

Robert A. White, Jr.

Manuscript

1975

Ruby Schmidt Collection of BiCentennial Interviews

ORAL HISTORIES OF FORT WORTH, INC.

I remember.....

Carnegie Library with the Chinamen and ricksha; two floors of books where I happily lost myself; the mast adon's skull and tusks; the streetcar ride to town with its singing wheels.

Guns, Brownies, Kress, where I bought Big Little Books; the opening of South Main, where my dad was an ice man for Crystal Ice Company and presided over a truck with a radio entertainer; his ability to go into a dark mule lot full of half-wild mules and pick out his two mules, then service his ice route from South Main to Eighth Avenue and still play baseball at the school yard in the evenings.

My mother, washing clothes in an old iron pot and tubs of rinse water for which I had collected the wood for the fire. Climbing the thorn tree behind the school; hunting crayfish in the huge field behind the school where the Quarter-master is now located. Getting stung by bees from our beehive when I got too near; listening to Tarzan of the Apes on the radio and thrilling as he said "Kagoda" to the ape which he was fighting.

Miss Langford, our principal, a very great lady; rubber-gun fights with my brother, who always won. His scooter made of a skate; a bop (a short 2 x 4 and a stick). My father's Durant and Ford truck. My brother climbing the flag pole at Hubbard Heights; his quickness as short stop on the first team while I was right short on the second team; playing Wolf over the River; seeing a Punch and Judy show. Listening to the Dempsey-Tunney fight at Whitley Drug Store; going to church at the Steel Mills Church of Christ. Making our airplanes from three or four pieces of wood; I still think the World War I Spads were the best.

The imaginary battles which the Yanks fought with the Germans, setting one of my planes on fire for realism, its falling on the roof, and how quickly I got on top of the house to put it out.

I remember

Going to the free movies at the Tivoli, the Worth, the Liberty and the Majestic; Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. and Rin Tin Tin.

Louis Fox playing "To the Colors" as the flag came down at Jennings Junior High; the wood shop at Daggett, my sister singing in a play when I was the terrible tempered landlord, Mr. Wade, during intermission.

During the Depression we lost our home in Fort Worth and moved to the country, to a farm between Lake Worth and Azle; cutting down trees with my brother, using a double bit saw and double headed ax. The thrill of a huge supply of logs prepared against a cold winter; the sight and sound of a falling Red Oak tree.

I remember the hoeing of corn on the farm, the bed we made on four poles, the tank by the windmill where we bathed in well water, milking cows, pushing the car through the mud, the sight of our five cows coming up the path from the woods to be milked.

I remember

The wood fire in the fireplace and how good those beans tasted; pulling up Johnson grass roots in a huge pile necessary for a field of sweet potatoes and the warm pride the sight of them gave, the feeling of riches when they were harvested. Plowing with a huge mule, a Morgan, a black horse, a red horse, and a small mule, Piedmont, who also pulled a cart which my brother had made with an old pair of cultivator wheels.

Going to school at Azle, where we rode the Blue Goose schoolbus; where I got into a fight and acted terribly, wrote poetry, played sandlot football, and boxed with the welter weight champ, a friend; the Golden Glove fights, the thrillers and Blue-beard's Castle.

I remember.....

Joining the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression. My uncle inspired me to join. We had lost our home in Fort Worth and were living on the farm and I was wondering what sort of a job I could find at a time when most of the men were out of work. Somehow I could not see myself as a farmer for the rest of my life.

My dad, knowing my thinking, advised me and I eagerly accepted the idea. Food, clothing shelter, work, and \$25.00 a month to help my parents, my brother and sister, and perhaps a chance to learn a trade for the approaching time when I would be a man. I would get \$5.00 per month for my personal use; this was at a time when \$5.00 was a huge amount, with \$25.00 sent home to my parents.

We went to town where I spent the night with my grandmother. Next morning I went to the old Post Office and joined a group of young men on the second floor. After signing in, we were sent to Carlsbad, New Mexico (SP 1837 Civilian Conservation Corps) where I would spend three months. We went by train to Carlsbad, then by truck thirty miles through the mountains where, nestled at the foot of a sheared-off hill, the barracks of a new life awaited us.

It was night when we arrived and went to the supply room to draw our bedding and then were directed to a barracks where we spent the night. For some reason which I never learned, the next morning when we again went to the supply room to be issued denim work clothes, khaki dress clothes (shirts and trousers), black tie, shoes, socks, two face towels, one bath towel, belt, two sheets, two blankets and a comforter, the sergeant looked us over and then sent me all over camp looking for a pair of "sky hooks".

