

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, longtime educator O'Hara Chandler reminisces about growing up in and around Diboll, working at the sawmill, going to school, and teaching school all over the state. He recalls swimming in the Emporia millpond, Dred Devereaux and his bridges, and his family's time spent working for Southern Pine Lumber Company.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today is June 18, 1999 and my name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm with Mr. Chandler and we are at 903 Jefferson, at his home. He is going to tell us today about some of his memories of Diboll and East Texas Community. And Mr. Chandler, just to start could you state your full name and when and where you were born?

O'Hara Chandler (hereafter OC): I'm Charles O'Hara Chandler and I was named after two Diboll old timers, Mr. Charles Crager and Mr. John O'Hara. I was born February 12, 1908. I have a lot of fond memories of Diboll.

JG: And what were your parent's names?

OC: My daddy's name was Will Chandler. He came to work at the sawmill around 1898. My mother's maiden name was Annie Taylor. She came to Diboll with her mother and father in 1896. My Grandfather Taylor blew the first whistle that was ever blown at Southern Pine. An interesting thing about my mother and grandmother, back in the early days they had no church and no school. Diboll [unintelligible] so Granny told her husband, she said, "Now, I can teach my kids to read and write, but I can't preach to them. You need to get us a church or we are going to move out." So Grandpa and two or three other men got together and built an old building out of scrap lumber. And the Baptist had church in the morning and the Methodist had church in the afternoon. [unintelligible]

JG: You mentioned to me earlier that you lived in Bluff City for a while. Do you know about how old you were when you moved with your parent's to Bluff City?

OC: I was five.

JG: Five, okay.

OC: I started to school there. They had school in the old church house. They had church every Sunday and they had the larger children inside of the school. The smaller children,

we had two teachers. It was very interesting how the old school worked. About fifteen miles from...

JG: And it is in Houston County.

OC: Yes, Houston County.

JG: It is named Bluff City, was it on a bluff on the river?

OC: Yes, it's on a high bluff. And you could almost see Alto it was so high. I think that came out.

JG: Do you recall if the railroad...well, let me first ask you how long were you there?

OC: We were there about a year. My older brother took pneumonia. The doctor from Diboll came out there to see him and told my father that he would have to move out of the camp. [unintelligible] They thought my brother had TB but he didn't.

JG: Do you recall what your father did for a living when you left and went to Fort Worth?

OC: Well, what he did then, there was steam there that made steam for the log train before it came in [unintelligible] That is what he did. He worked in the wheat fields in Fort Worth.

JG: That was some pretty good farmland up there for a while. Now they are covering it all with concrete. So you were just there about a year then at Bluff City?

OC: Yes.

JG: Of course we have that picture that is in the Cornbread Whistle, that school photo. That photograph, was that just about everybody that went to school? That was a pretty representative photograph?

OC: Yes, they were from all over the woods.

JG: Do you recall, you said they were all over from the woods, did they all live there in the camp or did some of them live in the surrounding areas and would come in? I realize that was a long time ago.

OC: I really don't know. I imagine that they came in from surrounding areas, but most of them worked at the camp.

JG: And maybe, I don't know if you would remember from living there but maybe hearing some of the others talk or from some other places, do you recall what type of housing you lived in?

OC: In boxcars, joined together.

JG: Boxcar housing, joined together.

OC: Everybody lived in them. But we had a store, general mercantile store. And we had a hotel. [unintelligible] I remember it was a very happy place. My short memory, we had just about what everybody else did. We had to go out there on the place in the boxcar because Mother wouldn't let us go where any roads wasn't at. The fishing [unintelligible].

JG: So your parents and you and all your brothers and sisters were living in Fort Worth for a while, above Fort Worth. Then did you move back to Diboll?

OC: No, my daddy went with a man by the name of Jackson from Diboll. My father put in the first electric lights in Tenaha. We lived there about a year. He and Mr. Jackson wired the houses at Tenaha.

