

Oral History Interview

with

HAZELWOOD BAKER

(and some comments by her daughter Aileen)

August 1, 1972
Early days in Portales

By Mrs. John Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library

BURROUGHS: Hazelwood, would you state your full name and your place and date of birth?

BAKER : I am Hazelwood Moore Baker. I was born in Cleburne, Texas. We moved to Portales, New Mexico in 1910.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something about your grandparents? Do you know their full names?

BAKER : My grandparents, on my parents, on my father's side were Jonathon Moore and Lucy McClary. They lived in Moss, Tennessee, where he was a merchant, a farmer, and a judge.

BURROUGHS: Who were your other side of the family, the grandparents?

BAKER : My father is . . .

BAKER, A.: On your mother's.

BURROUGHS: Your mother's parents.

BAKER, A.: You didn't know them Mother, did you? On your mother's side?

BAKER : No.

BURROUGHS: You don't know them?

BAKER : No, I don't.

BURROUGHS: Well now can you, do you know anything about whether they ever lived in Roosevelt County? Did they come with you in 1910?

BAKER : My parents?

BURROUGHS: Your grandparents.

BAKER : Oh no, my grandparents, all of them had been dead a long time, you know, on Papa's side and my mother, I told you, you know, about that.

BURROUGHS: Well now, when you came to Roosevelt County in 1910, you came with your parents?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Will you tell their full names?

BAKER : All right. My father is S. S. Moore, deceased. He was born in Tennessee. My mother is Myra Pitillo and she was born in Weatherford, Texas. Her parents have a plantation there and my mother went to college in Weatherford.

BURROUGHS: It's unusual for a lady of that time to go to college. Can you tell a little about that and also where you received your unusual first name?

BAKER : Now, her father's team of horses ran away and he was killed in this accident. Her mother died at her birth three weeks later. Her aunt, Mrs. Hazelwood, took her to live with them.

BURROUGHS: Now this was your mother you were talking about?

BAKER : It was my mother.

BURROUGHS: And she was raised by Mrs. Hazelwood.

BAKER : Mrs. Hazelwood, yes.

BURROUGHS: So in return for that she named her first daughter Hazelwood?

BAKER : The last one.

BURROUGHS: The last one. Well then, tell me about your brothers and sisters. If you were the last child, who were the others?

BAKER : Brian James, I am one year older than he is, he was. He's deceased . . .

BAKER, A.: Mother, give the names of the other three.

BAKER : All right. There were five children in the family: Myrtle, Lucille, Stanford, Hazelwood, Brian James.

BURROUGHS: And you were the last?

BAKER : No, Brian James was last and I was next to the last.

BURROUGHS: Brian James was the last?

BAKER : Yes. We were almost twins.

BURROUGHS: Well how many of you came to Roosevelt County? Did the whole family?

BAKER : Yes, the whole family.

BURROUGHS: Five children in all came. What did your father, S. S. Moore, do to make a living here in the county? Was he a homesteader?

BAKER : No, he had a dry goods store all the time.

BURROUGHS: He was a merchant?

BAKER : He was a merchant. Yes. His father had been a merchant and he used to pack eggs in the morning and then walk five miles to school. And the boats came up and down the river, you see, and they'd swap bacon for eggs and . . .

BURROUGHS: Now that was before he came . . .

BAKER, A.: That was the Cumberland River.

BURROUGHS: Of course, that was in Tennessee.

BAKER : Yes. I think he got tired.

BURROUGHS: Now will you tell me a little bit more about the town of Portales, if you can remember it, when your father was a merchant?

BAKER : Yes, I can remember when we first came because every other place was a saloon.

BURROUGHS: How many?

BAKER : Oh, I don't know, but it was terrible. But, haven't we got rid of it, I don't know how they . . .

BURROUGHS: Well, now I would like for you to comment on that. What caused the saloons to disappear on the local scene?

BAKER : I guess they got [unintelligible]

BURROUGHS: Was it because of national prohibition?

