

Dora Wear McClane

interviewed by

Mrs. W.A. Schmidt

February 25, 1975

Ruby Schmidt Collection of BiCentennial Interviews

ORAL HISTORIES OF FORT WORTH, INC.

Mrs. Dora Wear McClane

October 15, 1905

What is your name, please?

My name is Mrs. Dora Lee McClane.

Was Lee your maiden name?

No, my maiden name was Wear, W-e-a-r.

And where were you born?

I was born in Fort Worth, October 15, 1905.

Who were your parents?

Mrs. Hettie Virginia Wear and Mr. Archie Smiley Wear.

What was her maiden name?

Hettie Virginia Morison.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

None. I was an only child.

Who were your grandparents?

Well, on my father's side I never really knew because his father died when he was quite young, and my grandmother's name was Elizabeth Wear. And on my mother's side I never knew her father because he died before she was born. But her mother was Sarah Jane Morison and she lived until I was about 9 years old, and she was blind for 10 years before she passed away.

Did she live here in Fort Worth?

She lived with my mother.

Did you know how your daddy came to be in Fort Worth?

Yes, he and his brothers and his mother migrated to Fort Worth when he was just--I think he was perhaps 16 or 17 years old, and there was nothing in Mississippi to hold them there. He was the oldest of the children and had the responsibility of looking after the family.

What county--do you know?

Tupelo - and so they came to Fort Worth because I think that some of their older relatives had moved to this part of the country and they came up here seeking work and everything. In later years my mother and father met and were married in Mansfield in an old log cabin that belonged to her people.

Well, then they had settled in Mansfield and been there evidently a long time.

My mother had. My mother had an older brother who was 23 years old when she was born.

What was his name?

Emmett Morison, and he was a constable in Mansfield and he was shot down in cold blood without any weapons on him or anything on one of the streets down there in Mansfield in front of a hardware store.

How old a man was he when he was killed?

I think he was probably in his fifties. Of course at my age he seemed terribly old.

Well, you were a child when it happened, but you remember?

Yes, I remember going to his funeral. I remember the trial that they had. They moved it all over Texas before they finally wound up giving the man 99 years.

Was that the only brother your mother had?

No, she had another brother who was struck down by an automobile down on 8th Street.

What was his name?

Marcy Morison. And my mother was born in Acton down close to where Davy Crockett's mother is buried, but when she was 6 weeks old her older brother took the family and moved to Mansfield.

This was due no doubt to his daddy's having died?

Yes

Now I know that you lived in Riverside, but would you tell me what were your earliest remembrances of living there?

Riverside was living in the country. Sparsely populated, nothing unusual except getting poison ivy and getting stung by nettles and grass burrs and everything, and picking dewberries. My father had an acre and a quarter in a dewberry patch.

Now tell me exactly where this place was.

It is on the corner of what is now Sylvania Avenue and Yucca Street. But of course Yucca was just a gravel road

or it wasn't even gravel, it was just a sandy lane leading from our place on back to some farmer's back of us there. My father had this truck farm and the old gentleman who lived with us for about 15 years was a Confederate veteran.

Do you remember his name?

Perkins.

You said that he also worked in the garden.

He gardened the place. My father worked in town at Fakes Furniture Store for about 45 years before he died in 1938.

Where was Fakes located then?

It was on the lower end of Main Street, along below Monnig's and Meacham's which were on 12th Street.

Can you tell me where some of these other businesses that are still here were located?

Leonards was north of present location. Stripling's, the only thing I can remember, was where it is right now. Then we had at that time L. G. Gilbert Store which was on 3rd Street. It was right next door to the old Interurban Station.

Now tell me--some people don't know what an Interurban is.

Well, it is an overgrown street car. It had a motor on either end, and they could run it both ways.

Where did it go?

It went to Dallas and to Waco and to Cleburne. The last time I rode an Interurban was to see a show "On the Sunny Side of the Street" in Cleburne.

Then tell me about this area of town when you started to school.

I can't remember too much about my first and second grade in school. In fact, I don't think I spent the first and second grades in school, because I left Riverside in 1918 and I was only 13 years old when I started to high school. My mother had been a teacher and had taught me at home.

My gracious; you were young.

