

Harry G. Halbert

interviewed by

Mrs. Nellie M. Rennels

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ORAL HISTORIES OF FORT WORTH, INC.

Interview of Harry G. Halbert on March 26, 1976

H: Mrs. H.G. Halbert

I: Interviewer, Mrs. Nellie Rennels

H: My mother was Eva Lohman from Michigan and dad was John Thomas Halbert from Illinois. They lived at Newton, Kansas before they moved here to get a better job. My father drove a mule car here for a while, then he went into government service with the railroad mail. I lived as a child in south Fort Worth on St. Louis Avenue. All that country out there looked like a prairie then, no houses, just a few farm houses. Went to school at East Magnolia, 7th Ward. School was a brick construction with a wood roof. Miss Moore taught the first and second grade. Had to walk to school about two miles. I'm still single yet, no children. I married late, but no children. Hunting, fishing and wrestling was all there was to do. I had no sports or clubs or social organizations. I worked part-time baling hay; that paid about \$1.50 or \$1.75 from sun up to sun down-- out south of the Baptist Seminary.

I: What was your occupation?

H: I was a railroad man, signal maintenance. I worked at the railroad all the time during the depression. Got the job through a friend. I was in World War I for two years, in the Navy.

I: Were you stationed on a ship?

H: I was on a ship part of the time, part of the time I was on shore. Brooklyn Navy Yard was home port, went to school there. Went to Central and South America.

I: What were some of the hardships for you?

H: Just being away from home was the greatest hardship. I got to see Teddy Roosevelt when he was President. It was right after he got back from the Spanish war. Saw him in Fort Worth in front of the old depot. He made a speech. Several of his Rough Riders were there to greet him. I belong to the Masonic Lodge in Handley 1140. I am a charter member. I go to church once in a while at Handley North.

- I: When did you move to Handley?
- H: I moved to Handley about 1905 or 1906.
- I: Do you remember how the area looked?
- H: From about two blocks north of what is now Lancaster Avenue there was only about two or three houses in there. Lancaster was called Dallas _____.
- I: Were there many businesses?
- H: There was just one block of businesses, where they are down there now: Schultz Drug and Gant Grocery,,, Grady Grocery. The old depot there right across the street from the main part has been torn down for years.
- I: Why did you move to Handley?
- H: We moved to Handley to get some acreage to raise fruit on. The only transportation we had was the interurban or train.
- I: Did you have a car?
- H: Not at first.
- I: What did you do for entertainment?
- H: We went to the picture show, it only cost a nickel.
- I: How many shows were in Fort Worth, do you know?
- H: I think there was only about three. There was a picture show where the First National Bank building was later on the corner of Houston and 7th Street. They had a show that ran five hours. I didn't know it at the time and I had to go three days to see it all.
- I: Tell about the most outstanding event in your life such as marriage, military life, involved in anything in Fort Worth.
- H: I didn't get married until I was in my sixties. I married a lady by the name of Mattie Peavey. Both of us had been single until that time. She had worked for the family during sickness.
- I: What kind of entertainment did you have after you got married? Did you go to shows, did you travel?

- H: We did travel quite a bit, went to the picture show quite a bit. Used to go to Hot Springs once in a while and take them hot baths down there.
- I: What happened in Fort Worth that sticks in your mind?
- H: What is outstanding in my mind is when I was young, all the stores on Main Street had wooden porches, A team got spooked and ran away. Got close to the porches and knocked them all down. All the men on the street ran after them; caught them. There was a blacksmith shop at 8th and Houston--Gans. In the early 1900's the streets had creosoted pine blocks. Maybe they were laid by A.E. Want of A.E. Want Wholesale Grocery Company. They would warp when it rained. At first none of the streets were paved. There was a streetcar that went from the courthouse down to the depot. The depot was down where Frank Kent Cadillac is now. The old Post Office was where Continental National Bank is now--it was red sandstone.
- I: Do you remember when they paved the streets in Fort Worth?
- H: They put down blocks. Bois d'arc blocks, Then vitrified white brick. I guess I was about 14 or 15 years old when they put the blocks down. There was a little community north of Handley called Ederville. Ederville is older than Handley. At one time, it was a health resort with a two-story wooden hotel. They had mineral water so they dug these wells. It was about the time the interurban was started. There was a one-room school out there about where there is now on Handley and Brentwood-Stair Road. They just tore that school down about ten years ago. They used to have Christmas programs at that old school. They would back a covered wagon up to the windows on each side of the school for dressing rooms. The boys used one and the girls used one. There was only farm houses from Church Street north to Brentwood-Stair Road. A farmer by the name of Stair lived near Ederville and the street was named after him. Earl Waddell married one of the Stair girls.
- I: Was there any water piped down here?
- H: Water was all supplied by a private well and was piped all over town. When Handley started to grow