BAKER : I really don't know. I guess I didn't pay much attention to things like that.

BURROUGHS: How old were you then?

BAKER : Oh, I was about twelve years old, I guess.

BURROUGHS: When you came to Portales, you were twelve?

BAKER : Yes, I think so.

BURROUGHS: So, you don't remember anything about the wild and wooly days then?

BAKER, A.: Well, you might not have been but about ten, mother.

BAKER : Well, I'll tell you, this place where, this friend of mine Hightower was, I stayed the first years with them. My father bought a farm, and he soon didn't like that 'cause I had to board in town, so did Myrtle, so did Brian James, so he moved to town after that. Before they did move back, I stayed at the Hightower's boarding place and Myrtle boarded over at Miss Hardin's.

BURROUGHS: Now that was your older sister, Myrtle?

BAKER : Yes. Myrtle Hardin.

BAKER, A.: They later moved to Ardmore and that was the reason that Aunt Myrtle moved to Ardmore when she left Portales.

BURROUGHS: Well, where did you go to school when you were a young girl?

BAKER : I went to school here all my high school years.

BURROUGHS: But, you were in the grade school when you first came, weren't you?

BAKER : I was just ready to go into . . .

BURROUGHS: What is it?

BAKER : I was just ready to go into high school.

BURROUGHS: I see. Who was your teacher?

BAKER : Well, I had, Mr. Robert Dean was our superintendent. That's Clifford Dean's brother. I had one teacher named . . . Well, Mr. Brown was one of my teachers at . . .

BURROUGHS: L. L. Brown?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Was the whole school on the back of the . . .

BAKER : We just had the L. L. Brown . . .

BURROUGHS: One building? The old Central Grade Building?

BAKER : That's right.

BURROUGHS: Actually, it was the entire school system and then after they built the high school they used it for a grade school. Is that right?

BAKER : Yes, that's right.

BURROUGHS: How many children were there? Can you estimate?

BAKER : Not too many in the early . . . I just don't know how many. I didn't think about that part of it.

BURROUGHS: Can you recall any incidents of your high school days that tell something about your amusements or social life? Did they have a football team?

BAKER : Yes, we had a football team. I don't think they played much. We had a good basketball team for the girls.

BURROUGHS: You played basketball?

BAKER : I did. I played four years.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me about what year that was? Those years, your four years of high school? Was it about 1914 to '18?

BAKER : Yes, or '19. Somewhere around there. I should have, I didn't think about things.

BURROUGHS: What else did you do besides play basketball?

BAKER : Well, we had a dance in the Chamber of Commerce. They were the nicest things. They let us have a dance at their building. It's down there around back of Wacker's, in there someplace.

BURROUGHS: That's where the old Chamber of Commerce was?

BAKER : That's where the old Chamber of Commerce was. I think they tore that down not long ago, didn't they? And built something?

BURROUGHS: What was the feeling of the various churches in regard to the dancing held in the Chamber of Commerce building?

BAKER : I never have, I didn't hear them say a thing in the world about it.

BURROUGHS: There was no objection to dancing?

BAKER : No. The lights went out at eleven o'clock.

BURROUGHS: Everybody had to go home?

BAKER : We had to go home then.

BURROUGHS: How did you get down there?

BAKER : Well, we walked down there and we had a little slipper bag that we carried our dancing shoes in, and put on our walking shoes to walk home.

BURROUGHS: Did anybody ride horseback to the dance?

BAKER : No.

BURROUGHS: It was close enough, then, for people . . .

BAKER : Once in a while, there were cars and they didn't let the children have them much like they do now.

BURROUGHS: I guess not. The parents didn't have cars?

BAKER : No.

BURROUGHS: I'd like to ask you something about your sister Myrtle. Was she in school at the time you were?

BAKER : No. They were out before we finished, my brother and I. Myrtle was twelve years older than me.

BURROUGHS: Twelve years older than you?

BAKER : Yes, and Lucille came right next. I think she was just one year younger than Myrtle.