I came to junior high school out on Jennings Avenue, and each afternoon I walked to town over the old Jennings Avenue overpass which was a wooden structure over all the railroad tracks, and on the north end on the left hand side was a grain elevator.

Where did you go?

Well, at that time Fakes was up on 5th and Houston Streets and I used to go up and wait for my father to go home. We still lived in Riverside and I waited for him every afternoon to go home with him, and I just walked. It was more fun to walk than it was to ride the streetcar.

You said that sometimes when you had flood warnings and so forth, your father was phoned about this.

Yes, they had a system. I don't think they knew how far we were from the water but they knew that we were in Riverside and had one of the few phones in Riverside, and they would call and ask us if we were in any danger or knew of any

people who were, and my daddy would get up and hitch the horse to the buggy and go down in the lowlands and warn the people of the oncoming flood. Later his trusty Model "T" took him.

You said that many times he had trouble getting to work due to these floods.

Yes, I have seen those waters come down through there and it would be considerably over a mile wide and just raging torrents and deep. In fact, it was deep enough that you could just see the roofs of houses. One time we stood on the old Belknap Street bridge and roped a piano and pulled it out of the water.

You mentioned that your telephone number was 2874. I notice that is a small number. Evidently they did not have too many phones.

They did not have any exchanges at that time. The only exchange they had was the mail telephone office, and they just doled numbers out as people took the telephone service. We had one of the few phones in North Riverside, and we had quite a busy telephone, as the neighbors would come in and use it quite often.

Can you remember when they installed your phone, or were you too small to recall--you know, putting a telephone in was a big event.

No, I don't remember.

Do you remember when you saw your first car?

My first car that I remember was owned by an old Dr. Watters. He was a child doctor, and I had the measles, and he told me that if I would take my medicine which came in a little piece of paper and bitter as can be you know, that after I got well he would take me for a ride in his car which had big wheels; it set way up off the ground, and had a little old motor sticking up there that, well, it was unbelievable, and a great big old rubber bulb horn that would honk as we went down the road at all the chickens and cows running loose. Well, I got better, and he came out one day and said, "Are you ready to take that ride? I'm going to have to go up the road about a mile." So I got in that buggy and I was so terrified I screamed and yelled all the way till we got back.

You mentioned that there was a time when your daddy's car lights went out that I thought was most interesting.

Well, we had gone to Mansfield one time to see my uncle and aunt, and they wanted us to stay a little late. Mansfield was only 18 miles, but it was entirely dirt roads and you were liable to stick and everything. We usually started back right after lunch, but that particular day we stayed and had watermelon until about 4:00 o'clock and were late getting started home. So we got out on the country road, and our Presto or Prestone, I guess Presto

lights as they called them didn't work. We had two coal oil lamps, one on each side up near the windshield of the car, and Father stopped to get out and light them, and none of them had in oil in them because we hadn't used them in so long, so we stopped at a farmhouse and the man there said he could only let us have enough for one light because he was so short. So we got that and we had the flashlight in the car, and I rode the fender all the way back to Fort Worth with the flashlight.

It must have been a warm time.

It was watermelon season.

Now you mentioned that at times when it was bad weather you had to put up the sides on the "jitney" as you called it. What is a jitney anyway?

A paid transportation. A jitney was an old Model "T" touring car, and at the rainy season they had curtains that they put on the side--had little things that they turned that fastened them on there. One of our jitneys started to town one morning and was hit by a train on the Rock Island railroad down there, and I can't remember how many were killed, but they had a mass funeral at the Methodist Church out in Riverside.

You said that a lot of times the boys used the jitneys for dating.

...raised money for charities, for different building projects and things like that.

You mentioned a woman that was well thought of in Riverside called Mother Ingraham.

Mother Ingraham was really Riverside. Especially during World War I when there was a flu epidemic, and I didn't give my mother credit for it, but my mother wouldn't be home for nights and days either because they would go and sit up--neither one of them feared it, and I think the Lord took care of them because they would go sit with these flu patients, and many of them died but some of them survived, and Mother Ingraham was the Mother of Riverside; she organized the Red Cross Auxiliary out there, and they met at least once a week in a lodge hall, and I had the privilege of being dismissed from school and going and folding bandages for the soldiers, and I received a commendation from President Woodrow Wilson for my time spent.

Do you still have that?

