Interview (second of three) with Bernard Mayfield

Date of Interview: October 25, 2001

Place of Interview: Jacksonville, Texas

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Transcriber: Ann Chandler

TOPIC: CHEROKEE COUNTY: Railroads in Jacksonville, Education in Jacksonville, History of Education in Cherokee County (Interviews into Tape 2)

JP: I want to follow up just a little bit with Mr. Mayfield with a question that slipped his mind. He has an awfully good memory, but it had slipped his mind who the well-known star was who helped publicize the tomato industry in Cherokee County.

BM: Her name was Janis Joplin and she was the daughter of one of the founders of the tomato industry, C. D. Jarratt and at the time of the Texas Centennial in 1936, she was already nationally known as an actress and a celebrity and so the State of Texas chose her to be the pin-up girl, you might say -- the lady who would publicize the tomato industry in Cherokee County throughout the nation during the Texas Centennial in 1936.

JP: Janis Joplin was well known.

BM: Janis Jarratt.

JP: Oh, I thought you said Janis Joplin.

BM: Did I say Joplin? See my memory slips a gear once in a while. Janis Jarratt.

JP: We talked a little bit before we began the tape about things that have put Cherokee County on the map and Mr. Mayfield had one other thought on that about the railroads. Why don't you say some things about how Jacksonville was a railroad town.

BM: Jacksonville had three railroads that came through here, which is an unusually large amount for a town no bigger than Jacksonville was at the time. I guess the population at the time the third railroad came through here was probably about 2000 population. We would probably have been better known as a railroad town, except Palestine in Anderson County had the division shop for the International Great Northern, or the Missouri Pacific at that time. They had a railroad hospital and were well publicized all over for being a railroad town, but Jacksonville, of course, had two other railroads. The St. Louis and Southwestern, which was a part of the Cotton Belt route and then it had the Texas and New Orleans line, which was a part of the Southern Pacific system. The Southern Pacific put one of its divisional headquarters here in Jacksonville. That is, they had the round table where they

could turn the locomotives around, dispatch trains either way on the line. They also had the repair shop and the buildings where they kept the parts for the locomotives and the cars. For that reason, Jacksonville was known as a division headquarters even though Palestine was also a division, of course, for another railroad. I think that if Palestine had not had that division headquarters in Anderson County, Jacksonville would have been the best-known small railroad town in East Texas at that time.

JP: So what was the heyday of the railroad?

BM: Of the railroading here in Jacksonville? It would have been during – well at one time we shipped all kinds of produce, cotton, but I suppose the premiere time of railroading in Jacksonville would have been from 1900 when both peaches and tomatoes were being shipped from here in great volume. That lasted until World War II, I'd say. Until 1942 I would say. After World War II it never came back with the great strength it had before the war and then one-by-one the produce that had brought the railroad here in the first place began to die out. And the timber industry also began to wane and the cotton industry was not what it used to be. And so first the Cotton Belt left. Well, you might say that the Cotton Belt and the Southern Pacific went down about the same time, which would have been along starting in the '50s. They stopped shipping iron ore out of here and the timber business had gone down to the extent that there wasn't much volume there, so it really wasn't worthwhile for either one of those railroad systems to keep the trains rolling through Cherokee County anymore. So by 1970, those two railroads were out of Cherokee County. We are down to one railroad now, which is now – the old International and Great Northern was the original name of the railroad, then it became part of the Missouri Pacific System, and presently is the Union Pacific System. That railroad is still here but we don't ship anything out of Cherokee County on that railroad that I know about. The only thing I know that is shipped into Cherokee County on that system is granular vinyl, which is used in the plastic industry here in the county.

JP: So, as a railroad town, we are virtually dead?

BM: That's true.

JP: Of course, of a lot of little towns across the country that would certainly be true.

BM: Palestine lost the shops to the Union Pacific, and I guess the railroad hospital is gone now, and Palestine is really scrambling around to find something to replace that. Jacksonville was far-sighted enough to replace what the railroad brought in here with both a variety of small industry, which kept the people employed here.

JP: Well, I've seen a squib saying that Jacksonville was for a small town it had more small industry than any other small town in East Texas.

BM: I expect that's true. And there's a variety in it too. Because all of it, I guess, rotates around the plastic business, which was brought here originally in about 1954 or '55 by Tally Nichols who started a toy pistol industry. But involved in that industry was a knowledge of molding plastics, the injection molding business, tool and die business that pulled in people who were trained in that and who started their own tool and die shops and then you just have a variety of industries that spun off of the plastic making in numerous . . . and about the same time, the plant industry – green house plants – began to become a major money-maker here in the county and they use an enormous amount of plastic products. Containers and shipping boxes and that type of thing, which fed off of each other. It has really worked well for our economy.

JP: Okay, we're going to switch gears and start on another topic. Why don't you discuss education in the county and so we are going to talk some about – first of all I'm going to ask you about your growing up and how you were educated and where you were educated, what the school was like and then we will talk about the general development of education in Cherokee County.

