

Oral History Interview

with

FESSIE HILL

August 6, 1972

Lingo Reunion

By Mrs. Johh Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library

BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. John Burroughs. I am gathered here with the Lingo Community Reunion in the City Park. This is August 6, 1972. Will you give me your name?

FOSTER : Michael Foster. It's Mike Foster.

BURROUGHS: Were you born in Roosevelt County?

FOSTER : Yes ma'am.

BURROUGHS: Can you give the date?

FOSTER : April 9, 1953.

BURROUGHS: And who are your parents?

FOSTER : Otis and Wanda Foster.

BURROUGHS: Do you live here in Portales?

FOSTER : No ma'am, I live in Alamogordo.

BURROUGHS: What is your connection with the Lingo community?

FOSTER : My dad was born there, in Lingo.

BURROUGHS: Who is he?

FOSTER : Otis Foster.

BURROUGHS: Was he a son of homestead people?

FOSTER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something about them?

FOSTER : Oh, well I'm not sure. Let's see, my dad's father and mother lived there, I believe, had lived there before and so he was born there. Then, they just lived there until a couple of years ago and then they moved to Portales.

BURROUGHS: They were still on the homestead?

FOSTER : Yes. It's been a long time, but they moved to Portales.

BURROUGHS: Yes. Where did they come from?

FOSTER : What do you mean?

BURROUGHS: I meant where did they come from to the homestead?

FOSTER : I'm not real sure.

BURROUGHS: Do you know the date when they came?

FOSTER : No, I don't believe so.

BURROUGHS: And so you are the grandson of homestead people?

FOSTER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: It was nice to talk to you Mike.

FOSTER : Good to talk to you.

BURROUGHS: Mr. Harvey Balko is president of the Lingo Community Group. Mr. Balko will you introduce yourself and tell your birthdate, and where you came from?

BALKO : I'm Harvey Balko and I come from Lingo, New Mexico. I was born in Texas and I came to Lingo, I think, when I was twelve or thirteen days old, and I've been here all my life.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me about your mother and dad? Did they homestead down there?

BALKO : No, my mother and dad came from Texas in 1924 and they bought a place, bought out a guy that had homesteaded there.

BURROUGHS: Who was that?

BALKO : His name was Williams. I forget his first name.

BICKLEY : Now wait a minute. I'll tell you in just a minute if I can think.

BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. Susie Bickley trying to recall. She is the secretary of the Lingo Community Association. Mrs. Bickley, can you tell me when you first came to Roosevelt County?

BICKLEY : I first came to Roosevelt County in February 1924.

BURROUGHS: Did you come with your parents?

BICKLEY : Well my father was moving and I came out here to help him get things moved in.

BURROUGHS: Did he homestead?

BICKLEY : No, he leased at that time and then he bought a school section later, two years later.

BURROUGHS: I see. This is Mrs. Harvey Balko. Can you tell me something about your life?

BALKO(W) : Well, I was raised in Texas and came out here when Harvey Lee and I married in 1949.

BURROUGHS: Have you lived down in the community ever since?

BALKO(W) : Yes ma'am.

BURROUGHS: How many children do you have?

BALKO(W) : I have two, a boy and a girl.

BURROUGHS: Do they go to school in Portales?

BALKO(W) : No ma'am. The boy is in college in Canyon, and the girl graduated last year.

BURROUGHS: But where did they get their schooling?

BALKO(W) : At Causey.

BURROUGHS: Causey school. This is their daughter. Will you give your name and birthdate?

BALKO(D) : I'm Phyllis Balko and I was born April 14, 1954.

BURROUGHS: And you have just finished Causey school?

BALKO(D) : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Where will you go to school now?

BALKO(D) : I'm not going to go to college.

BURROUGHS: You're not going to Eastern?

BALKO(D) : No.

BURROUGHS: Do you live down in the Lingo community now?

BALKO(D) : No, I live here in Portales.

BURROUGHS: I see. You work somewhere?

BALKO(D) : No, I'm trying to find a job.

BURROUGHS: You're trying to find a job. That's the way with many graduates. This is Mr. Ted Bilberry, also of the Lingo community and Mrs. Bilberry. Will you. . . Pardon.

BILBERRY : She is my sister, Mrs. Heiner. That's Mr. Heiner over there.

BURROUGHS: I'm sorry. Mr. Bilberry, will you tell me something about your dad's homestead?

BILBERRY : Well, my father, and my grandfather, and several of our relatives homesteaded down there in the Lingo community about 1910, and some of them have been around there since that time. Now my father lived there about seven or eight years then he traded out the homestead for a business here in Portales, and of course, I was mostly raised here in Portales.

BURROUGHS: What was that business?

