

Katherine O'Riley Hester

interviewed by

Mrs. W.A. Schmidt

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ORAL HISTORIES OF FORT WORTH, INC.

O'Riley
Mrs. Katherine Hester (O'Riley)

Born: October 19, 1892

PLEASE TELL YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS.

I'm Katherine Hester and my present address is 3126 Forest Ave. I was born October 19, 1892 in Handley, Texas. My parents were Patrick O'Riley and Mary Ellen O'Fitten. They were born and married in Illinois, coming to Fort Worth in 1883.

THAT PROBABLY MEANS THAT SOME OF YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WERE BORN HERE?

They were all born here except two boys and a girl. The oldest boy was Terrance (Frank) Francis Riley. My father dropped the "o" after he had lived here for a while. The next fellow was James. The oldest girl was Mary Margaret, then Bridgette Estella, Callie Irene. The next one was a boy, John William, then me, Katherine; I also had a younger brother, Richard Andrew who was known as Jack.

WHERE DID THEY LIVE IN FORT WORTH?

They lived around here after marriage. My older brother went to Michigan and lived there for many years. James lived in the Riverside area and the next one lived on the north side. Our oldest sister lived in Dallas most of her life. The next one lived in Polytechnic; the other sister lived in Handley. Jack made my home his home after he came out of the service so lived in Handley.

DO YOU KNOW THE REASON FOR YOUR PARENTS MOVING TO TEXAS?

Well, they just thought that it was a new country and they felt like they could do a little better here than they were doing in Illinois or Indiana. My father was a farmer and stockman. They bought property right in this area on the other side of the railroad. It was adjoining the farm of the old Turkey Knob that was an Indian look-out post years ago. The Indians could sit up there on Turkey Knob and look around the country. The present location of Turkey Knob is about the 6800 block of Willard Street, south of the present location of Handley...it being south of Lake Erie which is now the property of Texas Electric Service Company, the lake having been drained and abandoned. Some of my family was involved with the building of the dam for the old Lake Erie, two of my brothers worked mules to scrapers and plows to help build the dam that Lake Erie was built around. It was owned originally by a man by the name of Cravey. He sold it to Texas Electric or North Texas Traction Co. While it was a farm and no Lake Erie there, just a hillside, we found arrowheads and all sorts of things.

DID YOU SAVE THEM?

Well, I did have a lot of them; I don't know if I still have them. There was a branch that ran through our farm that was the main tributary to building Lake Erie, filling it out.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF BUILDING THIS?

For an amusement spot. They had a pavilion where you could go and sit on the edge of the water. You could play cards or dominoes...or just sit and talk...or just look at the water if you wanted to. There was a beautiful dance floor in the center if you wanted to dance. First we had an Italian band; then later we had other bands there. It was fun. They had a roller skating rink and a merry-go-round. They had canoes or boats on the lake where you could rent one to go boating if you wished to. They had a chute boat that was built up on the edge of Turkey Knob way up high. They raised the boats up by some kind of lift; you got in and came down that chute and hit the water. That was a thrill for many people. The park was beautifully kept up. There were flowers planted in every bed with nice walks; it was just a lovely amusement center. There was a stage where they would show picture shows. We had a vocalist who would sing. They would illustrate her songs on those canvas curtains and it was beautiful.

DID THEY HAVE A GENERAL ADMISSION THAT YOU COULD GO TO ANYTHING IN THERE OR DID YOU PAY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL THINGS YOU DID AT THE LAKE ERIE AMUSEMENT PARK?

You could go in there any time and there was no charge; if you danced, you paid a small admission, I think it was a quarter, and dance all you wanted to. Of course, if you bought cold drinks or ice cream cone, pop corn or anything like that, there was a fee...and there was an admission to the skating rink.

WHAT ABOUT THIS LADY SINGING? DID YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR THAT?

No, that was all free. You could sit up in the balcony and look down at her singing there. It was two story, but open all the way around. Chairs and tables were there for you to sit and have picnics if you wanted to. You could play any kind of games or just sit and visit.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A FORERUNNER OR COMBINATION OF CASA MANANA AND SIX FLAGS OVER TEXAS.

It was a lovely place, just beautiful! I hate to think of something like that falling into disuse. The two story burned; then they built one that was one story. It was demolished when the recreation center was broken up. Other parks were built around the area. The only way to get to this one was on the interurban unless you had your own conveyance. It started in the early 1900's and was a recreation center until after I was married. That's where we had balloon ascensions too. They had this balloon on the ground. I don't know what they filled it with, possibly helium of some kind, I don't know, but the balloon was held down by people until it was sufficiently filled to go into the air. Someone would sit in the basket wearing a parachute. It went up so high; then the passenger jumped out and came to the ground by parachute. I wasn't brave enough to do that.

DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT THERE WERE ORIGINALLY SIX DWELLINGS IN HANDLEY?

After she died, there was a log post office located on what is now the corner of Handley Dr. and E. Lancaster. Mrs. Rose Weiler was postmistress. Before that Mrs. Helen Calais had the post office in her home across the railroad. It was built up real high to keep it out of the water level. They had cross ties from the railroad instead of steps. When I first started coming down for the mail, I couldn't get up them because my legs were so short. I got on my hands and knees and crawled. Mrs. Weiler would say, "Well, Kitty, I've got mail for you this morning." She had the sweetest voice. When I first started to school, that was the population here...Mr. William D. Weiler was the operator of the T & P station. Mr. S. M. Haynie, who was the grandfather of the Kell Cleaners had the general store at his home on Lancaster. Jim Hawthorne service station there now. Mrs. Kell's father, Tome, was related to Major Handley who lived with he and Ada Kell. They all came from Alabama. The first blacksmith that I can remember was Mr. John Hart and also a Mr. Ferguson. People had to come there to have their plow points sharpened when they were tilling the soil. They also shod horses so it was a general blacksmith shop. There were no brick buildings. It was all frame buildings with kind of porches with board sidewalks in front of each one. While we call it Lancaster now, it was Front Street then and everything kind of built up around the T & P station. Hunter Street was Baker; Church was Darnell; Erie was West; Forest was Daggett; Handley was Jennings; Halbert was East and Routt was Graham. South of the T & P station was the Interurban. They built the power plant, car barn and a depot. The Interurban came out what is now East Lancaster until it got to where 820 goes over the road; then it turned back under the road, under the railroad and circled back up to the depot. This was to pick up the people on the south side of Front Street.

WHERE DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL?

In Handley, right up the street here at Forest and Hart. Of course, we lived on a farm way back out here, but everybody went to school. They either walked or rode horseback. My first teacher was the father of one of our local doctors, Charles Foster. His sister, Bessie was another teacher. Mrs. Annie Carrington was another teacher. She was a member of one of the older families here, the Wilsons. I started school and finished in the same location. The building, built 1895, immediately north of the old Masonic Lodge is a part of the old school building where I went. It's still standing there. The people who own it have just recently remodeled it. One of our salesmen came back once and said, "That's the funniest built building. There's something in the center that is up like that." I said, "Well, do you want me to tell you what it is? We had two rooms but they were divided by partition doors that were pulled up in the attic by pulleys. On Friday afternoons when we had spelling bees or geography matches, we would open those doors and throw all of

them together. The primary grades was down at one end with the higher grades at the other end. When we needed water, two of us would be appointed. We would get our bucket and a stick and put the bucket on the stick and go to get water. We pumped it with a hand pump. Of course, we had an outdoor toilet and a coal stove in the center of each room. All of us children had the responsibility to keep those stoves going. The first one who got there started the fire. We had long home made benches and no desks. They built another school down on the east side in 1910 where the Continental Inn is now. Later they built what we called the high school on Haynie Street. Then they built Eastern Hills so Handley is now a middle school.

TELL ME ABOUT THESE OLD CEMETERIES OUT HERE.

There was one cemetery known as the old Handley cemetery which was land donated by the Tidball family. This is a public burial ground; anyone who needed a spot to bury their dead could use it. It's south of 303 and close to the power plant. If your neighbor on the other side of you passed away, someone notified the next neighbor; that neighbor got on his horse and made a circle around the different places and told all of us. All the young men, and the older men too, who were able to use a pick and shovel came down and dug the grave; after the casket was lowered, they covered the grave. It was all free; there was never any charges on anything. It has been abandoned for some time.

YOU MENTIONED THAT THERE IS A CEMETERY ON THE NORTH SIDE OF 303. COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT ONE?

The Oak Grove Cemetery was for the colored. There was one room box building (called Ebenezer) there that was used for religious services during the weekend (and protracted meetings). The colored children in the community went to school there during the weekdays. I understand it was later moved to Stop Six.

WHAT DID YOU DO FOR RECREATION?

Well, of course, we had parties and square dances; we always had square dances in the community. We usually had two colored men who played the violin and guitar. We cleared out the furniture in a room at someone's house; everyone would get in there and dance and have a good time...visit and so forth. If it was too far for us to go, somebody furnished a wagon and team; then 25 or 30 of us would pile in that wagon and go out and dance and come back in about twelve that night. That was our recreation.. .we built our own. Santa Claus didn't come to our house every day. He just made one visit a year.

HOW DID YOU CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

Well, by religious services and a feast...very much like Christmas is celebrated at the present time.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCHES THAT WERE OUT IN THIS AREA?

