

Pickney J. Brown

interviewed by

Mrs. Pickney J. Brown

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ORAL HISTORIES OF FORT WORTH, INC.

Pickney J. Brown

P.J. "Jimmy" Brown
June 6, 1903

INTERVIEW WITH P. J. JIMMY BROWN

Interviewer: What was the name of that territory where you lived?

Mr. Brown: Valley View

Intv: When did you move there:

PJB: 1917

Intv: How many people and how many blocks did it cover?

PJB: About 300 people lived there. When I first went there, there was a lot of camping. A lot of people lived in wagons and tents, etc. Then later, the majority of them either built a little house or moved up into some of the older houses. There was two streets besides the White Settlement Road. There was Woodward Street and I don't recall the others.

I lived on Woodward Street. We had the option of either going to Van Zandt to school or the old Second Ward Peter Smith School, but really all the kids down there went to Peter Smith.

Intv: Where did you cross the river?

PJB: On the White Settlement Road Bridge, which is no longer there. It crossed somewhere within the Leonard's Parking Lot --- where Leonard's Parking lot is now. It crossed more in an East-West direction than the present Henderson Street Bridge.

Woodward Street is still there, but it is nothing like it was then because when I was there it was, well, I don't know what you would call it a low-class neighborhood, but it was a poor people's neighborhood. It was a happy neighborhood and it was more or less like a park -- like Trinity Park is now. It had beautiful trees and it seemed that in the bigger part of it there was no restrictions on it. People could move in there and camp and stay as long as they wanted and no one said anything about it. That was mostly on the South Side of White Settlement Road. Valley View was on the North Side of White Settlement Road.

There was three or four real old settlers that lived there. There was a family of Greeks, a man and a woman. There were no children.

There was Tom Evans who had lived there for years and years. Then there was some Butlers who lived right up on the railroad tracks in White Settlement. They had lived there for years. West from the railroad was all farming country.

Intv: Did the Lester Jolly's live there?

PJB: Yes, they lived on the other street besides Woodward, but I don't know the name of the street.

Intv: When the flood came, how long did it rain before the water got up?

PJB: It seems to me like it rained for two or three days before it broke through.

Intv: Lake Worth wasn't built then, was it?

PJB: Yes, it was. That was 1922. Lake Worth was already built. I can't recall, but it seems to me that there was a rumor that the flood gates were opened to allow the water to get out. That was one reason that it flooded. As far as that being true, I've never known.

Intv: If they had not opened the flood gates there would be the danger of the dam going, then it sure would be bad.

PJB: That's what they were afraid of --- that it would break the levees, but it wouldn't make any difference anyway because it was the same height on each side of the levee. When we came out, the top of the levee was worn down to about six feet wide. It was just flat and the water was about two feet below that on each side.

Intv: It had already broken through in several places?

PJB: No. I never found a place where it broke through. I think they just opened the gates and let it out, either that or it came from the Clear Fork. I have heard a lot of discussion about it, but I'll never know.

Intv: Where was it that you went out and got on the bridge?

PJB: On the 7th Street Viaduct -- the present 7th Street Viaduct.

Intv: It is on the Clear Fork, isn't it?

PJB: Yes.

Intv: How did you get from where you were?

PJB: Woodward Street was only a block from the levee.

Intv: The West Fork comes in there and you were on the North Side of the West Fork and you got out on the Clear Fork.

PJB: Valley View was situated in the forks of the river. In other words, we lived between the rivers. We lived on the South side of the West Fork and the North side of the Clear Fork.

Intv: Where did you live before you moved to Woodward Street?

PJB: We lived in a covered wagon. There were not any streets.

PJB: It was just like a big park -- big pecan trees.

Intv: You lived in a covered wagon for how long?

PJB: I guess a couple of months.

Intv: You came to Fort Worth in 1917?

PJB: Yes.

Intv: You lived in a covered wagon a couple of months and then moved on Woodward Street?

PJB: Yes, we lived in three different houses on Woodward Street. The first house we lived in was a little old shotgun three-room house. It had two main rooms and a shed room on the back of it. Then we moved on the opposite side of the street into a bigger three-room house. Then, where we were living when the flood came was a still bigger three-room house. Of course, that was about as big as they built houses then.

Intv: You owned the house?

PJB: No. We were figuring on buying it but we did not own it. We were just renting. We lived there for two years, I guess, in that house.