BILBERRY : Well, he was in the wagon iron business.

BURROUGHS: Oh.

BILBERRY : And feed store business.

BURROUGHS: That was a booming business in the days of the horse and buggy, wasn't it?

BILBERRY : It was a very good business. In fact, we had at one time owned one whole block up there, that was covered with the feed store, and different stored facilities, and we called them "camp houses" then. They're like the tourist court now, where people just came and stayed.

BURROUGHS: I see. Where was that located in terms of present day Portales?

BILBERRY : Well, it's just on the street one block there from the old First National Bank. It's where, I believe there's a goods store there on the corner. It was a block south of Portales Hardware.

BURROUGHS: I see. And that Booth Pharmacy and Bishop Printing all in that block.

BILBERRY : That's right.

BURROUGHS: Did you go to school in Portales?

BILBERRY : That's right. I went through grade school here, and then my father traded out for some land down south of Lingo and we moved back down there about the time I should have gone to high school. We spent about four years there, and then. . . well, he was a trader. He'd trade for business and then farm and ranch stuff. But there have been a lot of Bilberrys and Corders and Kidds, they're all related, a lot of them around that community. A lot of them homesteaded.

BURROUGHS: Yes, I know there are many in the county. Will you tell something about why you went to Santa Fe, and what you did, and how long you were there?

BILBERRY : Well, I had just served four years as tax assessor here in Roosevelt County.

BURROUGHS: You were elected tax assessor?

BILBERRY : That's right. I served four years after I came back from the Army, and finished school here.

BURROUGHS: What was that year?

BILBERRY : Well that was '49 through '52. Then I was offered a position by the Commission of Public Lands, and I was just getting out of this job. I took it and I stayed up there eighteen years.

BURROUGHS: You worked for Johnny Walker?

BILBERRY : I worked for Johnny Walker two four-year terms, Murray Morgan, Shep Hayes, and two years for Armijo, the present Land Commissioner.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me of something about your duties in the Land Commission?

BILBERRY : Well, I was the Director of the Oil and Gas Department all that period--except six months--seventeen years I was the Director of the Oil and Gas Department. I'm not boasting, I'm kind of proud of that record.

BURROUGHS: Well, I think it is. Eighteen years in a political job is quite a record.

BILBERRY : Well one thing we did, you know, when I went in the land office with Mr. Walker, the state permanent fund was I think about 56 million dollars. Well it's going up, close to half a billion dollars now. Now all this money produced by the Oil and Gas Department was not permanent fund during the time I was in charge of the Oil and Gas Department. We produced 468 million dollars.

BURROUGHS: My, that's quite a sum. It surely is. What are you doing now in Portales?

BILBERRY : I'm retired. I moved back here and I made up my mind a long time ago that Portales and Roosevelt County is a good place.

BURROUGHS: It seems to be.

BILBERRY : We've got a lot of things here to be thankful for. We don't have all the smog. We have some dust storms, not as bad as they used to be, not as bad, but there are many things that we could be grateful for. We don't have too many tornados, too many bad storms. I think we have a good country here.

BURROUGHS: And the people are fine and friendly aren't they?

BILBERRY : That's right. Of course, there are a lot of my family. I have three sisters that live here and some of my wife's relatives live here. We just came back home and we're proud of it.

BURROUGHS: That's great. Thank you Mr. Bilberry. I'm talking to a gentleman now with a cowboy shirt all embroidered and bolo tie and belt with turquoise and horseshoe. What is your name sir?

TURNER : My name is Charlie Turner and we came here in 1906.

BURROUGHS: Where did you come from?

TURNER : We came from the territory of Oklahoma to the territory of New Mexico and I have lived in this territory. . . it's been my mailing address since 1906. There's one more man here, him and I are the oldest settlers that's here, and that's Mr. Hamp Byrd.

BURROUGHS: Now he lives down in the Lingo Community still?

TURNER : Mr. Byrd lives in Panhandle, Texas-But I still live, make my home here in Portales.

BURROUGHS: In Portales.

TURNER : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Well it's great to talk to you and. . .

TURNER : Thank you a lot.

BURROUGHS: And, I'm glad to see such an old timer.

TURNER : Well, I guess him and I are the oldest timers in this. . .

BURROUGHS: In 1906?

TURNER : Yes, we came here in the spring of 1906.

BURROUGHS: Thank you. This is Miss Estelle Johnson. I have already talked to her but she is a former resident of the Lingo community. Will you introduce your friend?

JOHNSTON : Norene, what's your last name?

LEDBETTER: Ledbetter.

JOHNSTON : This is Mrs. Ledbetter. She went to school to me the first year I taught.