The first church here was the Presbyterian, located near the old Handley Cemetery. It was more or less used as a union church since the Methodist, Baptists and Presbyterians all used it, as well as what we called the progressive Christians...the one that has music. We didn't have a Church of Christ until later. My father and his niece started a Catholic church on what is now called South Erie (south of railroad) around 1907-08. The first one burned; then they rebuilt. When they built St. Rita's up on the boulevard, it was abandoned so the colored people got it.

SO THAT'S WHERE ST. RITA'S ORIGINATED!

At that time, it didn't have a number; it was just down on Erie Street on the 1000 block. When you crossed the railroad it's the 1000 block. Thirty-One is the last block on this side. Our first regular minister was a little Italian priest, Parachini; the next was an elderly gentleman, Father Harrington. We had Father Langanhorst out here for a while. Father Guelt was at St. Patricks in 1897 and early 1900's.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

My cousin, who was my father's oldest niece, was Molly Farrell. Any number of people can tell you about Molly Farrell. She had an original dressmaking shop in the old Wheat Building downtown and sewed for the wealthier people. She had an artistic magic and knew how to use it. She would stand me up in the middle of the floor, wrap a piece of material around me, cut it out, sew it up...and it was wonderful. Her mother and my father were brother and sister. The two families moved here together. My father and mother, with the three children came from Indiana on the train. They stopped to visit the Farrells in Rockwall. After gathering the crops, they all moved here where there were no buildings or anything. They took the ox wagons and went to East Texas to get enough lumber from a little saw mill to build their homes and barns. None of it was dressed lumber; it was all just logs that had been sawed. This type of living is something our children can't comprehend.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE BEFORE THEY STARTED MAKING STREETS FOR A LITTLE TOWN INSTEAD OF HAVING A COMMUNITY?

Well, I guess that started about 1910, but the streets were not named; there were just roads built up...first one and then another would come along and stake him off a lot and build a home. That's how the town started.

HOW DID THEY ACQUIRE THIS PROPERTY?

It was all farm land. Mr. Groves and I got some old records of old places. We have a drawer full of old abstracts. Mr. Haynie

originally owned this property where we are; he paid \$2.50 an acre for it. Some of the drivers and employees of the North Texas Traction Co. started building their homes here. That was really the building of Handley. The first Interurban came through in November of 1902.

HANDLEY WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST UN-INCORPORATED TOWNS. DO YOU KNOW OF ANY BASIS FOR THIS?

We just all lived here in the community; no one wanted to incorporate the town. Later we tried to incorporate but the idea was shelved because several were against it. They weren't going to be told what to do by a few Handley people. We went to bed one night in Handley and woke up the next morning in Fort Worth. Up to then we had volunteer fire departments. When the siren sounded, everybody in the country went to try to fight the fire.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER CHURCHES YOU COULD TELL ME ABOUT?

The Baptist built a basement out on what is now Church Street. The Methodist started their building around 1907-08. It is still standing and is called the Forest Ave. Baptist Church. The Methodist went up the hill and built another place. The church next to me here on Forest was the Progressive Christian, or Disciples of Christ, like the First Christian downtown. They built the basement and had their meetings there for a long time. Later they put a top. It was sold to the Assembly of God. The Masonic Lodge Hall was located and still stands at 3024 Forest although a new Temple has more recently been built on Pollard St.

WHERE DID YOU MEET YOUR HUSBAND?

Well, he was from Tennessee; some of his relatives lived in this area; he came here to visit. I met him after he arrived. We were married in 1910 at the courthouse when it was a fairly new building. The old courthouse burned. When we went into town to shop, it was an all day affair.

DID YOU EVER TAKE GRAIN OVER TO RANDOL MILL?

Yes Ma'am, many, many times. It was one of the prettiest spots you can imagine, sitting right on the river bank. That was before the river became so contaminated. It was located about the 8300 block of Randol Mill Road. All the farmers carried their grist to be ground into flour and meal. It was powered by a very large water wheel moved by the force of water and had huge stones that ground up the meal. It was a wonderful sight for us little country children to see that big wheel turned by water. There were beautiful shade trees that was almost like a park. Robert Randol operated a store that sold tobacco, etc.

