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Morris Leeman White, Oral History Index

Morris White

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Interview with Morris White conducted by Marcia Lair

February 18, 2020

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00:00:01	Introductions and general information
00:00:50	Morris Leeman White, born 1935 in Paris, TX.
00:01:22	Grew up in Pecan Gap, TX, a farming community; is an only child. Married to Wanda Decker White for 50 years – two children, Sarah White and James White. Sarah has two boys; James has a girl. He has a degree in Agriculture, but farming on 100 acres no longer provides a living – he works in Dallas, TX. Sarah is a CPA & works in Sulphur Springs, TX
00:02:55	Pecan Gap in his childhood -four churches; First Baptist, Church of Christ, Methodist, and Pilgrim’s Rest Baptist. Businesses – the bank closed during the Depression; Goob Clower started a pharmacy in the building. Other businesses – Reid’s Cash Grocery, Shaw’s Grocery, Union Produce (became Parrish Grocery), Wood West Grocery, a dry goods store, furniture store, drug store, funeral home, a doctor and an optometrist (both moved to other towns), Downing Blacksmith Shop, Jim Way? Blacksmith, Westerdale Shop & Welding, Pecan Gap School, Deatherage Garage, Merrill Garage, Bar W [Weldon] Briscoe Service Station & Feed, Houston Cafe, Earline’s Beauty Shop, Ann Bowen’s Beauty Shop, a brick gin (on Morris’s property), an electric gin, & a natural gas gin. The Railroad made transporting cotton bales to market much easier.
00:08:44	War service – 156 veterans in the Pecan Gap Cemetery, including 6 from the Civil War.
00:09:21	1950’s – this area began “going downhill” – root rot and the boll weevils hit the cotton crop, two gins shut down; began grain and cattle farming. Some new businesses – GI School, new service station, new grocery store, new cafe – brick buildings on one end of town were condemned due to their common roof area– those businesses closed or moved. New spraying service, Bar W Briscoe – used WWII Stearman planes to spray for boll weevils – kept cotton farming going. Eventually had the Pecan Gap Volunteer Fire Department & built a community center
00:13:00	Currently – still have the churches, new businesses – [Texas] Wood Wizard, Bob Cheney Auto Body, Pecan Gap Seed House, The Fish Place, Pecan Gap Post Office, Pecan Gap Pet Clinic, Pecan Gap elementary school (Fannindel Elementary)
00:15:04	Rails-to-Trails [organization that converts abandoned railroad tracks & railroad right-of-ways to public trails] controversy – affects 5 acres of Morris’s land
00:17:34	Education – East Texas State Teachers College – commuted with Tommy Lancaster & Donald [Ray] Lancaster. Graduated with a BBA & a teaching certificate. He and Danny Durham [Dan Allen Durham] took tests to join the U.S. Navy. His mother said No, but he couldn’t get a job – was classified 1A
00:19:34	Service - Joined the U.S. Air Force – was a Weapons Specialist – stayed in 5 years; story of his enlistment extended due to the Berlin Crisis. Stationed at Langley Air Force Base. Discharged - recalled during the Cuban Crisis, but got a reprieve.
00:22:13	After the service, worked for father and farmed for 5 years, while attending school on GI Bill – 3 Master’s degrees; almost finished a Ph.D. Met his wife, Wanda Decker. Story of their courtship. Got a job in the Business Education Dept. at Polytechnic High School in Fort Worth, TX. Worked there 30 years.
00:26:59	Story of integration at Polytechnic High School
00:28:00	“tacks in the teacher’s chair”

00:30:37	Teachers at Pecan Gap School – Ms Coye Reid, Miss Champion/Mrs Burleson, story about Miss Clara [Olive] Richardson, classmate Philip Ray [Langston]
00:35:15	More memories of childhood during WWII – story of reselling ice cream cones to soldiers on the troop train when it came through Pecan Gap. Story about Sam Merrill sending Morris his foot locker.
00:38:47	Story about how he started collecting pocket knives, including story about Lee Bob Johnson
00:40:13	Story about how/why he quit running his combine
00:41:08	Story about building his house after he and Wanda retired and moved back to Pecan Gap
00:42:42	More about his pocket knife collection
00:46:51	Memory of the first all-weather road coming through in 1947. Story about using his father’s tractor to pull the school bus out of the mud onto the road whenever it got stuck.
00:49:01	Story about a Halloween prank he and friends pulled on Lonzo Bishop “Goob” Clower [was married to Pearl Walker Clower]
00:50:28	More memories of childhood and teenage years - story about “Buddy” Sills and his home-brewed beer; story about first time smoking cigars – bought them at Parrish Grocery, he and friends (included Philip Ray and L.J. Thomas) smoked them in Cooper at the Parkhill Cafe. Memory of getting the lights in the family’s old house. In 1941, father built a house, a barn, and a shop – memory of grinding feed for the sheep, job sweeping at Union Produce after school; memory of 2 women arguing over a sack of chicken feed at Union Produce.
01:01:27	1948 – New Home Economics Dept at the school, Ms. Roberson hired as the Home Economics teacher. Mr. Roberson started a Boy Scout troop. Memories of summer Boy Scout camp. Mr. Roberson had a Kaiser Frazer car
01:04:03	Description of Kaiser Frazer cars
01:05:06	More childhood memories - story about his horses as a child; getting called down in church (Corine Lancaster)
01:07:47	Story of family’s reaction to Pearl Harbor attack – were in Lampasas, TX, where his father sold John Deere tractors. Moved back to Pecan Gap, and father went back to farming. Story about U.S. Army coming in and using all available lumber in lumber yards to build Camp Maxey.
01:10:40	Memory of JFK assassination – was in college
01:12:48	Information about the GI School held in a new building next to the Pecan Gap School – mechanic courses, welding, blacksmith shop, etc. Used [John Franklin] (Budge) Deatherage, Jr.’s shop as well as several others
01:14:02	Current problems for single farming – land, equipment & seed too expensive, can’t get parity price for crops.
01:14:56	Difference in cotton farming then and now
01:16:49	Story about dealing with students, parents and teachers at Polytechnic High School. Taught Business courses aimed at providing useful information; worked with the Work-Study program. Descriptions of the machine shop, cosmetology department, sewing department, etc.
01:19:28	Story about a “witch” in Ladonia, Texas
01:21:50	Advice for future generations.