

Interview of

Mrs. Robert M. Rowland

by

Mrs. W A Schmidt

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Interview of Mrs. Robert M. Rowland

R: Mrs. Rowland
I: Interviewer

I: Tell me your full married name as well as your maiden name, please.

R: My maiden name is Euphrates Major Smith; my married name is Mrs. Robert Meridith Rowland.

I: When were you born Mrs. Rowland?

R: I was born November 9, 1888.

I: You are somewhat unique since you are a charter member of our Six Flags DAR. I want to interview you because you have such a marvelous facility for remembering things that happened to you in earlier times. I know that there is a lot of interesting things about your own childhood but before we get into that, tell me a little bit of what you just shared with me about why you were interested in this DAR, because actually I think this is something that not too many people could tell people that you told me.

R: In 1899 I was eleven years old. My little sister and I went to Missouri to visit my aunt and her husband and my grandmother, my father's mother. While I was there I had a great aunt, a sister of my father's mother, come from Kentucky to visit. She was seven or eight years older than my grandmother, and remembered our revolutionary ancestor who was John Major. He had visited them in Kentucky. He was also in the War of 1812. Aunt Susan was about four at the time Lafayette came back to the states in 1812. When he came back, my revolutionary ancestor was there with others to greet him. Lafayette remembered him. We would have more than we do on this ancestor except that the papers in the courthouse were burned during the Civil War.

I: Would this be in Virginia or Kentucky that this occurred?

R: It was in Virginia. When my great grandfather, John

Sleet Major, was eleven years old the family moved to Kentucky from Virginia.

I: I wonder what the occasion was that he came to visit them; just close family?

R: He came to visit the family. John Sleet Major was his oldest son. He had ten children; five sons and five daughters.

I: I wonder how this revolutionary soldier made his living after having lost his hearing after the war?

R: John Major was a plantation owner as was his son. The son's plantation was near Frankfort, Kentucky.

I: I see, he probably got some bounty land.

R: He refused a land grant. He had more land at that time than he needed.

I: You told me about the remarkable place you visited in Fayette, Missouri and what an impression it made on you as a young child from Texas. I thought it was interesting that it was such a large house and two grandmothers were living there.

R: It was built right after the Civil War by Thomas Robert Betts, the father of my aunt's husband. He brought his bride there. He met his bride to be during the Civil War when he was in Virginia. He was on horseback with some other cavalrymen. The girl was at the well where they were watering their horses. She was a tiny little thing with black eyes. He fell in love with her and talked with her a little bit. He said, when the war is over I'm coming back to get you. Will you wait for me? She said she would. It was love at first sight for both.

I: Tell me how large the house was.

R: The house he had built was three stories and a cellar underneath. The grounds were at least two country blocks. It was close to the main part of town. Later the widow

sold this property to the schools. It became the first high school that Fayette ever had.

I: I thought it was interesting that both grandmothers would live there in separate wings.

R: They were both my cousins grandparents. My mother's parents lived in Throckmorton, Texas. The place produced so much; many kinds of fruit. The leaves from walnut and maple trees had fallen for many years and the soil must have been a foot deep. No mowing machine was used because the grass was Blue Grass; it got just so high and no higher. There were no chiggers, bugs or insects like we have in Texas. A large barn was in the back, also. They had a chicken yard, an orchard, a wonderful garden, a vineyard, a rye patch for the horse and the cow, an immense front yard with every kind of flower that would grow. There were great shrubs and a snowball bush so large that people would pass along the street to look at it. The lilac trees were so big that we made our play house under one of them and had a wooden swing. I had three cousins there; there were five of us children near the same age. The oldest girl was two months older than I so we were both in the sixth grade. With no high school we went to college preparatory the next year at a Methodist school named Howard Payne College where my Grandmother Smith had gone as a girl, and her four daughters were educated. Central College for boys was next door. With co-education the two became Central College.

I: That early?

R: Yes, they started with the 7th grade.

I: You were talking about the ice on the pond for skating. That sounded interesting.

R: A cousin of my aunt and my father had married a doctor. Their house was about three miles out of town. Their youngest daughter, Carrie Belle, and I were very close. In the winter time Carrie would come in the sleigh and take us for rides. They had this big pond that we skated on in the winter. They would saw and stack the ice in

an ice house which was something new to me, being born in Texas. They cut the ice in great big blocks and put in in the ice house where they saved it and had ice all summer. That was before the days of artificial ice.