BM: All right. I was lucky enough to live in the Jacksonville Independent School District and I started school at what we call the old East Side School building, which is located where the Jacksonville Tomato Bowl is located now. Jacksonville had a pretty progressive school system at that time.

JP: That would have been . . . Tell us the year.

BM: Okay, I started school in 1936 in the dead of the Depression. Even though the economy was really down, the schools were functioning as well as they ever had. We had good teachers in place; we had good administrators. In the 1920s when things were really booming, we had built a brand-new high school and renovated the three grammar schools that we had here. So we were in pretty good shape going into the Depression. Of course, that lasted for about 10 years and then at the end of the Depression the government did a great deal to help local school systems refurbish their school buildings, and Jacksonville was fortunate enough to receive government aid on the Works Progress Administration to get labor to build a new grammar school building for the East Side. They don't call it the new East Side School building any more; it's just East Side Elementary School.

JP: So, East Side's building was built by WPA money? WPA labor?

BM: Labor. I wouldn't say that all of it was. I'm sure that the master technicians on it were paid by the local school system, but the government contributed a great deal toward the common labor on the school.

JP: Did you live close enough then that you walked to school?

BM: No, I lived just on the edge of the city limits. I was too close in to ride the bus at the time, but too far away to walk and my father carried me – he worked in town; he was a building contractor – and I had to go to school every morning usually by about 7:00 even though we didn't have, as they used to say, "books" didn't take up until 8:00. So I had a little while to kill before school every morning. But, if you lived in the country, if you had attended grammar school in a common school district, a rural school district, then you would have had to really catch a bus early, which would have been probably about 6:00 in the morning and would have to ride, probably four or five miles to get to that school, and if you graduated from a common grammar school and you wanted to continue a high school education, you had to come into Jacksonville or one of the independent school districts like Rusk or Alto, Wells. Then you had to ride the bus all the way into one of those schools. In my case it would have been Jacksonville. Fortunately, before I graduated – at one time I did attend a country school for two years, but we moved back to town before I reached high school age, so I never had to ride a bus, but I remember in the two years that I went to this country grammar school, I would see the high school kids come up to – this was Cove Springs, which is out northwest of Jacksonville – and they would board the Jacksonville Independent School District bus and ride the five miles into town and then when school was over at the end of the day – about 3:30, I guess – they would get on the bus and they would be brought back out to Cove Springs Common school house and they would all get off and then they would probably have to walk– some of them would have to walk an additional three miles to get home, because the schools did not have enough money to keep those buses just traveling and traveling. Common Schools were usually built about five miles apart so that no child had to walk more than 2 ½ miles to get to school every day. So even after you made the round trip on the bus, some kids that I know did have to walk 2 ½ miles, or at least 2 miles to get home in the evening. In the wintertime it was pretty dark by the time they got there. Then when they started out in the morning to catch that bus by about 6:00 or 6:30, all lot of them had to travel through the woods in the dark. They had to know the cow trails pretty well to not get lost and get to the local school to catch the bus into Jacksonville. So it was still pretty hard going.

JP: Besides that kind of thing, which is hard for us to imagine in this day and time, what else was really different about your school experience and what kids have now?

BM: The kids now have computers and all these technical gadgets that you play with and when we started to school, our list of school supplies would be a nickel Big Chief Tablet, I have one right in my desk here, still has the picture of the Indian chief on the front of it and the paper in it was not finely ground; was pretty rough. If you could afford it, you had a pencil with an eraser on the end of it, which probably cost about a nickel, I guess. If your father was a farmer and had made a bad crop that year, not much money off his farming, you probably ended up with what we called a cedar pencil, which had the hardest lead in it that you could imagine. It would actually cut the paper as you wrote along. The eraser in it, if it had an eraser, was a little daub of rubber stuck to the very top of it, which you were liable to lose the first day you carried it to school. And you might have some construction paper, we called it. I don't know what they call it now. It was a little sheaf of colored paper that you carried, that you made cut-outs when you were pretty young. You bought a little bottle of paste, I guess, to paste the cut-outs on the bulletin board or something.

JP: What about lunches?

BM: Lunches? We were very fortunate. Some, even in the country schools, if it was a pretty good country school, they could qualify for government money to feed the students lunch– this was during the Depression. I don't think they had this before the Depression of the 1930s – they would have a little lunchroom set up in the country school. You could buy a very delicious and nutritious meal at lunchtime for anywhere from ten or fifteen cents.

JP: And you always had enough money to buy it?

BM: Not all the time.

JP: Sometimes you did.

BM: If the money ran short, and you didn't have – in the Jacksonville school they had a larger lunchroom and they had more variety. You could order a hamburger for a nickel or a plate lunch that cost a little more. If you lived on a farm of course, you had home-raised milk. And you could bring your own bottle of milk in a little glass milk bottle made specifically for that purpose, which you could arrange to get one. They usually belonged to a milk company, but we had one of them. So many days I went to school with my milk bottle and ordered a hamburger for lunch, which cost a nickel, and it was an adequate lunch for a small boy and nutritious and delicious at the same time. If my father had enough money, I could get what we called a plate lunch, which was a full family-sized plate of vegetables

and meat and bread. I think that it cost about fifteen cents, I think for that. A delicious meal.