Intv: Where was your daddy working then?

PJB: When we first came to Fort Worth he started working at Camp Bowie. They were building Camp Bowie. Then after the war, we went into a recession and he was out of work for a long time but he managed to work here and there. Then when the oil boom started he left and went out of town to Mexia, Breckenridge and Ranger and different places to work in the oil fields.

This old lady had a big bunch of chickens. When she fed them (she lived right next to the levee) she would throw feed at the top of the levee. The chickens would run up there to get it and then she would throw one handful down at the bottom and they would come back down to get it. We asked her why she did this and she said, "Well, the more exercise the chickens get, the more eggs, they will lay." She was running them up and down the levee to get them to eat.

Some of the people that I recall that lived there were the Williams. This was a big family and had a whole set of kids. I could name the bigger part of them if I just took a little time. Jeff was an older boy that married after they moved there and he and his wife also lived there.

Then the Vickers were a rather large family.

Intv: She was the one that was Grandma Vickers whose picture was

Intv: in the paper?

PJB: Yes, she is still living. She is about 102 years old. Then Casper and his wife and two children -- they were of the same family but he was the older son.

Then the Johnsons were a family, mostly girls and the one boy.

The Briggs moved from North Side down to the Valley and lived there for about a year and they they left.

The Windoms were another one of the bigger families. There was three different families of them. There were two older boys who were married and they all lived there.

The Stamfords were a large family. Now understand that a three-room house was the biggest house there was down there. The Stamfords were a bigger family than we were. One of the Stamfords -- the older boy was in the Navy all the time that we were there, or a big part of the time that we were there -when he came out he married the Briggs girl.

Intv: Is that Nellie Stamford?

PJB: Yes.

Bob Kettner was just a big old country boy, a real likeable cuss. His mother and stepfather lived there quite a while. Their names were Mr. and Mrs. John Sexton. I was born June 6, 1908, in Brady, Texas. In 1915 we moved to Lamesa for my older sister's health. My father was a carpenter and also farmed. After two crop failures, my parents, with his parents and brother's family all started to Oklahoma. When we got to Fort Worth, my father got a job working at Camp Bowie. So we stayed here, while the rest of the family moved on. At that time our family consisted of my father, James Pinkney, mother, Inda (Johnson), older sister, Ollie, two brothers, Clarence and Jesse and a younger sister, Bertha. Two more brothers, Bloyd and Loyd were born while we lived in the vally.

The Fishers were just a man and a woman and one girl who was one of the prettiest girls in the whole neighborhood. All the little boys took a liking to her.

Roy Grigsby and his wife (she was originally a Penny until she married). They lived next door to us and I recall they had a team of mules that he drove to a gravel wagon and they were the most ornery mules that I ever saw. When he came in of an evening, he would tell Birdie to go unharness those mules. She would go drop the breast yoke, unhook the traces and turn them loose and they would kick all the harness off.

There was three families of the Pennys. Some of them moved

PJB: from there before the flood, but I don't recall which.

The Donnellys (Donleys) were two girls and a boy and they moved from there before the flood.

Johnny Akins was an old country boy that came from East Texas. He lived there for several years with his sister and brother-in-law, but I don't recall their names.

Intv: That wouldn't be the Johnny Akins that was a builder here?

PJB: No, it wasn't.

The McVays -- he was an old packing house worker and he had three boys and one girl. They moved before the flood.

The Baldrich family was another family of four or five girls and one boy. The boy, naturally, was the favorite of the family, being the baby also. It so happened that little Tom Evans and I were riding a jackass one day and this little kid wanted to go with us and we put him between us on this donkey and we started down the levee. The levee was so steep that we all slid off over the donkey's head. This little boy started crying and we noticed his arm was bent, so we straightened it out and tied a handkerchief around it. We told him he had just bent it a little bit and it would be all right after a while. So, he went on home and kept crying all through the night. We had told him not to tell his parents what had happened. The next morning it was hurting him so bad his mother persuaded him to tell her what had happened -- he had fallen off the donkey and hurt it. She asked me if I knew anything about it and I told her that he had bent it, but naturally he had broken it. The poor little kid had suffered all night with it.

The Keys were a family that I don't remember a lot about.