The food was excellent. By rotation and for failure to make our bed properly, we were assigned K.P. duty. I always accepted this duty as being my turn or my time or as punishment for not making my bed correctly, although it did prevent going to town over the weekend. I remember Louis Sanchez showing me how to make my bed according to CCC regulations on the first morning.

The first time I was in the camp, we rode G.I. trucks to huge granite boulders which with crowbars we wrenched out of the ground and turned end over end up a wooden ramp to the floor bed of the truck. They were carried to the site of a stone shelter house where the bigger blocks formed the base, then built up with a small amount of gradual slant back for each level. These granite boulders were built into a shelter house at Sitting Bull Falls, where we climbed the hill by the falls and drank the cool water at the top of the mountain.

For some reason I was taken off the detail of hauling rock and assigned the job of removing the cement to a uniform depth after the rocks were placed.

I remember the wooden box at one end of the truck that held our sack lunches of two huge sandwiches and an apple and coffee cooked over a sagebrush fire when the temperature was below freezing, and how good the coffee was. I have drunk a lot of coffee since, but never has it tasted as good as on those cold days.

By the time the three months of my first enlistment were up, we had progressed up to about six feet all the way around. The houses were for summer visitors to Sitting Bull Falls. With some companions, I climbed the face of this hill to the source of Sitting Bull Falls, pausing to go into a cave where I got a preview of Carlsbad Caverns. I was later to visit and lead my companions on the trip into the depths of the earth.

Saturday nights I went with Henry Chapman and Louis Sanchez and others to Carlsbad, New Mexico, where we usually went to the Cactus Theatre and then back to camp over thirty miles of prairie and mountains. I believe the price was 35¢. One night we went farther uptown to a higher priced theatre, the Cavern. Outside the door a crowd was gathered around a man with a microphone.

"I see we have some young men from the CC Camp," he said. "I'll ask one of them to answer some questions," he said, thrusting the microphone at me. "Who won the football game in 1930 between Notre Dame and Army?" he asked.

I didn't know but had to think fast. "It wasn't Colorado that year," I said.

"Thank you, young man," he said. "Here is a ticket to see Champagne Waltz,"

which I did.

Food was excellent, being a pattern of the army fare I was later to enjoy because I was serving and being served by Uncle Sam with the finest of food and care. I remember washing dishes that Thanksgiving and the huge amount of kettles we used to serve a very sumptuous meal to my companions and me. I remember cleaning the grease trap and signing the CC Blues which my uncle had taught me and which I taught the camp. After my three months were over, I returned home. Soon after, my family and I moved to Indian Oaks (in Lake Worth). I tried school for a while, but with the Depression still on, although waning, I again felt that I could find the answer to many problems in the CC Camp, so I went to the old Post Office and signed up again. When I walked into the group of waiting boys, I made friends with Cyldon Donahue, who was one of the finest men I have ever known. We served together later in the Army, the Second Division, at San Antonio.

First we went to Kingman, Arizona, where we worked in the Park Department building shelter houses. In the evening after work and wonderful chow, if I was not on K.P., I boxed all comers. One who saw me box arranged for a fight in the Copper Gloves, but the lieutenant in charge of the camp wouldn't allow it for some reason which I never knew.

A well stocked reading room kept me informed on the world with all the news, and I remember helping a boy learn to read and write during the evenings.

After three months, as the winter snows were beginning, we moved to Tucson, Arizona, where we worked with the County Park Service (CP-1A1837) on shelter houses under the pine trees. I worked for a while, before my time was up, as a nightwatchman for the trucks.

I remember on extremely cold nights going into mess hall to eat supper and how good the coffee was, although not as good as the coffee had been in Carlsbad cooked over a sagebrush fire, but still one of the pleasant memories I had in my Civilian Conservation Corps adventures.

I remember.....

Joining the Army to serve my country before Pearl Harbor; recruit training at San Antonio in the Second Division. The thrill of "Pass in Review" as the band played and we moved in ordered ranks past the reviewing stand of generals and the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt. I remember Pearl Harbor, Camp Claiborne, the hospital, home; working at Armour Packing Company, going to college at TCU, and now, grateful to the good Lord for living in Fort Worth, Texas, the 200th year of American Independence.

(The foregoing are nostalgic memories of Bob White, whose mother contributed the picture of Mrs. Frances Ayres Sanderson, who is buried in the small cemetery on the hill at Ramada Inn Central in Fort Worth, Texas.)