I: Now what did you say your uncle did?

R: My Uncle Carl Betts was the owner of an independent telephone company. There were many of them in those days before Bell bought them up. He also owned a drug store. My aunt said the biggest grocery bill they ever had was \$25 one month and that was the Christmas my mother and father came up to visit us. We came home in the summers.

I: I'm sure you enjoyed all of it. Now tell me something about your parents. What was your mother's and father's name?

R: My father was Major Wilson Smith. His mother said that since all of her sisters and brothers had named their first son for their father that she could not name her son John because John Smith was no name at all. So he was named Major Smith.

I: When was he born and where was he born?

R: He was born in 1859 near Columbia, Missouri. His family moved to Missouri by that time from Kentucky.

I: What about your mother; what was her maiden name?

R: My mother was Jennie Buchanan. She was next to the youngest of eight children. The Buchanans moved to Throckmorton from Coryelle County when she was fourteen years old.

I: What I am wondering is how the two of them met.

R: My father came to Texas a very young man and first lived in the eastern part of Texas, then came to Throckmorton. When he saw my mother he said, that's the girl I'm going to marry when she is old enough. He didn't tell anyone else. He didn't tell her until she was eighteen and he

proposed to her. Father was nearly 28 and mother was 18 when they married.

I: Was he cowboying, or what was he doing?

R: My father was in the sheep business. His friend, Alf Carrigan, became a very prominent and popular lawyer in Wichita Falls. It was understood when they bought the furniture for a house that the first one who married would get the furniture. My father married just a little earlier than Alf. Alf Carrigan married Joe Barwise's sister. Joe Barwise was a prominent lawyer in Fort Worth. He had a son Seth who later was also a lawyer.

I: Your daddy obviously was quite a bit older than your mother since he waited for her to grow up. They started their family, I assume, in Throckmorton.

R: Yes. My parents were married January 19, 1888 and I was born November 9 the same year.

I: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

R: I have a sister four years young who lived in Houston. I had two brothers; one ten years younger than I and the other fourteen. The one ten years younger died in 1975 in Richmond, California. The other brother, Lloyd Green Smith married a Houston girl. They moved to Lafayette, Louisiana and are still living there. He was in the ice cream business and had something like the 7-11 stores. He later sold out to Borden when he was the biggest independent owner in Louisiana. The older brother Salon was born in Haskell in the fall of the summer when my father was manager for the cowboys reunion in 1898. My father had two ranches seven miles apart in Haskel County; the Rose Ranch and the Messer Place.

I: Well, tell me something about your childhood there on the ranch at Haskell.

R: I knew very little about the ranch except the summer we came back from Missouri we spent the summer there on the ranch. I went to school with O'Henry's daughter at Belmont in Nashville, Tennessee in 1906. Her father had

lived in Texas so she wanted to know all about the ranch life. I told her it was pretty dull. Father had his ranch carpenter add onto the ranch house a living room which was also the hall. Then a room 26 by 26 for my parents with a porch on each side and a large fireplace. And a smaller room at the back that my sister and I used. A couple did the cooking and managed the house; usually a Negro or Mexican couple. My sister and I were never allowed to go where the horses were. We had to wait until a cowboy brought our horse around. I was never allowed to ride anything but a side saddle, Philadelphia style, with a long skirt. It was terrible. It was wonderful prairie country. You could get on your horse and go for miles and miles and not be disturbed. Children were perfectly safe in that country. My father had men from many places working for him. One was a handsome man from Florida who sent for his two nephews. They were sheep herders. He had the brothers, Bob and John Steel, and two Thorpe boys from Throckmorton. One of them was a carpenter who would build all kinds of things. My father never would buy a home until we came to Fort Worth. He always said, I can take that money and turn it over ever so many times. Rent houses were never big enough, so he would have the carpenter come and add on another room. He also built a large two story grainary in the back to store winter feed for livestock.