JP: Yes. Lunches have changed a lot too. Just like so many other things – transportation. Is there anything else you would like to say about your own experience with school? You graduated about when?

BM: I graduated from Jacksonville High School in 1947. That was two years after World War II ended. I would also like to say that during the war there were a good number of boys that I know that maybe for one reason or another had been detained in school for a while. Maybe they had had to work and had gone to a country school, and maybe were a couple of years behind in getting to high school. Well, they became draft age before they graduated from high school and some of them never got their diplomas. Others here lately in a ceremony at the school board last week received their diplomas. Five or six of them that I knew personally; they were older than I was, that had to go to the service and after the war things started really booming along and so they wanted to get started in a job and didn't go back and continue their high school education and get their diplomas, but then the school board now awarded diplomas to them.

JP: At sixty-five?

BM: Yes, sixty-five years old and they finally got their high school diplomas.

JP: That is a wonderful story for the school board to follow through in that way. Did you play any sports in school?

BM: No, I was too small. My family on both sides was rather thin, not very muscular. We were sturdy enough. We weren't ill or anything like that, but the coaches – and I wasn't very tall so I couldn't play basketball, so none of the coaches ever looked toward me, or asked that I come out and play. We had, for those that didn't come out for regular sports, organized sports in high school, in grammar school you had recesses then and you had school ground instructors who put you through a regular series of exercises before they turned you loose to play baseball or whatever game you wanted to play. In high school they had P.E. classes, which were a regular part of your school credit, and one of the coaches, of course, put you through calisthenics and you would also have some organized sports. You would play a little basketball just to familiarize you with the game, but you didn't represent the high school in a contest or anything like that.

JP: We want to talk a little bit about the history of education in Cherokee County and the way in which there was a development of the schools to the present time. You have mentioned

the common schools, so can you go way on back in the history and kind of trace it to the present time.

BM: Okay. In the beginning of the settlement of Cherokee County, what few schools we had here were private schools. They were usually taught by a man or woman who had had some schooling in an older state, most of the people in East Texas came from the states in the old South – Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia and those sections. By the 1840s when people started coming to Cherokee County, some of them had a pretty good education, enough to teach school well. They would just advertise around in the community that they were going to teach a school for a month or two, and they would check at the farmhouses around and see if anyone had children of the age and wanted to come to school and tell them how much it would cost.

JP: School by subscription?

BM: Yes, subscription schools and let them know what they were going to teach for that month or two. You didn't have regular periods of school, semester, like we do now. It was just whoever was teaching the school set his own schedule. And if you wanted to come during the time he was willing to teach, that was about the only schooling that you got. The first school that I've ever heard of in this county was on the Brooks-Williams Farm, which is south of the present San Antonio Road, Highway 21. That school started in 1836, the year that Texas won its independence and I understand that there were periods of time there were three teachers at that school. One was named Smith; one was named Reed. I don't know their first names. And then the third one was Jacob Pruitt. I don't know how long the school lasted but evidently school was taught in that spot – by them having three teachers; I don't think they would have had three teachers at one time. So that probably extended over two or three years, maybe. More or less kind of a permanent school there. The reason for that was that south of the San Antonio Road was settled early on. There were some people there even in the late 1820s. North of the San Antonio Road was the old Cherokee territory and it didn't start settling up until after the Indians were driven out in 1839. Finally, in 1854 the State of Texas got a little extra money to help pay a teacher's salary, if the local school district would provide a building (usually a local church) for a school house.

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JP: The federal government was beginning to subsidize the schools a little bit. Say some more about that.

BM: Okay. The reason that Texas – this was sort of special for Texas only for this reason. When the Republic of Texas became a state of the United States, it had claim to a vast amount of southwestern territory that they claimed from Mexico by way of the Texas Revolution and so the United States paid off a huge debt the Republic of Texas had accrued and also paid the State of Texas a little extra money for their claims to this land. So that's how Texas got the money to help a little bit with building a school system in the state. It was very little help, but a little was a lot back then. The state would pay part of a teacher's salary if the local school district would furnish a building that could be used for a schoolhouse. Usually, communities back then were poor, but usually they had already built a church house in the community, so they made a formal deed to that church house and recorded it at the county courthouse and by doing that it would qualify as a school and the State of Texas would help pay a teacher to teach school there.

JP: So this is part of the beginning of public schools.

BM: That's right. This is the beginning of the free public school system in the State of Texas. Then in 1858, to ensure that teachers knew something worthwhile to teach to the students, the state required that teachers be certified to receive state money as payment. The way this worked, in every county, there was a three-member board of examiners appointed. Each year the teacher had to go and appear before that board and be asked some questions on rudimentary fundamentals of education and if they satisfied the board that they were qualified to teach, then they were given a teacher's certificate and that takes the place now of a degree in college – a teacher's degree. For years and years and years, teachers in this section taught just on board certification, even – I was taught by some teachers that only had board certification. They were quite good teachers. They knew their subject. They were limited, but they knew the subject they were teaching.