No, it was burned when our house burned.

Tell me something about people that you can remember in Riverside.

Well, there are so many of them--I mean there were so many that I knew at the time that were so prominent out there that I have forgotten that I hate to mention one without

being able to mention the others. But one of the ones that I remember in particular that later became a doctor and was a neighbor of ours--Dr. John Tucker, and then J. B. Baker had a florist shop out there; I think at one time it was Drum & Baker, I am not quite positive about that. And then there was Mr. Emery who had the Water Supply out there, and Dr. McElroy was our only doctor. At one time when I was growing up Dr. Dilbeck was principal of the school; and then, well, there were just so many people that contributed so much to Riverside that I hesitate to mention because I can't think of all of them.

I am interested in how this Oakhurst School came into being. I think your father had something to do with it.

I don't really know who did that. We weren't living out there at that time, but Mr. Emery before that had bought the lot on the corner because we had a 300' cased well on the property and he bought it with the intention of supplying that end of Riverside. For some reason the deal fell through, so then the State approached my father to sell them that property. Well, Mr. Emery donated his lot and my father donated a lot and then he sold the rest to the State on which Oakhurst School is now built. And there were no such things as streets up there or anything. That was just a wilderness.

You said you had happy childhood memories of the area around there and described some of that--

On the opposite side of what is now Sylvania there was the old Daggett Woods. The Daggetts were very prominent people in Fort Worth at one time--old settlers here. The Cutcheons lived near us, and Mr. Cutcheon built a little covered wagon and we would hitch a goat to it and we would pull it up and have picnics in the woods and pull wild grapes, and our mothers would make jelly out of them, and we usually came home with poison oak.

You said something about you had swings up there and had Easter egg hunts.

Well, no, that was down in the extreme southern part of Riverside. However, I imagine we did have swings in the trees up there too, but there was one that we were allowed to use for a park down at the extreme southern end of Sylvania. We put swings up there, and somebody put up a seesaw, and we had Easter egg hunts out there. That was the only park we had in Riverside.

Did you do things together?

Oh, always. We had watermelon parties at our house. I have seen the time when we had as many as 23 relatives at one time. We would make pallets all over the front yard and the back yard and wherever.

What happened to this well on this property?

It's still there. I've often wondered why they didn't plug into it and use it for a sprinkling system, because it was cased and I imagine it is still good.

It would be there on the school grounds somewhere?

It would be there on that corner. Of course having widened Sylvania and Yucca, it naturally decreased the size of the lot and it wouldn't be as far away from the street as it was when we had it.

You said that the school burned.

Yes, it burned in 1918, because I had just started to junior high school when the Armistice was signed, and it burned before they made arrangements for us to go to high school in town. We were without a school, and so they made arrangements for the high school pupils to go to town. I don't remember what they did with the grade students, but it was my first year in high school.

About the church--do you remember much about the pastors of the churches out in that area?

I didn't go to church out there. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church all my life. My mother and father were charter members of First Presbyterian Church, and my father had two brothers who were Presbyterian ministers. However, I did go to the Methodist Church some.

What were their names?

One was R. D. Wear and the other was F. L. Wear. F. L. was at one time President of Trinity University. R. D. Wear was one of the first ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth, which is on record. The churches out there were always having get-together groups. They contributed quite a bit to Fort Worth. They had the prayer meetings and the singings and the tent revivals, which I think should be re-established. I think there is more religion in a good old tent revival than you will find in churches of today.

You mentioned that when the street car replaced the jitney that it created quite a stir.

Yes, Mr. Cartwright's grocery store was on Race Street. It came in there, and everyone in Riverside had to go down. Of course we had seen street cars before but they were in town, and this was something new to Riverside, and they had everything in the world down there to give away for prizes, and I won a 48# sack of flour.

This was the kind of way to sell flour, wasn't it--in sacks?

Yes, the only way you could buy flour then was in a 25# sack or a 48# sack. You bought sugar in cloth bags, and you bought feed in burlap bags.

What about things like cheese?

You bought it off of a big wheel sort of a round thing--they cut what you wanted out of it. It was in the grocery store, just a great big chunk of it.

Did stores charge for their customers, or was it cash?