BURROUGHS: Was that the one later known as Lucille Cumby who taught in the school?

BAKER : Yes, she taught here twenty-seven years.

BURROUGHS: Twenty-seven years?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Well tell me something about what Myrtle did when she wasn't in school.

BAKER : Myrtle went to the State University of Texas to school. Then she came out here and went to work in the bank.

BURROUGHS: What bank was that?

BAKER : Well that must have been First National. And she got this letter from this friend, Mrs. Hardin, who had moved from here to Marietta, and said, "Myrtle . . .

BURROUGHS: Marietta, Oklahoma?

BAKER : Yes. Said, "We have a job for you in the bank if you'd like to come," and said, "You can come and stay with us awhile," so she went. And she was cashier.

BURROUGHS: In the bank in Marietta?

BAKER : In Marietta, Oklahoma. No, Ardmore.

BURROUGHS: Ardmore?

BAKER : Yes, that's where my . . .

BURROUGHS: Well, why . . .

BAKER : Mr. Lard Noble came in the bank one day and said, "I've got my books in terrible shape. Do you have anybody to fix them?" And they said immediately, oh yes, said, "We've got a girl in here that can just fix anything." Said, "She's the smartest thing you ever saw." So Lard brought his books in. She took them home at night and got them straightened out. He was in the oil business.

BURROUGHS: Now what was the name of that oil company?

BAKER : Noble Drilling.

BURROUGHS: Noble Drilling Company of Ardmore, Oklahoma?

BAKER : Yes. And she decided that she'd quit her job at the bank and go and work for them. He said, "We can't pay you any money because the bank's paying you." But said, "I'll give you a working interest." So she went home and thought it over. And Lucille was there visiting at that time. And she tried, and she didn't know what to do because she had such a nice job. But, she went with the oil company.

BURROUGHS: How long did she stay with that oil company?

BAKER : Until she retired and came out here. She moved out here . . .

BURROUGHS: What was that date?

BAKER : That was 1943?

BAKER, A.: 1943, yes.

BURROUGHS: '43 when she retired from the oil company?

BAKER : Yes. She moved in out here and built . . . we had one story on this house and then she built the second story.

BAKER, A.: She was still connected with the drilling company, of course.

BAKER : Well, she still, we are.

BAKER, A.: Yes, but she, when she came out here the SEA Cattle Company started, and she kept all the books and so forth for the SEA Cattle Company.

BURROUGHS: SEA?

BAKER, A.: S-E-A.

BURROUGHS: Oh.

BAKER,A. : There's a little story behind that. It's out south and a little north of Kenna. They were going to name it Sam-Ed, and Aunt Myrtle said, no you're not, you're going to name it Sam-Ed-Ann and SEA for the SEA Cattle Company. And Sanedan was another subject, they were a drilling company. And, that was because there was Sam and Ed, the two boys, and the girl's name was Ann. She didn't want the girl left out and so she told them you'll name it SEA.

BURROUGHS: Sam, Ann, Ed.

BAKER, A.: Sam, Ed, and Ann, SEA. And, Sam-Ed-Ann, Samedann Drilling Company, which was a subsidiary.

BAKER : That was the oil and they did the drilling too, but they had lots of oil wells . . .

BURROUGHS: How long have you lived in this present home? Was this the location of your home when you first came here?

BAKER, A.: No, you lived down . . .

BAKER : No, we lived one year . . . I didn't . . . my parents were out there, but the rest of us stayed in town, in the country, you see, when we . . . but that was in 1910. We've been here sixty years, I guess.

BURROUGHS: Sixty years in this location.

BAKER : No, just sixty years in . . .

BURROUGHS: . . . in Portales.

BAKER : In Portlaes, yes. Mrs. Oldham has lived across the street from us. We didn't plan it that way, but it happened. For sixty years we've been neighbors.