JP: Continue with how the public schools developed in the outlying areas. I know there were a lot of small schools in Cherokee County.

BM: That is right. As I have already mentioned, throughout the county, communities were usually settled around a church or two churches and a little country store, maybe. They were usually about five miles apart because in horse and buggy days a lot of people walked. That is about the farthest distance that you could get to an appointment at a particular place fairly early in the morning. So you had these little churches that were used for schools about five miles apart throughout the county. Then after the Civil War, they made provisions for black schools. In the 1870s during the late days of the Reconstruction, the government required that they set up schools for the black people, but of course, they were

under the control and supervision of the white districts. You would look in the old school record books and they would list, supposedly, say a Common School District #25. They would have two schools. One of them would be #1, District 25, would be marked white. Then District 25, #2 would be colored, or black. We call it black now, but in those days they called it colored schools. Number 2. The way this worked was that all the money that was spent went through the white trustees in that district. They also had black trustees for the school, but the black trustees' responsibility was to recommend any teachers to teach in the black school and they were responsible for doing the labor; maintaining the school building and get in firewood and to provide a well or some way so that the kids would have water to drink. That's the way that it worked back then. The money came through the white board of trustees to pay the black teachers and to pay a little money to buy building materials to maintain the black school and whatever else they might need.

JP: So the colored schools in Cherokee County – was there discrimination on the basis of color?

BM: You would have to say that because the black schools were inferior to the white schools. The buildings were always smaller and weren't kept up in as good a shape and any materials or supplies that the white schools didn't need were passed on to the black schools.

JP: How long was this sort of situation true?

BM: To the present century, until . . . of course everything improved as time went along. But the black schools were still secondary to the white schools as long as there were common schools in Cherokee County.

JP: And how long was that? How long were there common schools? Can you date that? Did I get a little ahead of the story?

BM: Yes, you got a little ahead of the story on me.

JP: Okay, keep going on the story and then we'll pick up.

BM: Okay. Really, the Common Schools were organized in 1884. Originally I think there had been about 44 districts when the state started paying. Yes, there were 44 districts in Cherokee County when the state started helping pay the teachers. In 1884, when they redrew all the districts in the county, the population had increased a great deal and so they had 69 districts in 1884.

JP: This pretty well represented those communities?

BM: Yes, that's right. They still represented the original communities that existed in the county.

JP: So that means there had to be at least 69 teachers. Were a lot of these one-teacher schools?

BM: I would say a mean average would be two.

JP: You would have one white and one colored.

BM: Yes. They were – well, a lot of the black schools would just have one teacher, but later on, most of the white schools that I knew had at least two teachers and a great majority of them had three, four teachers even. The population had really grown by the 1880. It was really a kind of a boom time. We had gotten the Civil War over with and the Reconstruction days were over with and the peaches and the cotton and agriculture was good. We had two railroads through Cherokee County by that time. So that attracted – well, the population just grew that was here, but then it attracted a lot more people that came to Cherokee County.

JP: So even when the Common School districts were organized, a lot of the schools had at least two teachers.

BM: That's right. They sure did already. So that system continued until the 1930s. Then the Depression caused the decline in population. People were leaving, trying to find some place to work, or maybe they just weren't sending their kids to school and the County School Districts began to consolidate with other Common School Districts. By 1967 all of the Common School Districts in Cherokee County had been absorbed by the six independent school districts at that time. Then in the late 1980s Maydelle that was an Independent School District in its own right diminished to the point where it consolidated with Rusk Independent School District. So now we only have five. All schools are controlled by five Independent School Districts in the County.

JP: Was this by choice that they did consolidate or was that a forced consolidation?

BM: Sometimes it would be a forced consolidation. If the county school board -- I suppose the state had certain regulations set up so that the local county school board had to go by these regulations. If a school declined in scholastic population down to where you only had enough for maybe one teacher, something like that, it forced consolidation. You had no choice. The only way that a district could get out of it was to encourage more people to come in and increase the scholastic population.

JP: So the students weren't required to attend.

BM: Yes, I think even in that time – I don't know in what year that was put into effect – but all the children in my time from the time that I started school in 1936, I think that it was compulsory that all children above six years old attend a grammar school, a common school.

JP: Right. When I was in school from early on, which would be not too different from you, I remember talk about the truant officer that would come and get you. Did you ever not want to go to school and your mother threaten you?

BM: No, really I didn't. I enjoyed going. I was the oldest child and I enjoyed school a great deal. If I stayed home, I had a lot of chores I had to take care of, so I always wanted to go to school.

JP: So, these Common Schools were for grades one to eight?

BM: It would vary. If you had a big school district, sometimes they would teach to the eighth grade in the common schools. If the scholastic population wasn't very large in a district, sometimes they would only teach to the sixth grade, I guess was the most they had.

JP: So if you wanted to continue after the eighth grade or the sixth grade, you had to be bused into high school?

BM: Or get transferred into an adjacent school district that provided classes above sixth grade – usually eighth. Eight is as high as they taught in a common school that I know of. Yes, you would either have to be bused . . .

JP: Did most of the kids stop after common school or did the majority go on to high school?