Well, I don't really know because we always paid cash for everything. Oh, and then the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. came to Fort Worth and they put their salesmen out on the road selling products, and that was before they ever had a store, and they had prizes just like Jewel Tea Co. later did, so we started buying coffee from them. But you still ground your coffee. You always had to grind your own coffee.

When did you stop having the iceman?

I think we stopped having him when we moved in 1923. We finally bought an Electolux, but we still had an ice box when we were in Riverside and they still had icemen then.

What about milk delivery?

I don't remember because we had cows all the time. However, we did have a surplus of milk and there was a woman came by in a hack.

What's a hack?

A hack is a small wagon, a very small wagon. But she did come by and pick up the surplus milk that we had. I really don't know what she did with it. We didn't have a big surplus of milk because we had hogs and we fed it to the hogs. We had chickens which were laying regularly. We had our own eggs.

I was just trying to think of some of the things which have changed so dramatically. It was quite an event for the iceman to come as far as the children were concerned, wasn't it?

Oh, yes. I used to step up on the back of the ice wagon and rode home in the afternoon if he came along about the time I was going home. And long years ago there would be a man deliver coal to you. We had a coal bin built into what we called the vegetable house where the old man would bring the onions in, tie them up, and pay so much a bunch to get them tied up, and he would have people picking berries and bring the berries into the house and box them and take them to market. In the corner of this vegetable house we had a coal bin. We would order coal from the coal companies here. One of them was over on the East Side on Boaz (now the South Freeway), and they would bring coal out there and fill our bins, we filled that every so often.

What about the political world? Were you aware of it?

Yes, very much, because I always got a nickel anytime anyone came down to distribute cards, or a dime, whatever they saw fit to give us. They would have a community fair with displays and things like that, and these men would gather, and they would have their hands full of cards and they would give us children so many to give out to prospective voters which were entirely men at that time--women hadn't seen the light then. They would give us those cards. I have on occasion had two or three men's cards for the same office.

I would shell off one of each and hand them out.

I overlooked something I wanted you to mention: the way they brought water. Evidently water was a premium.

Yes, it was, and there were companies in Fort Worth that had these huge water tanks which looked very much like the modern gasoline trucks except that they were horse drawn water trucks, made from wood. We had our own well and never had to rely on delivery of water. We had a bathtub in our house. We had a little room that was as large as the ordinary kitchen is now, and we had a bathtub in there, and my father had water piped from our tank outside. We had a great big wooden tank outside our house that held 50 or 100 barrels of water, I don't know how much, and he had the water piped in, but of course it was cold water, and we had a great big wood stove with a hot water tank on the end of it. But the toilet facilities were located at the back end of the barn and you had to go through two rows of stanchions to the "two-holer". So of course we didn't go there at night. But one time I had gone out there. We had a cow that was awfully mean. Mother and I didn't dare go near her. The men could, but anyway we had a 6' red fence all around our back yard that set up on a foot-high board. So one day I thought the cow was fastened in the back pasture lot, about an acre and a half of ground, and I went

out to the toilet. Mother had just made me a new dress and I had it on. I started back and this cow had her head down and her horns in--oh, a very treacherous-like mood, looked like she was going to come right after me, and I couldn't unhook the gate, and I climbed over it and hung on the top of it with my dress. (Laughter).

You said that lights reached Riverside in 1923.

Yes. They reached the southern part of Riverside a little bit before the man got up in our neighborhood, but my father had them put in as soon as they could get up that way, and that was our downfall with Riverside. We had had gas lights for several years. I don't know exactly when the gas came to Riverside, but we had it several years for lights as well as cooking. We were on the direct line to Dallas. In town there was a huge storage tank on North Street (now West Lancaster), but it held insufficient gas to supply the cities' demands during the cold season, and many of our friends would spend days with us because of their shortage. They had disposed of all other means of heating and cooking. Many of them, however, did still have kerosene lights. We stuck our curling irons down in a kerosene light and heated them so we could curl our hair so of course the women naturally kept a lamp or two.

Tell me about this fire.