- I: It sounds as though your parents always sent you to somewhere else to insure that you got a good education.
- R: Yes, they did the best they could for us. I went to private schools from the time I left Haskell at the age of eleven. There were few good public schools at that time in Texas.
- I: I thought that the sheep and the cattle people didn't really get along?
- R: My father was a very magnetic person. Most people liked him. My mother's family accepted him. My father's cattle were really my mother's cattle. They were her brand--JEN. When one of his children would marry, my grandfather Nathaniel Greed Buchanan gave all of his children a start of cattle. Two of mother's brothers

went west to the little village of Odessa in 1886 and were among those who organized the County of Ector and Odessa was the county seat. They each had a ranch in the county. Someone told me that my father had twenty thousand sheep. We lived in Stamford after we lived in Haskell. That's where my younger brother was born. I saw the first train come into Stamford the summer I came back from Missouri in 1900. There was a big crowd there. James Hamilton of San Angelo, Texas was the biggest sheepman owner in the State of Texas. Later they moved to Del Rio also because they were getting further south all the time. Stamford was the Swinson brother's town. They had the Stamford Inn which was something for that part of the country. There were few hotels in those pioneer days in West Texas. The chef and the waitresses were imported from Chicago. I remember the waitresses were very sophisticated and wore beautiful uniforms. My father made a connection with Mr. Hamilton and we moved to San Angelo in 1903 in time for school.

- I: What was it you said about you daddy, the first cattleman's association...is that what you were telling me?
- R: He was the manager of the Cowboys reunion in Haskell in 1898. A tribe of Indians from the Indian territory camped in the north part of town. I was very much fascinated by the babies on the backs of their mothers. They lived in teepees and dressed like Indians and cooked on open fires. People came in covered wagons that dusty summer to the reunion, that way they had a place to stay. We had Mollie Bailey's Circus. They always traveled by road to towns off the railroad. It was a family circus. Birdie, the daughter, sang. One son was a trapeze performer. There were cages of wild animals. The tent was good-sized and the performers colorful. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram not many years ago had a page about Mollie Bailey and her circus. I wonder how many readers remember her. I was not ten years old. It is a part of Texas history. People were hungry for entertainment. There was a band from somewhere because our father was manager and my sister and I had free tickets to something. My sister and I rode in our surrey with father's man John the driver. I had a clipping about father and the reunion from the Waco paper but somehow it got away from me.

The reunions were before the Fat Stock Show in North Fort Worth. All of my father's surreys and ranch buggy were custom built. They had to be very strong, because to get to the Rose Ranch we had to go up a winding road with large rocks everywhere. I wondered sometimes if the horses were going to make it. My mother had been given a pair of beautiful horses bred in Kentucky; one-half Arabian thoroughbreds. They were a gift from Uncle Soloss Smith. He was the man who financed my father when he came to Texas. He came down to visit us every summer. I think he and my father had a business settlement. He was a gentleman of the old order. He sent down two spans of horses; one was sorrel and the other was paint. He made my mother a present of her choice. She chose the paint horses and they were really showy. They were beautiful; they had the big blue eyes and their skin quivered. They were very sensitive animals. They could not be turned out to pasture, they had to be kept in a livery stable and they ate their heads off. It was pretty expensive. When my father came to Texas in his teens he brought a young Negro man he got from the poor farm. This boy grew up to be a giant of a man; never had any sickness during his life, always lived out in the open air, slept under the stars except when it was raining, then he slept in the covered wagon. All the herders had chuck wagons. When my mother couldn't get a hired girl my father would send Johnny to do the cooking and take care of things in the house for us. He wanted us girls to look just right when he was driving the surrey. I was very blond and he would say to me, you put that bonnet on and you tie it on tight. Do you want to be as black and ugly as I am? He was ebony black. My father said there was never any trouble with Johnny and the white men. My father also had a great many Mexicans working for him, especially at sheep sheering time. I remember one time he had forty-six. He wanted us to know what that kind of life was like because he wanted us to be adaptable. When we were in camp, we ate out of tin plates and drank out of tin cups. We girls didn't have a table, just a board between two trees and we stood there and ate. My father had a "car" pulled by two draft horses.

I: What was it really?

R: Car was very much like one of the old fashioned streetcars.