JG: Can you recall what year that might have been, before World War I, or after?

OC: Oh yea, before. [unintelligible]

JG: And then after Tenaha you moved back?

OC: We moved back to Diboll.

JG: You moved back to Diboll. And then your father began to work in what...?

OC: My father was a pipe fitter for the company, plus the fact that he worked seven days a week at mill two. He was fireman. He worked seven days a week.

JG: So you finished school out in Diboll and graduated in '26, I think you told me. What do you remember about those years in Diboll, say from 1915 through the rest of your school year?

OC: Well I remember we worked on accreditation. During those days Lufkin was the only school in the county that was accredited with the state. You know where you didn't have to take your examination to go to college. We worked on that until 1926, the first year that we had accreditation. How many kids are on there?

JG: We are looking at a picture here of his graduating class from '26. Looks like there is about 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, about 13 people in the picture but one or two or those might be teachers.

OC: They are, the superintendent of the school, Mr. Miller and Mrs. Short.

JG: That would be eleven students then. I was talking in the past with Franklin Weeks and he had told me about living in Burke, that at Burke you couldn't finish out school at Burke, you either had to go to Lufkin or Diboll. In those years in which you were going to school, do you remember if any of these people were from other areas besides Diboll?

OC: Yes, there were two from Corrigan.

JG: Two from Corrigan. Okay.

OC: The Saxton girls. They did not have accreditation. They'd go to the eleventh grade and [unintelligible].

JG: I was reading some of the transcripts from the earlier interview that you and Mr. Weeks and, I forget the other person's name, but it was done back in 1984. In that interview as well as other reminiscences of people, they often talk about swimming in the millponds. Was that the old Emporia pond or did you swim in the Diboll ponds as well?

OC: I swam, some of them swam in the mill pond. But the old Emporia pond is where we usually went swimming.

JG: Was Emporia still far enough away from the main part of Diboll that it was considered kind of out of town?

OC: Yes it was out of town. It was only about a mile. When my mother went to Diboll in 1896 the train didn't stop there. My granny made them stop because one of her daughters had pretty high fever. The conductor did stop but it wasn't one of the usual stopping places.

JG: Yes, I think Diboll didn't get its post office until 1897; three years after Emporia had one. Do you recall, several people talked about alligators being in the mill pond, Mr. Watson Walker would put alligators in the pond, what do you remember about that?

OC: Well his excuse was to kill the turtles. But I think he put them in there to keep the kids out of there.

JG: Did he put them in all the ponds?

OC: He only put them in mill two ponds. Mill one had the log pond, but they were big ponds. That is where they put the logs.

JG: Did he put them in the Emporia pond?

OC: No.

JG: So y'all probably would have swam in the Emporia pond instead of swimming with the alligators.

OC: I never did swim in the millpond at Diboll. Well they didn't want us to. That is the reason I didn't. But White Oak creek, we swam in White Oak creek. It used to have some pretty good holes in there.

JG: I've got an old photograph here. I'm just showing you here. It's from Latane Temple's scrapbook and it's of some type of millpond. Does that look familiar to you?

OC: No.

JG: I was just wondering if that would have been Emporia pond. That is one of those contraptions they used to bring up the sinkers. But, there are several boys on there diving off into the water.

OC: [unintelligible] it's actually numbered here.

JG: This is from a photograph from Marie Davis and it's identified as Marie Hudson on Emporia pond. Is that your memories of the pond?

OC: Yes, It was [unintelligible].

JG: Do you recall approximately where the pond was today?

OC: Is that the one they filled in?

JG: No sir, I believe they filled it in the late '50's or early '60's. But, I know where the Catholic Church is today. Can you maybe explain where the pond was in relation to where that church is today?

OC: Yes, I've got some pictures of baptizing in the Emporia pond. The Baptist church baptized all their people in the Emporia Pond.

JG: Was the pond east or west of the railroad?

OC: It wasn't very far from the railroad.