We had just had our lights a month or so and we were having our house all painted inside. It was about 11:30 at night and we had our mattress on the springs out in the back yard which was entirely fenced in. My father woke up and smelled smoke, and the whole top of our house was in flames. We had to run in and get some clothes on. My mother and I ran the other way. Anyway, the fire department from town--my father was well-known in Fort Worth--and the fire department from town came out and they put hoses into our tank and into the neighbors' shallow well trying to extinguish the flames, but they couldn't and they drained the tank and the well. After the fire and everything--we had drug our mattress clear of the fire, and we had gone back out there. We knew we couldn't stay up, it was about 11:30 or 12 at night, and so we lay down, and that morning they threw us an extra: President Harding had died.

So that's how you remember that. What did you all do then--your house was gone.

We had some friends down further south on Sylvania and he worked at Fakes Furniture Store, and they had an apartment that was vacant, so we went down there to stay till my father had built the house over at 2900 College Avenue. We had some property over there and Mother didn't want to live out in Riverside any more because there was no fire protection. So we moved over to College Avenue and built that house there.

How long did you live there?

Until 1941, my mother died and I didn't want any more of the place.

Do you remember any of the prominent people coming in to Fort Worth?

Any presidents, or anyone else?

Yes, I remember President Roosevelt very well. In fact, I have a letter from George McHenry Howe for a poem that I wrote to President Roosevelt.

Do you have it where I could see it?

Yes. Here it is:

DEAR PRESIDENT

Faithful, honorable, loyal and true
Doing the things others failed to do.
He sits at his desk and masters his work
And smiles at the tasks someone else would shirk.
His pleasures are few while his duties are many
His hours that he spends in his office are plenty.
His capable mind our problems work out
While we sit and wonder what it's all about.
For years that have passed we have all felt
The wrong and neglect that we have been dealt.
But now the sun shines over this land of ours
And smiles are spreading as tho watered by showers.

The one man in many, cherished by multitudes
He loves his people and works for their good.
The nation was wrecked and town with strife
But this great loving man has saved its life.
It's a great country to live in, good old USA,
But what has it been in others' day?
He never grumbles, puts his shoulder to the wheel
And sees that everyone gets a Square Deal.
We love him and trust every move that he makes
And know that his actions are never a mistake.
Now deep in our hearts will ever be felt
The greatness of our leader

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT.

He is so mightly, my words are so small I can't
Express my feelings at all.
But if I were an artist and could paint such things
I'd make him an angel with bright silver wings.
I'd put a halo above this wonderful man
And a picture of Jesus grasping his hand.
He would uphold the things he has done
And say to our President
"Well done, My faithful son."

I can see why they sent you a letter. . . You haven't mentioned anything about your life since you became an adult, but I do know that you worked some. What did you do primarily?

I did everything from stenographic work to cleaning shop work. I really worked. . .I don't know, I just did the things I really wanted to do, I guess.

Did you have a family?

No. My husband had emphysema and was ill 15 years. I had worked before we married, but all of that 15 years I worked for the Majestic Cleaners which was down on 10th between Main and Commerce. Here's that letter.

Do you want to read it out loud?

"To my dear Mrs. McClane: The President has asked me to acknowledge the receipt of your poem which you were good enough to send him, and has requested me to tell you of his appreciation of your kind thoughts. Very sincerely yours, George McHenry Howe, Secretary to the President."

How did the depression years affect you?

Actually I have always had a feeling that nothing is bad enough that it cannot be worse. Now I did not have all the luxuries and all the things that people would like to have, but I never really suffered from it. Of course I didn't get to do the things I wanted to do and I didn't get to participate in the things I would have liked, and I didn't have the clothes that I would have liked to have, but there were so many people in the world so much worse off than I was.

You mentioned that you had taken pictures when they were getting ready to tear down a lot of these business places. You evidently have an interest in history as such, and I would like to see those pictures.

I would too if I could find them.

Can you remember some of the other businesses that were downtown at that time?

Well, in my early days that I can remember there was the old Melba Hotel which was down on Houston Street, and the Majestic Hotel, and the old Metropolitan Hotel which later turned out to be the Milner Hotel which was torn down. Then at one time there was a Natatorium Hotel up on Main Street and it had a swimming pool in it. That was in early years. And on the lower end of Main Street at one time Fakes & Company warehouse--or it was probably on the lower end of Commerce Street, and there was Neil P. Anderson Hardware Store down on Houston Street, and at one time Gernsbacher's was also on Houston Street between 9th and 10th. G. T. Leonard's was on the corner of 11th and Houston. And then there were some second hand bookstores and so on where the telephone building now is. On Jennings Avenue the old post office, and it was a great big rock building like our present County Court House, and our library and city hall were also that kind of rock.