BM: In the early days, they usually quit by the time they got out of grammar school. By the time I came along, most of them made an effort to get at least an eighth-grade education and a great majority of them, when they got the buses running would come in to an independent school and try to finish a high school education. Not all of them, but a lot of them.

JP: They got a diploma, however, from grammar school?

BM: Yes, and those school records are still existent in the county. They are required to keep those; I don't know for how long, but the County Clerk's office is required to keep those, at least the certification that they finished a certain number of grades in school. Now at the Commission office, we have the complete school records of each child in the common school districts. Files and files and files of cards and registry books.

JP: Going all the way back to 1884?

BM: I'm not sure that we go back that far, but they would go back at least to the 30s, the 1930s.

JP: This is registration for anybody who attended the common schools back to the 1930s, their names will be on the roster?

BM: That's correct. Their grades and the teachers and what work they completed.

JP: Is this common that those kinds of records exist?

BM: No. Only thing that the county is required to do is to keep the certificate that they received. How many grades they actually completed. That's kept in the clerk's office. The reason

that we have these other registry records is that the Historical Commission asked for and were given these records and we've preserved them here as one of our projects. When I first saw the records, they had been tossed into a basement room next to the boiler, what we call the boiler – the heating room – in the courthouse. Later I understand that records similar to that have been placed into a rented business building in Rusk and that there hasn't been much done toward filing them or keeping them in useful order anymore. So we (the Commission) rescued them and they are still useful to us on certain occasions and once in a while individuals find out we have them.

JP: That's a treasure trove of information if they are accessible enough. I guess they are by years.

BM: Yes, chronological.

JP: Is there anything else you would like to say that comes to your mind about education in Cherokee County?

BM: I might mention higher education. That is, academy or college work. The first attempt to establish a college in this county occurred in 1855 when Joseph L. Hogg, who was the father of Governor Hogg donated a site in Rusk for another gentleman by the name of Moses W. McKnight, built five little two-room buildings, which was called the Hale Institute. A gentleman by the name of Milton P. Tucker opened another school in Rusk in 1859 on college hill. College Hill is another site in Rusk, which later became a well-known college later on, which I will talk about. This Tucker enlisted in the Army and then a Mrs. Thompson – I don't know her first name – taught private school in one of the buildings for a while. Of course, the best-known early college in Cherokee County was Larissa College at the old town of Larissa in the northwest part of the county. It was a Presbyterian school established by T. N. McKee, who was a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher, and his sister, Mrs. S. R. Erwin. That school operated from 1856 until 1860. You will notice that was only four years, so they only had one graduating class. At that time there were 125 students attending the college, but they only had four graduates. The only graduates that ever came out of the school. But for a school body no bigger than that, in early Texas history those students made a good showing in the state of Texas. They were railroad presidents and heads of companies and teacher and professors and all people with good academic standing.

Then back down to Rusk, in 1865, right after the Civil War, a man by the name of Payton Irving established what he called the Cherokee High School. Then in 1869 the Masonic order in Rusk established the Rusk Masonic Institute and the professor there was John Josh

who was a graduate of Aberdeen University in Scotland. Tom Campbell, who later became governor of the state of Texas, was a student there in 1873. In 1889 that school was purchased by Rusk Public School District.

JP: It lasted about 20 years as a higher education institution.

BM: Yes, it did.

JP: That was probably a pretty good record for that time.

BM: Yes, it was. Then in 1873 here in Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Collegiate Institute was organized and a professor J. A. Patton had about a hundred students in that private school, which closed in 1880. Then in 1880 the school building was used for a public school. Over in a place that you wouldn't think about being a place of higher education near Lone Star, which actually was a rural community in the northeast part of the county, at a small town called Lone Star, the Lone Star Institute was established in 1889 by Colonel T. A. Cocke and the Reverend A. M. Stewart and that institute lasted about four years. It was a good place of learning I understand for that short period of time.

Then in 1895 down in Rusk, the East Texas Baptist Institute was established. J. H. Richardson was the president and it was an academy of industrial arts.

JP: So it was a technical school. Maybe the first one in the county.

BM: The first one that I know of. In 1895, the Cherokee Baptist Association chartered the East Texas Baptist Institute in Rusk. The school became a part of the Baptist correlated school system. In 1907 the name was changed to the Academy of Industrial Arts for Girls. In 1916 it became the Rusk Academy and then Rusk College in 1918. It was a pretty well established college. It had a brick building for an administration building. It had two brick dormitories, president's home on a twenty-acre campus. It had a 220-acre farm and it lasted until 1928 when it was closed. It had some pretty well known graduates there. W. R. White, who became president of Baylor College, went to school there, and Dr. A. J. Armstrong at Baylor who made the famous Browning Collection there was a student and his wife.

JP: Was it an accredited school? So far I would guess that none of these were.

BM: I think this Baptist College was an accredited school.

JP: You mean the Rusk College?

BM: Yes, the Rusk College was an accredited college. Of course, you had Lon Morris here in Jacksonville in 1873, which originally started in Kilgore and moved to Jacksonville as the Alexander Institute in 1894. Then 1923 it became Lon Morris College.