BURROUGHS: Oh, one of your former teachers, pupils.

JOHNSTON : Yes. And, this is Mrs. Marie Keller.

BURROUGHS: Mrs. Keller, how long have you been in Roosevelt County?

KELLER : Nearly all my life. I came here in 1906.

BURROUGHS: 1906, and you did too?

LEDBETTER: Yes, we're twins.

BURROUGHS: That's unusual. And, you went to school in the Lingo community?

KELLER : No, Causey.

BURROUGHS: Causey? That's where you taught?

KELLER : No, you taught in Redland.

JOHNSTON : Redland.

BURROUGHS: In Redland?

LEDBETTER: It was Redland then.

BURROUGHS: Well it's not so far back, but what you can remember.

KELLER(S): You know me, don't you, Mrs. Burroughs?

BURROUGHS: Yes, I do.

KELLER(S): I'm Mrs. Keller. I'm [unintelligible] sister.

BURROUGHS: Yes. Mrs. Keller, when did you come to Roosevelt County?

KELLER(S): 1916.

BURROUGHS: You came at the same time the Estelles and Flemings did?

KELLER(S): Yes.

BURROUGHS: It's nice to talk to you.

[JOHNSTON ?]: This is Mrs. Fullerton, Mrs. Laura Fullerton.

BURROUGHS: How are you Laura?

FULLERTON: And we settled in the Longs community, the old Longs community which was named after some people named Long, who came from Cooper, Texas.

BURROUGHS: Where is that community now? Can you locate it?

FULLERTON: No, we don't have it anymore, but it was east of Dora. . .

BURROUGHS: East of Dora?

FULLERTON: Yes, east of Dora and half a mile south.

BURROUGHS: Were you a homesteader?

FULLERTON: Well, no. We weren't homesteaders, my folks traded land in Arkansas for some land here.

BURROUGHS: To John Young?

FULLERTON: To John Young for some land here.

BURROUGHS: Were you a former pupil of Miss Johnston's?

FULLERTON: No. No. I'm as old as she is.

BURROUGHS: Well she was mighty young when she began teaching. Thank you ladies. I'm talking to a man in a bright turquoise cowboy shirt. What is your name sir?

BYRD : Hampton Byrd.

BURROUGHS: Will you tell me when you came to the Lingo community?

BYRD : Well it was 1912.

BURROUGHS: Where did you come from?

BYRD : Well, I came from Oklahoma--Altus, Oklahoma.

BURROUGHS: Were you a small boy at that time?

BYRD : Yes ma'am.

BURROUGHS: And your parents homesteaded.

BYRD : Yes ma'am, in Oklahoma. And then, my sister homesteaded in New Mexico here, down at Redland, what we called Redland then.

BURROUGHS: Are you still on that land?

BYRD : Well I still have the lease on it.

BURROUGHS: You do. But, you live here in Portales?

BYRD : No, I live at Panhandle, Texas.

BURROUGHS: Oh, so you left?

BYRD : I've been there fifty-one years.

BURROUGHS: Well, it's nice for you to be here today. Thank you.

BYRD : Thank you.

BURROUGHS: This is Mrs. Fessie Hill of Dora. She is a long time resident of Roosevelt County. Mrs. Hill, when did you come?

HILL : We settled on our claim the fourth day of July, 1910.

BURROUGHS: Fourth of July. Who came with you?

Hill : My father and my mother.

BURROUGHS: Will you give their names?

HILL : Tom Byrd, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Byrd.

BURROUGHS: Did they stay down in that community?

HILL : Yes. They lived there ten years. We all lived there ten years and moved to Portales.

BURROUGHS: You're living in Portales now?

HILL : No, I live at Dora.

BURROUGHS: You went back.

HILL : I lived in Portales thirty-nine years.

BURROUGHS: Were there brothers and sisters who came in 1910?

HILL : Just my brother came a little after we did, but he came in 1910.

BURROUGHS: What was his name?

HILL : Hamp Byrd.

BURROUGHS: He's the one I talked to while ago then?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something of your life in those early days?

HILL : Well, I don't know, we all seemed to have a good time and enjoyed ourselves and we wasn't, you know, everybody was poor. We lived in a shack.

BURROUGHS: Was it a dugout or a wooden shack?

HILL : It was a wooden shack.

BURROUGHS: Where'd you get your lumber?

HILL : Well, it was on the place. We bought their wood, the man's relinquishment, or his. . .

BURROUGHS: Was he one of the ones that they called "starve outs" When you got the claim?

HILL : No, I don't know what. I don't know. Their name was Swearingen, but they had moved away from there. I don't know where they went to, but I've seen them a lot of times since.

BURROUGHS: Where did you get your water on this place?