so much the pipe was so small the people living on the hill didn't get no water. Finally, they declared the water district out here #2 and they dug two wells over in the west part of Handley fifteen hundred feet deep. The water table lowered about 300 feet in them, so we had to get water from Fort Worth. Fort Worth built a line out to Point Breeze, hooked it into a water tank there. We had to use that for a good long while. The city finally taken it over and we got city water out here. The old Lake Erie down here, that belongs to the Power Company. They used to run excursion trains out here every weekend and holidays. There was a big pavilion out here. They had dances, and carnivals. The grocers and butchers used to have a big barbeque out here every 4th of July. They got so many freeloaders they had to quit that.

I: Handley used to be a city in itself, didn't it?

H: At one time Handley was the largest unincorporated city in the state. I think the City of Fort Worth took Handley in around 1920, I don't know exactly. There was a negro settlement west of Stalcup Road to Stop Six Road. I don't remember their having a church. On Lancaster where the Continental Motel is, that used to be the school house. They sold that property. It was later on sold to that hotel chain--they have been there about five years, I guess now. Lake Erie never was a very good fishing place; the water that was used to cool the electric generators there in the plant kept that water so hot that the fish couldn't live in it. I used to have an old shotgun with an extra long barrel and I would go with the boys down there hunting. When we moved out here there was only a gravel road from Fort Worth to Dallas. We lived here five years before it was ever blacktopped, and then it was just a narrow road you could hardly pass on. In the early 1900's, when we lived in Fort Worth we had to buy our drinking water from a wagon. They come around and charge you 10 cents a barrel for water. What you had left over was dumped in another barrel for wash water. When they finally got enough water to supply Fort Worth, they had two wells west of town where the stockyards is now. They pumped water out of that. I worked for the railroad for 53 years. There are not many old-timers left now.

I: Who were some of the other old-timers?

H: There was a family named Barber out here. They lived right where the Handley Church of Christ is now. They sold the property to the church for a parking lot. There is a family out here named Kell. He was the chief engineer down here at the old power plant. His daughter-in-law still lives out here. They run that Kell Cleaning and Press Shop. There was a blacksmith shop where the Kell Cleaners is now located (6600 E. Lancaster). It was used as a jail for drunks as well as for a blacksmith shop. There is a fellow by the name of Ellis who lives out north of here, Ellis Road named after him. There is a street out here, Halbert Street, named after my father. It's the first street east of Handley Drive. We lived on that street; we lived there in that house about forty-five years. Finally sold that to get a smaller place; it was too big a house to take care of. Had two acres of land there, had about a half acre front yard and that was too much for me to mow. There is another little incident that I happened to think about, happened out here in the north Handley area. There is a private cemetery on a hillside right west of 820 and north of John T. White Road. Somebody went out there and stole a headstone off a grave and taken it uptown and threw it through the front door of the Hollywood Theater. They gave a description of it over the radio. The stone belonged to the grave of Mrs. Bridge's husband; she thought that description fit it. They went out there to see, and theirs was missing, so they went to the police station and had the stone brought back out and had somebody set it back up for them.

END OF INTERVIEW