It had the seats at the side so it was like a table. The parent's bed was built across that at the back. Underneath was a roll of bedding that was rolled out at night. My sister and I slept on the pallet. There was a little stove in there. Mother hated roughing it and soon left with us and came back home. We girls didn't mind. We would borrow dish pans from the cook and fish for crawfish. When we were down at the creek I would say someone is washing their lamp chimneys here, all this oil on the water. I later knew what that oil was. I could never get anybody interested to go back there and lease that land. When we got oil in Texas and a boom in the 1920's, I knew that what I had seen was surface oil. As you know, Haskell and Throckmorton got many gushers. Uncle Bob Buchanan stayed in Throckmorton and acquired plenty of land. He and his family heaped the benefit of the oil. Coal oil was used in lamps and lanterns. Then came gas lights and later electric lights which we take for granted. When we came to Fort Worth in 1905 from San Angelo, they had gas lights. Most people still cooked off wood stoves; later they had the gas stoves. But many people were afraid of the gas stoves; tragic things had happened.

I: What brought about this decision for your parents to move to Fort Worth?

R: Around 1902 or '03 a law was passed outlawing free grazing. My father sold his ranches because he had free grazing; that's why he made money so fast. He was very industrious and a good manager. He made a connection with James Hamilton of San Angelo so we moved there when my younger brother was only about six months old.

I: So then after that period of time you moved to Fort Worth?

R: We went to Stamford. My sister and I went to school at the Presbyterian Academy at Albany when we moved to Stamford. I've heard since that it was turned into an orphanage. The Reynolds and the Mathews were families my father had some business connections with. Mr. William Reynolds said, why send your children

back to Missouri; why not to the Academy. There was a woman from Haskell that we knew so father made arrangements for her to board us. We went on the Texas Central using it to go home on weekends.

I: I've heard a lot about that old train.

R: I'll tell you about the paint horses we brought to Fort Worth. We had them on the north side in a livery stable. It was something to get those horses to us. They would bring them clear over to the south side and then come again to take them back. My parents decided that it wasn't a very good idea so my father sold these horses to a Mr. Cox who was President of the Texas Central Railroad and lived in Waco. I went to school the following year with his daughter at Belmont College. I never told her that they had our horses.

I: Why did your parents decide to move to Fort Worth and the South Side?

R: They didn't move to the South Side; they lived on Taylor Street right up there where it is all the business buildings now. My sister Mabel and I boarded at a school in San Angelo and didn't come to Fort Worth until school was out. My father made a connection with the Commission House in North Fort Worth. He had been shipping by train to Fort Worth, Kansas City, and Chicago. While we were in Albany going to school my father told me that he had thirteen cars of cattle being shipped to Chicago. The men who were to look after the cattle had failed to do so and the cars were set off. All thirteen carloads of cattle died without food or water. That was quite a blow.

I: I didn't know you had lived on Taylor Street. Did you buy?

R: Oh, no.

I: He rented down there on Taylor Street; then what happened?

R: My mother said she wanted a home, so they bought a home on South Jennings just a block off Hemphill. We were on a corner lot and had our horse and cow. I still had my horse. When I was at school in San Angelo my father saw that I had my horse and buggy in a stable. It was a very strict school. At sixteen I was much younger than most of those girls that came in from ranches and farms. School authorities considered that I was dependable. I had my little brother Solon with me. In Fort Worth my mother had rheumatism and was confined to her bed. A housekeeper was in charge at that time when they lived on Taylor Street. My little brother was about six. He asked for fifty cents and she gave it to him, so he went to the drug store and bought a roman candle. He came home, lighted it, and then he didn't know what to do with it. He got frightened and tucked it under the corner of the house. When it went off, it was right below my mother's room and she couldn't take that. They thought Solon needed supervision so they brought him to me. There there were the three of us there in San Angelo at school.

I: Bless your heart, that was a lot of responsibility.

R: Oh, I had a great deal of responsibility. I had to look after their clothes and buy them and have them laundered. My father had an account with March Brothers Stores and all I had to do was sign a sight draft if I needed any money. One time my father laughingly said he thought maybe we were boarding with March Brothers because I would order a dozen oranges and other food the boarding house didn't have. Of course, in those days everything was delivered. I would take first one friend and then another for a little ride in the afternoon. The school had baseball for the boys but didn't have anything for the girls in the way of recreation, so they appreciated the ride. I phoned the livery stable and the rig would be ready when school was out.