Where was City Hall?

I believe it was between 10th--I just don't know for sure. What about fashions? You were a young woman when styles changed so very, very much so you would be much more aware of styles and changes than someone who was, well, more set in their ways.

Well, when I was growing up we had little aprons with two pockets in the front, little Peter Pan collar around the neck.

How long?

Oh, they were just a fraction below the knee, but if you'll wait a minute I'll show you some pictures of them.

Your dresses then in 1924 were ankle length. What would you call that hat--a cloche?

I don't know. I usually just went to town and picked what I wanted.

Did you have any particular kind of dresses that you felt were the most flattering?

No, I usually tried to buy what they were wearing most, and I had no particular color. At that time young people wore quite a bit of black. We didn't have the variety of colors that they do nowadays.

What about the shoes, haven't they changed a lot?

Yes, I can remember when I was quite young, the old button shoes. They came up above my ankles, I was just a small

child, and I'd sit down on the floor with a button hook and do those shoes up, and my father went to town one day and bought me ones that had the black, which would be about our pump, and then the upper part was a kind of a gray mixed cloth material. And I thought those were the prettiest shoes that I have ever seen in my life.

Did little girls wear hats in those days?

Oh, everyone wore something, and when I was a youngster in school we wore a sunbonnet, and I know I didn't like to wear anything on my head. My mother was sick quite a bit when I was small, and if I had an opportunity I would put my sunbonnet under the front steps and then when I came home I would get it and put it on before I came in, and she caught me at it.

What was your punishment?

Well, I didn't do it any more.

Did you take your lunch?

Yes, you took your own lunch. They had no such thing as cafeterias or eating places or anything. We had a grocery store which would be I would say a half a mile from the school that many times Mother would give me a nickel or a dime--a dime would be the most. Well, you could buy crackers and cheese for a dime.

Can you think of anything you might like to add to this that I haven't thought to ask?

Not really. I think I have covered just about all of Fort Worth. I remember when I used to go to Handley. I had a friend whose parents rented the place where Rose Hill Cemetery is now; it was a great big farm. I used to go on the interurban and get off in front of the place and then crawl under the wire and go on up to their house.

What was their name?

Ripetoe.

They had a daughter your age?

No, I went with the son.

What was his name?

Floyd.

Can you think of any of the other areas that you were familiar with? You mentioned earlier about out where Lake Worth is now.

There was no such thing as Lake Worth, and one of the most comical episodes in my life was--I wasn't old enough to single date and if some of the neighborhood boys wanted to go along Father and Mother would take us in the car. Lake Worth had just been put there, and we used to go fishing in the river up there all the time. My father was quite a fisherman. When Lake Worth was put there we were going around that Meandering Road when it was first

put there and it wasn't complete then and they had comfort stations all around the lake, and my mother didn't know what comfort stations meant. We were riding along and she read the sign that said comfort station. We rode a little further, and she saw another comfort station, and by that time I was terrified and had nothing to say, and finally Daddy said, "I don't believe I would mention that any more if I was you." Well, when she saw the last one she said, "What in the world is a comfort station?", and me with a little boy; it was terribly embarrassing. This is that Ripetoe, a picture he had made in California--that is all him. He is dead.

Did a lot of people go out toward the lake for entertainment? Yes, and Fakes & Company had one of the first camps at the lake, and it was up on what is now the road to Eagle Mountain. I suppose that is why they named the lake Eagle Mountain Lake. We went up there when that house was first completed--my mother and father and another couple, and opened it up, and Fakes & Company gave all their employees the weekend out and furnished all the food. We had it brought out in truckloads, and cots and everything put out all over. And the lake was

just full of old trees and everything, of course they dammed it up and it took an awful long time for those trees to decay and give way. We caught one fish up there one time that weighed 115#.

On a trot line?

Yes. We would go out in the boats between the trees and just haul them in.

Did you have a fish fry?

Yes, for all the employees.

What was your dad's position; evidently he was a responsible person?

He was a collector.

When did he die?

1938. My father and mother celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1936--Centennial Year.

Did she die in 1941?

Yes, in 1941.