JG: Between here and the railroad but west of...

OC: There wasn't anything left of Emporia, just a marker. There was a few old houses; nobody lived in them.

JG: Is there any memories you have of school, attending school in Diboll?

OC: Yes, I didn't go to first grade here. I went to first grade in Tenaha up there. We must have had some good teachers. [unintelligible] I had no problem growing up,

especially English [unintelligible]. Buy anyhow, we had some excellent teachers. We had good basketball teams and good baseball team but we didn't have football.

JG: Of course things were segregated back then, but do you remember much about some of the black schools that were going on while you were there? Were there as many students in the black school as the white school during your time?

OC: I wouldn't think there were. We didn't know much about the black school. Blacks and whites got along well. In fact we had a black woman clean our home and took care of the kids.

JG: That was in Diboll?

OC: Yes, and we called her Mammy, but we got along well.

JG: I remember in your earlier interview there was quite a bit of talk about the bitter weeds and red bugs. (laughter)

OC: Oh yes. In fact the first few days of school our main job was to pull the weeds. You couldn't cut them off because they were like nails.

JG: Yea, poke right through the bare feet.

OC: Them bitter weeds would get [unintelligible]. But I don't see bitter weeds any more. Used to they were everywhere.

JG: What did you do to combat, besides pulling up the bitter weeds, but what did you do to combat the redbugs?

OC: Well I remember Momma used to put meat grease wherever you had bites on your body. There wasn't much else to do.

JG: There wasn't much preventive care. Also during that day and of course in sawmill towns and camps but also just anywhere there were houses, it was common to keep all the grass out of the yards. Is that the reason?

OC: Well we didn't have lawn mowers. To keep the grass off we would compete with one another to see who had the prettiest yard. And instead of rakes we had push brooms. That is the way we swept our yard, a push broom.

JG: You didn't rake it you swept it, huh.

OC: We swept it.

JG: You were mentioning the Baptist earlier and then you said you went to Baylor University. Are you a Baptist?

OC: Yes, I have a doctorate degree from Baylor.

JG: Oh you do, that is great. What years did you attend Baylor?

OC: I went in the fall of '26, '27 and '28. Then I had to drop out 'cause the cost of the school and I had to go back to the sawmill. [unintelligible]

JG: Did you ever work around the mill?

OC: Oh yea, I went to work at 14 years of age.

JG: You were 14 years old.

OC: We had a neighbor named Mr. Chandler who was a foreman. During those days they didn't have child labor laws. And in the summer time he would give me a job. I worked at the sawmill ten hours a day. I didn't know anything, but I worked the carriage, nail saws, just about anything there was to do except a sawyer. I never was a sawyer.

JG: Was that common to work in a number of different jobs.

OC: Oh yes.

JG: Not just for school age boys but for men as well.

OC: No, men usually had a steady job.

JG: Had a particular position.

OC: Yes, they had the skills. The people who made the lumber had regular jobs. But it was just us kids.

JG: Just the kids would do different things, wherever they needed help that particular day.

OC: Yes.

JG: How long was the summer then? I'm thinking of a school year and...

OC: We usually had nine months.

JG: Nine months of school. So you experienced enough sawmill work to know that was not what you wanted to do.

OC: No my daddy kept saying, "Son, don't stop at just a regular job" Most of the people in the sawmill were raised in the sawmill.

JG: They just continued what their parents had done.

OC: Yes, and once you got started you felt like you couldn't go anywhere else. My daddy worked many, many years for Southern Pine Lumber Company. My grandfather Taylor he started with just a little half an acre in Diboll. Also, if a child was sick they would call Granny before they would call the doctor. You paid a fee – I think two dollars. He was a company doctor. The company would hire the doctor and the fee, they would deduct the fee.

JG: They just deducted out of your wages. I know I'm backing up again, but you said something that reminded me. Your mother and father actually met at Diboll?

OC: Yes.

JG: They weren't married?

OC: No.