I: Well, here you were a sixteen year old girl away from home at a school with a younger brother and sister dependent upon you. When did you have the opportunity to date, or did you date at that time?

R: Oh, no, we didn't date. Now on Sunday night they let us walk two and two as couples to the Methodist Church, but the teachers were walking up and down all the time to see that we didn't hold hands. When my little brother came, bless his little heart, he was frightened to stay up there by himself. He would get up at the window and say, sister, sister, come back, come back, so I would go back and stay with him. No wonder I was an old maid.

I: Did you complete your schooling then at San Angelo?

R: The next year I came back to school alone and the next year I went to Belmont in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Landry was the president. He looked much like Theodore Roosevelt. By the way, my father was a personal friend of Theodore Roosevelt and was at a dinner for him at the Metropolitan Hotel.

I: How did that come about?

R: My father was a Republican. The First president I had ever heard of was Grover Cleveland. My father was furious because Grover Cleveland hadn't done him right. It was about the tariff on wool. Then in 1907 my father had over-extended himself and his health broke. That was the year of panic; all the banks closed tight. When we first came to Fort Worth the president of the First National Bank was Captain Loyd; his son-in-law, Burt Burnett followed. The next I remember was W.E. Connell. I remember that he told my mother that she could borrow money from the bank but he would not let Major have it because he came in and drew out \$22,000 when the bank did not know how they were going to make it. My father had obligations that he had to meet. After we moved to Fort Worth my father bought five thousand lambs and had them at Arlington Heights to fatten for market. The Heights was open country--just a few houses. My father had Mexican herders. There was only one way you could get there. They had a bridge across the Trinity--was a wooden bridge. It was all open land and built up very very fast when they started building. I remember the bridge was washed away with the river overflowing its banks. Guy Waggoner had a plan, so it must have been along the time of World War I, probably about 1915.

He had his private plane and he came back and forth supplying the stores with the staples they needed in Arlington Heights. He made many trips back and forth to supply the little stores with groceries.

I: How long did your daddy have these sheep out in Arlington Heights?

R: Oh, I don't know. He was just fattening them for market. I went away to college in 1906.

I: Where did you do your shopping?

R: We had Striplings; they had a big wooden sign that said the price is the thing. Striplings is still in the same location. Burton and Peal, the largest store, failed. I remember when Texas Christian University came to Fort Worth. A friend of mine from San Angelo whose father was Judge Joseph E. Spence would come to visit. She was a very close friend of Dean Hall's wife. She, Mary Bain Spence, was majoring in music at Waco before they moved here to Fort Worth. When she went to graduate they found out she had never had physics, so she had to come back to TCU another year so she could get her degree. I saw the first TCU building ever built here. Robert M. Rowland, who later became my husband, was an attorney for TCU for thirty years and forty-two years for the Tarrant County Independent School District. He practiced law until he was 87 and only lived two more years.

I: You seem to have spent so much of your time going to school, one place and then another.

R: I went to TCU.

I: What did you major in?

R: I took art and expression at TCU; two things that I had taken before. When I was in San Angelo I had two gold medals, one for expression and one in art. I took art at Belmont under Mrs. Cockrell who was head of the Art Department. We became very close friends. I spent a great deal of time helping her type some of the books she edited. I have some of those books; one of them became a school text book. Her husband was head of the law school and had three degrees. He later became president of William Woods College in Fulton, Missouri and Mrs. Cockrell was head of the Art Department.