HILL : On, right on--it had a windmill.

BURROUGHS: It had a windmill by then?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: In the early days there were no windmills and people had to haul water. Did you know any like that?

HILL : Well, we had a neighbor that hauled water.

BURROUGHS: How far did he have to go?

HILL : I don't remember where he went, to some of his neighbors. I don't believe he came to our house. He lived about a half a mile from us. Ma. he went to Mr. Ashbrook, C. C. Ashbrook.

BURROUGHS: You mean that if a neighbor had a windmill and a good well that he would furnish water to other people?

HILL : Yes. Yes, he would.

BURROUGHS: There was no danger of running out?

HILL : No.

BURROUGHS: Even in the dry weather?

HILL : No, our well was really good.

BURROUGHS: Well, that was quite fortunate. Where else did people get water before they put the windmills down? In the early days before 1910?

HILL : Well they hauled water from the ranches.

BURROUGHS: The water holes on the ranches?

HILL : Yes, from the wells on the ranches. You know, there's a lot of wells--the DZ well, and the six shooter well, I don't know. . .

BURROUGHS: Are you saying there was a good well at the DZ Ranch?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: How far was that from Dora?

HILL : Well, I just really don't know.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me how many barrels of water a wagon would hold?

HILL : They'd bring three or four barrels is all.

BURROUGHS: How long would that last?

HILL : If they watered the stock, it wouldn't last very long, you know.

BURROUGHS: Well, how often did they have to go?

HILL : Well maybe they hauled water every day. I don't remember.

BURROUGHS: Oh, everyday?

HILL : I remember when we came from Roswell, we stopped in a valley, Gandi Valley, and the people had been hauling water and they lived in a half dugout, and there wasn't anyone at home and we had been traveling all day without any water, and so I got some water out of their barrels. They had about two barrels on the wagon and I got enough out to water the horses and we went on. That night we camped and we were just four miles from where we started that morning. I don't know where we went, we just traveled all around.

BURROUGHS: You traveled in a circle.

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Well that was easy to do with no landmark.

HILL : Yes. Now that was between here and Roswell in the Gandi Valley.

BURROUGHS: Gandi Valley? I've never heard that location.

HILL : I haven't either lately but it might not be. They might not have it now.

BURROUGHS: Were there homesteaders down there?

HILL : A few. I don't say much because it just slipped my mind. I've forgotten so many things.

BURROUGHS: I know it's been a long time but it's very interesting to people now because that life is gone forever.

HILL : I tell you that we came from Hamlin, Texas to New Mexico and we stopped in Terry County and stayed a night or two with an old friend, and then came on. And they told us about the Mescalera Sand and so I walked the eight miles. I walked that Mescalera Sand. We started in about 2:00 in the afternoon and we camped on the. . .

BURROUGHS: You mean the White Sands?

HILL : Well, I don't know. I don't think it was. I don't know, I don't think it was. It was. . . anyway, it was called the Mescalera Estacada between Roswell and Texas you know. And, we got to. . . after that first day we got out about 10:00 the next day and then we went with them. It was a ranch, the Hagerman Ranch. We went there and stayed all night that night. There were several wagons you know.

BURROUGHS: Traveling together?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Were they covered wagons?

HILL : Yes, covered wagons.

BURROUGHS: Can you tell me something about the covered wagon, what you carried in them, and what was hanging on the outside? You see pictures.

HILL : We had a five gallon, a little five gallon keg that we had full of water. We got it at a little place just before we went into this sand and we had to pay for it. I don't remember how much it cost. It seemed to me like about two dollars and a half.

BURROUGHS: \$2.50 for five gallons?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Oh!

HILL : But it may not have been that much. But anyway. . .

BURROUGHS: The water was fresher.

HILL : And I walked all the way through that, and let me see. . .
We came into New Mexico before we got into that and that was
when we. . . I don't know, my father gave the horses too
much oats or too much feed and they drank too much at the
Bronco. We stopped at Bronco and they drank and then we drove over into
New Mexico at around close to Tatum. We stayed all night and that's why
our horse, it died and we had to get out and buy another horse you know
to go on.

BURROUGHS: How many pulled the wagon?

HILL : Two.

BURROUGHS: And, one couldn't do the job?

HILL : I know I was a-crying.

BURROUGHS: How old were you then?

HILL : Oh, I was twenty. I was just a-crying, you know, because
our horse had died.

BURROUGHS: Well, of course. And you were twenty when you walked that
eight miles through the sand?

HILL : Yes.

BURROUGHS: This was on your way into the Dora Community then?

HILL : Well, we didn't come to Dora, we went on to Roswell.

BURROUGHS: I see.