JG: They were married at Diboll? No.

OC: No, [unintelligible] They married in [unintelligible].

JG: When they married. So they met at Diboll is that correct? They met at Diboll.

OC: Yes. Daddy was born [unintelligible] but his mother died. She was buried by her grandfather in Houston County. Don't ask me how he got to Diboll. I never did ask him that. Somehow he got to Diboll.

JG: Okay so now we're jumping back to where we were, back to Baylor. You went to school there you said for two years?

OC: Two and a half.

JG: Two and a half years. And then you went to teaching. Of course that was quite an accomplishment just to go to college during those days, especially being from a sawmill town.

OC: That is right. And I wouldn't have gone if I hadn't gotten the scholarship.

JG: Did anyone from the company encourage you to get a scholarship or when you sought a scholarship what was the process there?

OC: No, I was valedictorian.

JG: Valedictorian, okay.

OC: An old doctor encouraged me and a schoolteacher encouraged me too.

JG: Okay, that is good. Do you recall their names?

OC: Old man Moore and the teacher was Mrs. Short.

JG: Mrs. Short was the teacher and the Superintendent was Moore. And being the valedictorian they encouraged you to go on to college?

OC: Jake went to college and Jake became a lawyer.

JG: Now that is Jake?

OC: Jake Durham.

JG: Jake Durham.

OC: He went to college and my sister-in-law, she had a sister that was a teacher at Diboll, Mrs. Elodie Miles.

JG: Elodie Miles, yes sir. I put some of her pictures in the paper.

OC: Well that was her sister.

JG: Oh, okay.

OC: This girls name was Turner, Shorty Turner's wife. His daddy was a conductor and his sister was, well he died here not long ago. He was train conductor for years and years. Who is the secretary for Mr. Temple?

JG: Burkhalter.

OC: Yes, Mrs. Burkhalter. [unintelligible] They have all passed. Every one of them is dead now except me.

JG: And you will be 92 years old, and you're still looking good. Where did you teach your first teaching job?

OC: I came back at nineteen years of age to Corrigan, Texas.

JG: Corrigan.

OC: They got accredited; we got accreditation. I was there two years as high school principal. I was coach and taught six subjects. Then I went to Moscow and did about the

same as Corrigan. Then I went to Chester. Then the war came along and I went to Orange and I became superintendent. I stayed there 12 years. [unintelligible]

JG: So you were in Orange during World War II?

OC: Yes.

JG: Do you recall, I know we are getting away from Diboll here but we are still talking about history in southeast Texas history. I know Orange had a large migration of shipyard workers. I think the town went from something like a few thousand to fifty thousand in less than a year.

OC: Yes it did. It was a real problem. See we had three shipyards and all of them had, the government had to create [unintelligible], they built houses in the area called Riverside, along the Sabine River. They built a school out there, so I just stayed on. They gave federal money to build houses. Even after the war, these shipyards [unintelligible] within 5 years after the war you could still [unintelligible].

JG: So that was, can you speak more specifically about just dealing with all the people and the children and the school situation? Of course, and what was your position then at the school district?

OC: In Corrigan I taught mathematics and then in the summer I transferred to Diboll. I taught there two years. From then on I was superintendent.

JG: So being the superintendent in Orange during those years, you were primarily concerned with funding, was that it? Trying to get funding to deal with...you mentioned trying to get federal monies?

OC: Well, they gave that federal money [unintelligible]. The government [unintelligible] we started off with school nurses, school chaplain, special education, we had all of that because the government lobbied for that. In fact they were [unintelligible] education. They funded it too.

JG: Thinking back now to your teaching at Corrigan and Moscow and Chester...

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JG: ...can you compare and contrast Diboll with these other communities?

OC: Well Diboll had accreditation. They were ahead.

JG: They were ahead of the other places where you taught? As far as, you know, we looked at some of these Diboll pictures. Of course these high school pictures everyone is dressed nicely, wearing ties and shoes, but the younger kids they are all bare footed.