And then the old Greek couple that lived there. I remember that he ate so much garlic (and he peddled this garlic). He had a little vegetable garden. He peddled off it the year round. He put these things in a basket and carried them up into Fort Worth proper and sold them. This garlic was so strong that every time that we saw this poor old fellow coming that we would hold our noses and run. I can imagine how that poor old fellow felt. I think a lot of times about the cruel things that we kids did to that old man and his wife by not associating with them because they smelled like garlic.

Uncle Tom Evans and Mrs. Evans and their two daughters and Tom, Jr. Uncle Tom was one of the oldest settlers there. The girls and Tom had all gone when the flood came. He lived to be 90 something years old.

The Prices - he was a widower. He finally got married. He married a widow woman that had about four or five kids but

PJB: I don't remember who she was. In all, there was about 14 kids in the whole group.

Then there was this family that lived there right on the levee. They had a daughter that was a dope addict, which was at that time a terrible thing to everyone. Naturally, we were all frightened because she would scream at night and alarm everyone.

The Jolleys had the one son, Lester, who I went all through school with, and continued to associate with afterwards.

Zack Wiley and his mother and sister lived there for a year or so but they had moved just before the flood.

The Actons, who at one time lived on Woodward Street directly across the street from us, were rather old settlers, but he died while we were there. Later on one of the boys had his leg cut off by a train on the White Settlement Road at 7th Street. He was on a bicycle when the train cut his leg off. That was some of the most tragic things that I remember up until the time of the flood.

At the time of the flood we had people down there that had lived on that river for years and they knew the history of it, and they knew what it could do. So up until this morning that it came through, they all contended that it would never bother us, but it did come through and it seems to me that it was before 8 o'clock that we started making preparations for it. As I remember one of the Williams boys across the street had a little wagon similar to one that I had and he brought it over to my house and we tied them to a fence post. We thought if it did flood that we would save our little wagons. My brother Clarence and I were told to go to the pasture, which was some half a mile up the White Settlement Road from our house -- West from White Settlement Road -- and we were to get the cows out of the pasture and bring them back in. Fortunately, they had not gone far from the gate. We got them out on the road and started back toward home, which would be going East. We got about half way there and my brother looked back West on White Settlement Road and said, "Looky yonder. Looky yonder." The water was coming down the road about two feet deep -- just a rolling. It caught us before we got there and my dad and mother met us and they had the rest of the children so we all waded this water on down to the levee with the bigger part of the rest of the community. Some of them were taken out by rescue squads and were taken to Arlington Heights. It was really a bothersome thing because the communications were not good and we did not know whether they were drowned or where they were. We could not seem to locate them. You can't imagine that in a city as big as Fort Worth.

Intv: When communications are cut it is as bad as if you were way off in a desert?

PJB: I remember Lon Becker who lived on the East side of the levee up on the bluff. He was coming in to see about his family and he had come from the 7th Street Viaduct down the levee. His father wasn't with us. We couldn't find his father so he went in search of him and heard that a boat had picked him up and taken him out. We all went (Don Evans family, all of our family and some other family that I don't recall). All the Vickers family and our family and one other family all went. I don't recall which one it was. We lived with the Vickers for four or five days until the waters receded and we could get in and get the furniture we had left and rent us another place to live.

Intv: How high did the water come in the house?

PJB: Our house sat approximately two feet off the ground. My recollection is that the water came just above the doors which would make it about 8 1/2 feet deep. It was something that a lot of the people never got over because it was a beautiful place and a good neighborhood and they lost everything they had and they just never did get over it.

Intv: Did you lose your cows?

PJB: Yes, we lost our cows. We did not lose any in the flood. We just lost them indirectly as a result of the flood, because we lost our pasture. We were in the dairy business and lost all of our customers and had to move all our cows out to another pasture and were not able to pay the pasturage on them so we had to let the cows go for the pasturage. We had a bunch of hogs and we lost all of those. We had a big bunch of chickens and we lost all of those. We lost two or three calves.

To see what was "Valley View" now you can't visualize how pretty it really was -- how peaceful it was.

Intv: The main thing down there now is the dog pound, isn't it?

PJB: Yes, that's right.

Intv: Where did you move after you moved away from the Valley?

PJB: We moved over off of Lexington Street, I believe it was over by Pecan. I don't recall the name of the street.

There wasn't many friendships broken up. Most of them just moved across the river to higher ground.

She was running them up and down the levee to get them to eat.

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