JP: When did Jacksonville Baptist College . . .

BM: Jacksonville Baptist College started in 1899 by the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas. Now in Jacksonville we now have a Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary that was built in 1957. Land for that was donated by one of our well-known doctors and surgeons, Dr. J. M. Travis and well-known businessman by the name of W. S. Gober.

JP: I am surprised myself by the fact that Jacksonville, a town of Jacksonville's size, would have two colleges and a seminary.

BM: It is pretty unusual, isn't it?

JP: Of course, all three of them are extremely small in comparison to the size of collegiate institutions.

BM: But they hang on and they do good work. The students that graduate from them go ahead into their work and are very successful. It serves a very good purpose.

JP: Both of the colleges are two-year colleges.

BM: Junior colleges, yes.

JP: I'm not sure what the years, how many years you can attend or how long you have to attend before you get a degree from the seminary.

BM: I don't know. I suppose that maybe the ones that come here to the seminary already have a couple of years of college under their belt and maybe in two more years they are qualified to pastor and organize churches and things like that. I have known several of the people who have graduated from there but I have never actually asked that.

JP: I know. I haven't either. Well, is there anything else you want to say about education in Cherokee County?

BM: That's about the extent of my knowledge on education in the county.

JP: It has been a county that evidently has put a lot of emphasis on education. A number of higher education institutions have failed, but at least the effort was made.

BM: This County has always been blessed with having at least a few people who were well trained and academically oriented and they wanted to see the kids in the county get a fair shake in education. They did a pretty good job of providing resources for it.

JP: Let's move on to another topic. We were going to talk about the geography and the topography of Cherokee County. Some facts about how the county has been influenced by its topological features. We can take a pause here if you need to.

BM: Cherokee County of course, as I previously mentioned, is bounded by two average-sized rivers: the Angelina and its headwaters of Mud Creek and Stryker Creek on the East side and the Neches River on the West side. For the most part Cherokee County is rather hilly.

Then there are sections of it that are almost prairie-like. Rolling country I suppose you would call it. Especially in the northeastern part, which lends itself well to agriculture and the raising of beef cattle. The early settlers were attracted to this section of the country, the settlers that came here came out of four or five states of the old south – Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, but they did not come out of the plantation, the southern part of those states where the plantations were. They came out of the hill county, so for generations, they had been used to making a living in the hills and Cherokee County just suited them. They could farm part of it. The county is well watered. You had thousands of acres of wonderful forest country – pine timber and an abundance of hardwood, which supplied all sorts of food for wild life.

END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE A

JP: I am talking to Mr. Mayfield about the history of Cherokee County. We are discussing at this point about the topography of the county and he was commenting on the fact that the settlers came out of the Southern states – out of the hill country. In the northern part of the county, they would find a type of geography that they liked because it suited what they knew about how to farm and cattle. Continue talking about the influence and bring in the southern part of the county, too, where those people came from.

BM: Okay, the southern part of Cherokee County was settled early on. The dividing line in Cherokee County, north and south was the Old San Antonio Road, which is now designated as Highway 21. As early as the 1820s, way before the Texas Revolution, settlers were coming in that part of the country. There wasn't a great influx all at one time of settlers. These people were more adventuresome that settled south of the San Antonio Road. They were traders and entrepreneurs, land speculators. You would not classify them necessarily as farmers. They made a living with their wits and their trading ability. They operated water mills. They were more inclined toward speculation and industry. And they would come from everywhere. You had them from the northern states – Pennsylvania. You had them from Louisiana around New Orleans. You would even have a few foreigners that came here. You had various nationalities that settled south of the San Antonio Road. North of the San Antonio Road, which was part of the Cherokee land, and those Indians weren't driven out of here until 1839. The people that came in the great Immigration of the 1840s to occupy the Indian ground came in extended families – in clans. They primarily were Scotch people. They had lived in the hills and the mountains in Scotland before they ever came here. They came to this country to North and South Carolina living in the hills.

They never were tidewater people. They knew how to make a living as far back as their civilization had memory in the hills and they felt comfortable in the hills. That's why they settled in the north part of Cherokee County. The fact that the land hadn't been taken up, too. Most of the land south of the San Antonio Road had already been preempted by these great speculators. You see regions down in here where there are leagues. A league is 4280 acres of land. A lot of times they would take four leagues as a grant in the south part. All the John Dursts and the Helena Kimballs; those were big chunks of land that were taken out early on. These people were not primarily interested in farming. They were interested in land speculation. So there is a difference between the type of people in the southern part of the county and the ones in the north. In the north part of the county, above Highway 21, you'd think most of those people came here to farm and make a living.

JP: Were they getting a homestead or were they buying that land?