(laughter) So it is quite a difference in the ages and there is also less students. Was this the situation, and I'm pointing to the picture of all the bare foot children, was that pretty much the situation at these other towns, Corrigan and Moscow?

OC: Yes, every year we pretty much had the same curriculum as the last year, it wasn't much change.

JG: It wasn't much change.

OC: Reading, writing and arithmetic. The fundamentals back then were probably stressed more then than they are now. And discipline, parents, they wanted you to whoop their kids. If you didn't spank one through the day, you weren't doing your job.

JG: So that was, yea definitely that is a difference between then and today for sure. But that was pretty much true of all the communities where you taught that there wasn't any difference basically is what you're telling me.

OC: No, there wasn't much difference then. Now of course we didn't have computers and [unintelligible] and stuff like that. I remember...I don't know how we did it.

JG: Like the old mimeograph thing?

OC: Yes.

JG: And how long were you at Orange again?

OC: Twelve years.

JG: Twelve years and then you went from there to Victoria. And you retired from Victoria?

OC: Yes.

JG: Is that the Victoria Independent School District?

OC: Yes. I think I built about fourteen or fifteen schools during that time.

JG: And when did you move to Victoria?

OC: In 1954.

JG: 1954. And you retired in '74. You built fourteen or fifteen schools during that time.

OC: Yes.

JG: After you retired from Victoria where did you move then?

OC: To Lufkin.

JG: To Lufkin.

OC: My wife's family was from Moscow and I have a son who is a lawyer here.

JG: I think I saw a picture of Reich. I went to school with Reich.

OC: That is my grandson.

JG: That is your grandson, okay.

OC: That is a picture right there.

JG: Yea.

OC: Reich went to [unintelligible].

JG: I want to come back to that but you mentioned your wife and family and I wanted to ask you about that too. You mentioned your wife was from Moscow. Did you meet her while you were teaching?

OC: We were teaching together.

JG: Y'all were teaching together. Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about that or just some of your memories that you have?

OC: Well we had six teachers. It was her first year to teach and my third year. [unintelligible] We started going together.

JG: What was her name?

OC: Commenda Sellars. [unintelligible]

JG: So did she go to Stephen F. Austin then? So you had already gone to Baylor.

OC: I had gone to Baylor and started going to school at Tenaha. I came to Diboll, then I finished school at then I got my masters degree and when I got my masters degree I went to the University of Houston. Then I worked six hours on the job and Baylor gave me a doctorate degree. So, I never would let anybody call me that.

JG: Yes, well that was a nice gesture on your part. Okay, and how many children did you have?

OC: Just one, George.

JG: And that was George Chandler, and he became a lawyer. What school did he go to?

OC: Baylor.

JG: Baylor.

OC: He went to Baylor and Reich went to Baylor. In fact we are a Baylor family.

JG: Baylor family. I also went to school with Jason Waltman; he went to Baylor. He is an attorney now. I think he is working in Shreveport for one of the judges there. I don't know, well Reich knows him but I didn't know if you knew the family.

OC: Reich...[unintelligible]

JG: Where is he now?

OC: Here in Lufkin.

JG: Here in Lufkin. Okay.

OC: In fact a few years ago he had a [unintelligible] seven million dollars. He got [unintelligible].

JG: Wow, that is good.

OC: He is not married yet. I don't think [unintelligible].

JG: So you moved back to Lufkin in '74.

OC: No, I stayed in Victoria three years.

JG: For three years after.

OC: The reason I did, schoolteachers [unintelligible]. I went to work for the foundation. That is the reason I stayed there.

JG: You said you went to work for who?

OC: The Jayroe Foundation. It's a nation wide foundation for problem children. And I got accreditation for [unintelligible].

JG: Yea.

OC: [unintelligible] If I had my life to live over again, I'd [unintelligible]. There is a need.

JG: When did your son, George, move to Lufkin?