I have an old Star Telegram photo of my father sitting at the end of our house. (Pointing to picture on wall). That's the first house he built. One of the neighbors wrote up birthday celebrations and sent them to the Star Telegram. All the family (35-40) prepared a dinner and celebrated his birthday. One of my friends painted this picture for me from that news item. We sat out in the yard in the summertime; in the evening after our evening meal, we all got out in the yard and knelt in family prayer. Then we bathed and went to bed. My father said that we never had slaves because we didn't believe in slavery. A colored lady came in and helped with our housework and taught us children to sew and cook. She was a wonderful person named Elizabeth Smith. Her husband, Riley Smith worked on the farm. I imagine you could find records on them because their home was on the hill where Forty Oaks Shopping Center is right now. They had two or three children of their own and looked after us too. My mother died in 1898. I found a receipt from George Gause where he buried my mother and charged \$20. Of course, I can't remember this but my father said that they kept her at home until time for the funeral at St. Patrick's; then they took her out to Northside and buried in Calvary. She had a heart condition and was crippled with arthritis; walked on two crutches. Daddy said that she never was a real strong person, but she bore eight children so she must have been pretty strong. My father was active right up to two months before he died. He had fallen in the yard while putting out feed for the cows. I couldn't lift him so leaned him up against a fencepost, called one of the neighbors. The neighbors helped me get a blanket around him and get him in the house. It was February and very cold. He didn't get up and walk after that, but he kept his right mind right up to the last breath he took. When he wanted to read something that was a little difficult, he would take my glasses. I would say, "Pappy, you take my glasses and I have to feel my way around!"

Not long after my mother passes away, my brother picked a man up out on the road. He said that he had an awful red face. A few days later, he broke out with the measles. We had a country doctor here who called the health physician from Fort Worth. They took one look at Jim and said that he had smallpox. They vaccinated everyone, quarantined all of us. We really all had the measles! Our father said that it was a pesthouse...and he had to do the cooking and wait on the whole bunch of us. Two of the girls had pneumonia; I'll tell you, we had a time!

WHAT DID YOU DO IF YOU NEEDED A DOCTOR?

We had a country doctor that lived up on the hill here where the school is now. He was Dr. A. E. Graham. Here he would come in his horse and buggy! Dr. Herschel Thomas came in after that. We had to go get them on horseback. Horses were very important in those days. Most of us had a surrey with a fringe on top. We worked two horses, but some buggies had just one horse. I

had a horse that I rode and drove that lived to be 35 years old. He was an old horse that was full of ginger until the day he died. We all had hitching posts. I remember when Fort Worth had hitching posts. The streets were paved with Bois de arc blocks shoved down in the earth to keep you out of the mud. I remember that one of the early hardware stores was Anderson's; there were dry goods stores, Parker & Lowe and Ben Levinson. There was a Drumm Seed Co., but I don't remember the names of the 3-4 saloons because we never went near those things. Later on, we finally had a picture show in Handley where Kell Cleaners are now. This is somewhere between 1914-1920.

DID YOU HAVE WELLS FOR GETTING WATER?

We all had cisterns, but for our culinary use and wash water we hauled it from the artesian wells at 5¢ a barrel. There were seven wonderful artesian wells. The first was at Forest and Kerr. It was pumped by hand. There were two flowing wells on the back of the lot where I now live on the corner of Kerr at the Alley; another one was located near the old cemetery. One was located on what is now Routt St. about the 6800 block. Two were located on what is now Canton Dr. They were all abandoned after handley was annexed in December of 1945 or 46.

When I was a little girl, our farm adjoined the Farrell farm on the west; just beyond that was the Willi, Stallcup, Russell and Danner farms. The Cromwells, Barnes, Cravie, Bush, Tidball and McKinney farms were all nearby. We knew everybody in the country. We lived neighbors; if you got sick and weren't able to work your crop, the neighbors took their crew and worked your crop. There was always a big harvest time. We raised corn, oats, wheat, cane and cotton besides worlds of cattle. That was my father's main thing...cattle, horses and mules. He liked Red Durham cattle since they made such good beef cattle. We always had plenty....and killed 8-10 hogs at hog killing, making sausage and curing hams and shoulders. Since I didn't have a mother, my father would go buy material. Mrs. Farrel and Molly would cut the garments and make them. All my sisters sewed except the one just older than me; she couldn't hem a cup towel. She never did like it and wouldn't sit down and start. My older sisters would say, "Well, if you don't want to make it, I'll just let you go." Then she would beg them into the notion to make her some clothes. Those old treadle sewing machines were hard on the back. My mother's was so old that it didn't have a drop head; it sat up and had a box on it. When my folks came down here they brought only their most treasured possessions with them. I went up to Indiana 3-4 years ago, trying to find my grandmother's grave. She was buried in St. Patrick's in Washington townsite. I never did find it.

Some of the homes I remember as oldest are located at 3125 Halbert, the NE corner of Hunter and Church and the SE corner of Hunter at Craig (old Craig home). The McRees or McBees had the two story house at 3125 Halbert; the Weilers were at 3100 Handley. There was one at 3101 Handley Dr., another at 3104 Forest and also 3112 Forest. A plant shop is now in what originally was a log cabin. Widow Word lived in one house; Dr. Thomas lived in the two story at 3120 Forest.

In much later times, Dr. J. Frank Norris had a large home where the present City National Bank is now located. His children attended the Handley school.

Dr. Fletcher Craig had his home on the corner of Hunter and Craig. There was "Fox" Craig and Cleo (music, Janie (music) and Eva (Latin).