I went to Brantley Draughon, a business school in Fort Worth. I hadn't finished but Mrs. Brantley went on vacation and asked me to take over her classes so I did but what I had to do was to study at night and keep ahead of an advanced class. I never did graduate. Just before she came back County Judge John Terrell told Mrs. Brantley he wanted a young lady in his office. The main thing was he wanted her to look like a lady. He could not get his work done because the lawyers would drop in and sit on the corner of his table and tell funny stories. He did not want his time taken up that way. The first probation officer's name was Judge Travis and he had his office there too. I did their work. I didn't know for a long time what it was all about when they would laugh. These men would come in the door and then dash out. The two judges would look at each other and laugh. I didn't know or understand what it was all about. Finally Judge Terrell broke down and told me what had taken place. They get rid of the intruders. I became very much interested in law and decided that I wanted to be a legal stenographer. In 1921 Mr. Rober Rowland needed a secretary. He had been assistant attorney general in Austin when he was a younger man. One of the secretaries there was a friend of mine and knew him in Austin having taken dictation from him. She wanted me in the same building so we could go to lunch. I was working for the Star-Telegram at the time as a secretary to the advertising manager when I told them I had been offered this place with a lawyer. I didn't have to punch a clock there. Instead of working nine hours a day I worked seven and a half and just a half day on Saturday. That was wonderful not to have to work on Saturday afternoon. My salary was much more. Amon Carter Sr., the publisher, thought I ought to stay with the newspaper. When the time came for me to go I told him. He said, we are not going to let you leave. I told him then what my reasons were. He said, you're not going to always have these hours and we are going to pay more, and so on. But I preferred legal work and had already made this promise. I was secretary to Mr. Rowland seven and a half years. In 1927 Mr. Rowland's wife died; he had four grown married daughters. He proposed to me and I accepted. We were married February 1929 at Houston, Texas in the

home of my sister, Mrs. Eugene Harris. In October we had all this trouble; they didn't call it depression. They called it recession at first, but it was that awful Depression that lasted so long. We were married almost two years when our little daughter was born. We named her Susan Belle for the beloved aunt in Fayette, Missouri.

I: I bet he was crazy about her.

R: They were chums. My husband didn't see anything wrong with Susan. He didn't see why she ever had to be corrected. He never corrected her. He acted more like a grandfather; he had two grandsons who were quite a bit older than her. The younger was killed during World War II while flying over the English Channel. The other lives in Long Island, New York. He and Susan keep in touch. They are all that is left of the first family except Pauls children.

I: Where did you live?

R: We lived in Arlington Heights on Belle Place. During the Depression you were urged to hire as many as you could, so I had a cook and a laundress who came the first pretty day of every week for a dollar and a half a day to start. She was with me thirteen years. Then I had a house man who was also a yard man. He did the yard work and the heavy housework. I was not a lady of leisure; I had plenty to do. I belonged to the DAR since March 31, 1917. I was Regent of the Six Flags Chapter during 1942 and 1944. I belonged to a good many things. I often think when I can't make but about one thing a week these days how I would make about three a day back then. I didn't neglect my church either. During the war I was a Regent when the Carter Blood Bank was dedicated by the DAR Societies of Fort Worth.

I: I have looked back in the scrap books and have seen many of the things you did at that time.

R: The stockyards was the thing that drew us to Fort Worth. My father knew a number of people.

- I: Its obvious you and your husband have known many of the better known names in Fort Worth.
- R: My husband was born in Azle. Azle was named for his uncle by marriage, Dr. Azle Stewart, who gave the land the town was built on. My husband's father was a Baptist preacher and farmer; in those days a man couldn't make a living preaching, the turned the farm over to his sons and hired hands. He would marry people and bury them fording streams on horseback and preach to them. He was also assistant pastor of the Azle Baptist Church.
- I: Sounds like you have done so many interesting things in your different years of experience and accomplishments. Your daught, she is of course a grown woman now.
- R: My daughter graduated from TCU at nineteen and had a church wedding the next day. She married a college teacher and lived in Edmund, Oklahoma. Both now teach at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Her husband is a microbiologist. He is Dr. Lavon P. Richardson. My daughter has her M.A. She teaches but also supervises. She is a speech and hearing pathologist. She keeps very busy and loves the work. She did clinical work before she took this position. She knows the practical work; she loves working with children.
- I: I think I detect a little bit of mother's influence there.
- R: I am very much interested in anything connected with education and school; in fact, I was the one who started our Six Flags Chapter DAR giving to the mountain schools. Susan Rowland was the first child born into the chapter. At that time they gave her a sterling DAR baby spoon. She was made our mascott and I said if DAR didn't do anything else at all but what they do for those mountain schools, I think they justify their existence. I think in DAR you learn so much live history. My grandson is in his junior year at Oklahoma State University and the granddaughter is in Boston working and taking some extension courses at Harvard.

END OF INTERVIEW