OC: Well George started out in Corpus. And Ward Burke, he had a lot going in Diboll and they called George. George was in Dallas for eight years. In fact [unintelligible] down in South Texas and Arthur Temple gave him a job.

JG: Well that is great.

OC: I appreciate that. I had two sisters that worked for the company for years, and years, and years.

JG: And what were their names?

OC: Rhoda Faye Chandler.

JG: Rhoda Faye Chandler, okay.

OC: Yea, did you know her?

JG: No sir, but I've seen their names quite a bit.

OC: And Jimmie Ferguson. Rhoda Faye was postmaster in Diboll for years and years. Jimmie she was [unintelligible].

JG: So you pretty much kept in touch with the Diboll area even all the years that you were away.

OC: Oh yes, my mother...

JG: Because I was thinking of asking you what was the difference when you were here through World War I verses nineteen seventies. But you pretty much kept a breast of all the changes and everything.

OC: Oh yea. Arthur Temple was good to Diboll. He took over the company houses. People were charging at the store, the people would be in debt, things like that. When I was coming up for years and years and years we didn't have electricity. A lot of those houses didn't have running water. [unintelligible]. But Diboll benefited tremendously [unintelligible].

JG: I was in the corporate boardroom the other day and they told me that their boardroom was just as fancy as anyone in New York. So, they have come a long way.

OC: You need something nice.

JG: Yes, okay Mr. Chandler well I've...

OC: I hope I've given you some information.

JG: Yes sir that is helpful, and part of it is just me trying to get to know you a little bit. I'm sure I can think of maybe some other questions in the future.

OC: Ellen called the other day and said she was real proud of you.

JG: Well thank you, thanks for telling me.

OC: Who do you work for?

JG: Actually, really Ellen is my boss. We are under the library board, Alan Miller is the director, the chairman of the library board but there is a committee that is over the archives and Ellen is the chair of that. So she is more or less my boss. She is great to work for.

OC: There is some pictures of my sister down there.

JG: Yea, and I'm still learning all the collections that are there. But I've seen, that is probably where I've seen your sister's name quite a bit. And the Chandler name is all through the records quite a bit.

OC: What church do you go to?

JG: Denman Avenue Baptist here in Lufkin. You go to...

OC: First Baptist.

JG: I'll go ahead and turn this tape off and we can keep talking about other things.

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JG: We are talking about Dred Devereaux.

OC: He built all the bridges. In fact when we lived at White City he was [unintelligible]. Dred Devereaux would [unintelligible]. In fact whatever he built was hard to tear down.

JG: Yea, I heard that. In fact when they just redid the sawmill this past year they found some of his work and they just had to leave it there.

OC: They liked to never tore it down. He was a hard man. They said he was hard to work for. He demanded so much.

JG: I heard he had a pretty foul mouth too.

OC: I never did hear that.

JG: You never did hear that.

OC: He stayed with [unintelligible].

JG: I was talking with his son Jack, and he would tell me and several other people have all talked about it too, about his hat. He would always have that hat and he would get mad every five minutes and he would throw that hat down.

OC: Yea, and he'd fire people and hire them back the next day. (laughter) I had...

JG: Yea, that is one of the bridges he built over the Trinity River. I think that was back in the twenties. And actually I didn't think about it until late yesterday afternoon, but we have got quite a few other ones. In fact I took this one to Jack's house and he identified all these people. But one of those is Jack. I can't remember which one. But it's Jack and his sister and some of his other cousins and that kind of thing. That is Mr. Dred right there. But they were pretty proud of that bridge. We have got five or six pictures from different angles, one from this side and one from the other side. That was quite a feat for a logging company to build a steel trestle. Do you remember his dog? He had several dogs. He would always have a little dog with him.

OC: No I don't remember anything about that.

JG: Yea, he was quite a character from everything that I've heard.

OC: [unintelligible]

JG: I'll go ahead and turn this machine back off.

END OF INTERVIEW