BM: If they could find the vacant land, they could homestead from the State of Texas, but it was difficult sometimes to find vacant land and sometimes people would file claims to the same tract of land and it wouldn't be discovered until their claims were sent in to the Land Commissioner's office down at Austin. Then they would find they had conflicting claims and it took years and years sometimes to settle the claim on the thing. Cherokee County was the most confused thing as far as land claims go as any place I know of because it had been Indian ground and suddenly the Indians are gone and there is this whole vast territory -- a vacuum, a vacant space – and all these settlers come rushing in at the same time and there are no fences, no boundary lines to show them anything. You'd be surprised that a fellow had successfully claimed several hundred acres – he didn't go out on the public road and say, "Hey, I know a place next to mine that is vacant; you can claim on it." He waited until some of his people were ready to move to this area – saving that open land so they could have it.

JP: So this was happening between 1840 and 18—what?

BM: '60. Until the Civil War you would still have those conflicts sometimes.

JP: What else about the topography of Cherokee County is unique or unusual? There is a lot of lumbering, I know, in the southern part of the state. There is some lumbering up in our part. How has that developed?

BM: Well, the further south you go toward the Big Thicket and the counties below us, the farther south you go to that point, the heavier the timber gets. As you go north, the timber thins out, so most of your big timbering in this county occurred – when I say big timber, I mean mills that can produce 50 to 100,000 feet of timber in a day. There were probably three of

what I would consider "big" mills that operated in the southern part of the county. The reason they did that is because the timber stand would accommodate a big mill. As you moved north and the timber was more scant, you had what was commonly termed in this section of the county as "peckerwood mills." They were just little portable mills that you could move around and cut out a stand of timber and when you ran out of timber, you could pick the sawmill up and move it to another place where you had a timber lease and cut that out. So, most of the northern part of the county was lumbered out that way.

JP: In what era were these peckerwood mills?

BM: The little mills? The earliest of the mills I know of was in the late 1840s, just before the Civil War, and they were water-powered mills. In 1850 I know of two steam-powered mills. One of them was James Day's mill just about three miles west of Rusk. It was the first steam mill I know up in this section of the country. The little portable mills later on were operated by gasoline power. They weren't steam powered. The little peckerwood mills lasted from about 1900 until after World War II. They played out. They couldn't compete and they didn't have the timber. By 1960 all of them were gone from up in the north part of the county.

JP: I've been interested in the fact that the plant industry – one of the largest developments of it, I guess in Texas and maybe _____, is that because of the uniqueness of the topography?

BM: The Depression was the mother of the plant industry in this section of the country.

JP: It didn't have anything to do with the fact that we have the right kind of . . . .

BM: Yes, that too. This has always been truck-cropping country. You could grow almost anything that you wanted to – tomatoes, orchards, any kind of vegetables, garden plants that you can think of, and it all started with a number of people growing their own little bedding plants because you had to order them through a mail-order house and by the time they got to the farmer, a lot of them were dead and so stunted that they weren't much use. So a good many of the farmers started raising plants in what we call open plant beds. They would just plow up a little patch of land out in the middle of a field somewhere and build a little – what we call a cold frame around it – a little wooden frame up about 8 or 10 inches high and in cold weather they could cover it over with sheets or with pine straw or something and keep the little plants growing. They developed hardier plants that produced much quicker than the ones they had been buying through express companies. This went on through the 1930s when we had the Depression. Then some of them hit on the idea that, "If I grow enough plants, I can ship plants by railway express. And the plants grown here

were equal or better to what you might grow anywhere else. They would carry them to the post office, the post office would make up the express orders and carry them over to the nearby railroad and they would get to their destination pretty quickly. This turned out to be a lucrative business. It carried a lot of people, farmers especially, through the Depression years. The older ones kept it going during World War II and then when the younger ones came back after the war, they saw that it was a good business of its own. In the beginning it was just open bed type plant raising where you just had to fight the weather.

JP: Bare roots.

BM: Now there is a green house business. The one that you mentioned in this county is the Powell Plant Farm, the second largest one in the United States. It developed like that. Powell's father-in-law was an old-time open plant-bedding farmer. Then Powell hit on the idea of the greenhouse business. It is the leading agricultural endeavor in Cherokee County at this time. It brings in more money than any of the other agricultural undertakings here.

JP: Part of that is the unique geographical . . . . .

BM: That's true. We have the soil for it; have several different types of soil that are good for growing plants.

JP: And a more temperate climate.

BM: That's true. Our climate is good for that.

JP: Is there anything else before we quit on this tape. Is there anything else you would like to say about the uniqueness of the county?

BM: Well, one little thing. Let me find my note on here. When I was a young man I used to hear about the grass prairies in Cherokee County. The old timers told me that the Indians always burned those sections off to keep trees from growing on them so that they would have places for the deer to graze and that these prairies occurred close to the headwaters of the creeks and the rivers that we have here. In the wintertime it was a hunter's paradise because all the ducks and geese and the passenger pigeons came from the north and would just stay here on this. The Caddo Indians utilized those prairies as village sites. I'll mention a few of the well-known prairies in the county. Southwest of Alto you have one called Bean's Prairie, which wasn't named for an Indian; it was named for Ellis P. Bean, who was an early settler. He was one of those speculators and entrepreneurs in the south part of the county. That prairie now is occupied by the Caddo Mound State Park. In the northeast part of the county on the headwaters of Stryker Creek, which is now occupied by Lake Striker that produces electric energy, in the Indian days was the location of, I presume, a Cherokee village called Stryker Town. That's where the name comes from, but