BURROUGHS: Well that's very fine. This is on West Second Street and the house that Mrs. Baker lives in now, is noted throughout the town because, I think it covers a half a block. It has extensions and additions, two stories. It's very attractive and beautiful. Can you tell me anything about when Myrtle, your sister, acquired an interest in the H Bar Ranch?

BAKER : She bought that in 19 . . .

BAKER, A.: '42, I believe.

BURROUGHS: '42. Did she buy the whole ranch?

BAKER : She bought all that was left out there, 360 acres high range. And, you know, that was the old H Bar Headquarters.

BURROUGHS: Was the old headquarters building still on the . . .

BAKER : Half of it. Don't you know how it was. . .

BURROUGHS: Can you describe what it looked like?

BAKER : Well it looked like, it was an adobe house and there were some rooms in it that were whole, and the top was torn off. We had picnics out there.

BURROUGHS: There were lots of cotton wood trees around?

BAKER : Oh yes, around that time. And Myrtle tried to have the tank made so I could stock it with fish. You know I like to fish. But, they ruined it and it wouldn't hold water.

BURROUGHS: It wouldn't hold water. Well the mention of that tank, that makes you want to go back to an incident in your girlhood that you had told me about previously? You said you were baptised in a tank. Can you relate that incident?

BAKER : Yes, I sure can. I belong to the Christian church, always, Central Christian Church, the one here in our city. Miss Sally Bryant was our Sunday School teacher. She informed us on Sunday morning that we had reached the age of accountability and she wanted us to join the church that day, and we did. We were marched down to Hopper's tank.

BURROUGHS: Where is Hopper's tank?

BAKER : Charles Compton lives on that place now.

BURROUGHS: That was Taylor McCaslands' place before that, wasn't it?

BAKER : Yes it was.

BURROUGHS: How big a tank was it?

BAKER : Oh, I guess about the size of this room.

BURROUGHS: Fairly good size tank.

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Was it in the summertime?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Could have been. How many girls did she march down?

BAKER : Boys and girls both, it was about fourteen. We had a mixed class.

BURROUGHS: Boys and girls?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: And you were twelve or older?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Do you remember the name of the minister?

BAKER : I don't know.

BURROUGHS: Well that was a rather impromptu ceremony, wasn't it?

BAKER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Dipping that many all at once.

BAKER : Yes, it sure was. That was . . .

BURROUGHS: Well what happened? Did you go back to church in your wet clothes?

BAKER : No, we had to go home then.

BURROUGHS: You had to go home that day.

BAKER : That was after church.

BURROUGHS: After church. The baptismal ceremony was after church?

BAKER : Yes, and do you know that in our church they baptize them just as soon as they join the church. They go right on.

BURROUGHS: Well, that was a sure way of getting them in, wasn't it?

BAKER : They have a "baptismal", and Myrtle gave it to them.

BURROUGHS: Yes. I knew that your sister, Myrtle, had contributed generously-

BAKER : Yes, to their hospital and to their baptistry.

BURROUGHS: Well let's go back to your sister, Myrtle, now. We were talking about the tank on the old H Bar Ranch and the adobe headquarters house. Miss Aileen, didn't you tell me that you had a souvenir plate with a picture of that old ranch house?

BAKER, A.: Yes, we do. Yes, it was a long adobe under the cottonwood trees, and there's a picture of a cowboy there on his pony and all, and I think this particular plate was made for the Portales Drug store. It was made, as far as I can find out, approximately sixty years ago. I think there may be several of those plates around.

BURROUGHS: Where was the plate made?

BAKER, A.: In Germany, for the Portales Drug Store.

BURROUGHS: A china company . . .

BAKER, A.: Yes, a china company in Germany. I'm not sure where Aunt Myrtle got the plate, whether someone gave it to her after she bought the place or what.

BURROUGHS: I would like for you to relate something about the past history of the H Bar, if you know it.

BAKER, A.: I don't know too much, but for what I know, I think that it was actually started in approximately 1890. A man by the name of Newman filed on the H Bar out at this headquarters out here because there were springs there,