there was a big prairie in that section of the country, which was good hunting and that's why the Indians occupied it. I'm sure the Caddo Indians, the early, older Indians, had also had village sites in that Stryker Creek area. Then southeast of Jacksonville, right where we are sitting and talking today, from Bolton Street to the old line of the Cotton Belt Railroad, was known as Chief Benge's Prairie. Chief Benge was a half-white sub chief among Chief Bowles' Cherokee Indians who resided here from about 1821 to 1839. Chief Benge, incidentally, signed the Houston-Forbes Treaty along with Bowles that Houston made with the Cherokee Indians to keep them neutral in 1836 in the Texas Revolution. The prairies down east of the Alto area were natural prairies. The Indians, I don't think, created the prairies. They burned them off every year when they found that the grass grew better after the old grass made ashes for fertilizer. The prairies around the Alto area I know were natural prairies for this reason. I have spoken to a gentleman, and I'll give him credit for this, his name was Jim Corbin. He's a geologist and archeologist at Nacogdoches University in Nacogdoches County. He explained that the sediments that were washed off the surrounding hills settled in these places where the prairies were, and since the soil was undrained because of a rock formation under the bottom of it, that pine timber and most of the hard woods just wouldn't grow in those areas. But the grasses did really well under those conditions. So the prairies were either burned off through lightning strikes after the grass got dry or the Indians set them afire themselves. They discovered that the grass was fresher and grew better after it was burned off. As I mentioned, it was ideal for grazing for all types of animals that they hunted. Even in those days, they had what was called the Eastern buffalo or the timber buffalo that ranged into this section of the country. A few of them – nothing like the herds that they had out on the Western prairie.

I might mention this too. Where the rivers and the streams cut through to this bedrock that I mentioned, they became good natural crossings or fords over the streams. In the early history of this county you don't hear of any bridges. They were called fords, So-and-so's Ford on certain rivers or creeks. The early pioneers never built bridges. They just knew where these natural rock crossings were, and they used that to get across the streams. This rock formation now is called the Weches Geological Formation and is named for the community of Weches over in Houston County. It is a green rock formation, which they are utilizing now for construction of highways for the topping of highways.

JP: Are they mining it?

BM: They are mining it now southwest of Alto in several different places. A company down there is doing quite well with it. Green rock.

JP: That's something I had never heard.

BM: I didn't know anything about it until this gentleman began to mine it down there. I became curious about it and talked to two or three different people and then ran into this Jim Corbin, the geologist, who understands what it was and how it caused these natural prairies to form in the county.

JP: There are a variety of types of habitats in the county?

BM: Absolutely. You had the heavy timber in the south part, which was primarily a pine timber, the loblolly and the long leaf. Then as you go north, the hardwoods begin to be more numerous. Then you have the hills and prairies and the uplands -- sand-land, kind of rolling country that is good for the farming – so there is just a great variety of terrain.

JP: I know my dad would talk about bottomland.

BM: That's was what everybody was looking for when they came to this section was bottomland.

JP: Because that's where you could grow those good crops.

BM: That's right and they knew how to use these little hillside farms to good advantage. They knew what crops grew best in the very bottoms; you did ribbon cane and cotton and then a little higher up you did beans and corn, and then on the sandy land you could grow peanuts, corn, almost anything. Then you could harvest the prairie naturally for the hay or in some winters, if it didn't burn off, you could even graze your cattle in there and never cut any of it. Just graze them on the dry grass in the prairie. So it was easy to make a living. If you were a crop failure, you could always go fishing or hunting, but you always raised one acre of corn. The one acre of corn fed your horses and gave solid food for your cattle. The one acre also provided enough corn for you to make cornbread, which was the staff of life in this section of the country. If you could make corn bread . . .

JP: Corn meal?

BM: Corn meal to make corn bread with. You could make all variety of things out of cornmeal. Then you could hunt; you could live on the deer, the coon, possum, the birds, fish. Most of the early settlers didn't work very much. They were sightseers. They loved to see new country. They would put the acre of corn in and go traveling for a while.

JP: Now, are we talking about the northern and the southern . . . .

BM: Yes, the north and the south, most instances.

JP: What if you had a corn crop failure?

BM: If you had a corn crop failure, you weren't in very good shape. You traveled a little distance and hoped you found something – you gathered the acorns; you gathered the nuts that were in the woods and you preserved those.

JP: How did you get rid of the poison in them?

BM: They had a process of parching the acorns so that the poison was steamed out of them. Then they could make a pretty good substitute for bread out of those things. They utilized the same system when the Civil War came along and there were no men here to tend the crops and all; they went back to the woods again and gathered all these things that they remembered their fathers and their grandfathers doing when they were kids.

JP: How late were people subsisting off acorns?

BM: I would think the Civil War was about the end of that. Probably the last time they were utilized.

JP: So none of my ancestors had to eat acorns. Okay, this is a good place to stop. We've had a good laugh and a few good little tidbits here. We will be continuing with this at a later date.

END OF INTERVIEW