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Place of Interview: Sanger, Texas

Interviewer: Adelene Martin

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Date: March 29, 1986

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Oral History Collection

Hazen Armstrong

Interviewer: Adelene Martin

Date: March 29, 1986

Place of Interview: Sanger, Texas

Mrs. Martin: Mr. Hazen Armstrong was born in Sanger, Texas, in 1899, and he grew up in Denton [Texas]. Mr. Armstrong, we're going to use this interview for our Texas Sesquicentennial Oral History Program, and later on we'll put the tape in the [Denton County Historical] Museum to be used in any way they see fit. Is that all right with you?

Mr. Armstrong: Yes, it is.

Mrs. Martin: All right. Now, I want you just to start talking about when you got to Denton, how old you were, where you lived, and what it was like growing up in Denton when you were a little boy.

Armstrong: Well, I think that my parents brought me to Denton in 1899, and I've lived here ever since. I lived with my grandmother and grandfather, G. H. Kimbrough, all the time there. That's where he lived. I lived on the corner of Oak and Bolivar [Streets], where the Presbyterian Church now sits. It was right across from the city office and the fire hall and the "calaboose," which we called the city jail now.

The [animal] pound was back of that (chuckle). Now, the pound, then, was for the horses and cows and livestock that got out over the fence. Everybody had horses then, you know. They didn't have many cars; they had buggy horses and milk cows and everything. Early in the morning, they had a man who was hired or elected to find them. He'd get on his horse, and he'd find any stray horses and cows or animals of any kind, and he'd bring them to the pound. The pound had a big locked pen and a locked fence and a chain on it, and he'd lock them in. It cost them \$1.00 to come get those cows and other animals out of there.

Then, the city jail--we'd call it now--was a "calaboose," which consisted of three big ol' iron cells, and they had dragged the city violators down there, mostly drunks and a few other things. That was the only city jail they had. Then, of course, they had the county jail. They'd put them in there, and it was a real big thrill to see them bring them in and put them in there (chuckle). They'd just put them in there and locked the door and go on. They wouldn't come back until in the morning (chuckle).

I grew up there. Boy, we were only two blocks from the square then. They had a chain all the way around courthouse, a big chain. The only places where you could walk up to the courthouse were these walkways bordered by chains. That's where they tied all the horses and buggies and things. They had all the animals on the square on "trades day" or on "First Mondays," and they just closed that square up. You couldn't hardly get through with wagons selling watermelons and wood (chuckle).

Martin: Now, is this early 1900s or...

Armstrong: Yes, I'd guess the time would be about 1910, 1912, along in there, 1908, 1910, 1912, somewhere along in that time. Finally, you know, when the cars came, they done away with that chain-link and put a parking curb all the way around the courthouse.

The stores were so much different then. The meat market sold meat, and the grocery store sold groceries, and the hardware sold hardware. They wasn't nearly the extent [having a variety of goods] of stores today. They had all kinds of dry goods stores. There wasn't many women working in them days. Now, they had three or four dry goods stores, that I knew of. Well, they [dry goods stores] used to hire a couple of women [to work as sales clerks] over on the women's side, but outside of that you never saw a woman working in the courthouse, in the stores, or in the offices (chuckle). I remember those things real well.

Martin: And this is the time, too, that saloons were active.

Armstrong: Now, the saloons was before my day. I think that they went out of Denton in about 1900 or 1903 or

1904 or along in there. I know that the saloons were gone when I got big enough to remember. Yes, I know some of the places where they told me that they had had the saloons.

Martin: What were some of the businesses?

Armstrong: Well, the old businesses was...well, let's see. Of course, the Evers [Hardware Store], we know about that. McClurkan Dry Goods was a big store. Ol' man Will Williams, and his father had a big dry goods store there. On the east side of the square was Williams's store. On the east side there was a big company named Gerald Williams Dry Goods. Right there where the old Russell [Department Store] Building is now--there are offices in it now--it was called the Mississippi Store. It was a dry goods store.

Martin: For Goodness Sake! Now, is this the time that Mr. Ben Sullivan had his meat market?

Armstrong: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I know Ben Sullivan had his market. Well, he had several. The last time he had it, it was on the north side of the square, along there about the second or third store. That baker was right next to him, and the



Princess Theater or something was right next to him, all the way around (chuckle).

Martin: What did you do for fun? You know, kids today have to have something going on all the time. So, what kind of social events did you all have?

Armstrong: Oh, of course, they had parties, which they always had had. The young folks had either bicycles or horses. Now, the younger boys in them days had horses to ride, and we'd go all over going to places on them. I delivered the [Denton] *Record-Chronicle* when I was a boy, on a horse. Now, they have cars and motorcycles to do that. But back then, the town was so little that four boys could "make" [deliver newspapers all over] the town--one [for each side] on the square, [then we'd go to the] east, west, north, and south. There were four of us. Things like that, it made it very interesting to me.

Now, I was in Denton last night. I like to go back and see what used to be pastures (chuckle). I was down on University Drive at about 8:00 p.m. Well, it all used to be pasture when I was a boy here.

Martin: What kind of parties...you said that they had parties. What kind of parties?

Armstrong: Well, the average party, you know, where they played games. Of course, all the little kids, when they was seven, eight, ten, twelve, they'd have a birthday party for them, and they'd have entertainment of all kinds. Of course, that was in our younger days. Of course, I can remember the bigger young folks had big bashes at the Elks Hall and things like that. [Editor's note: Mr. Armstrong is probably referring to the International Order of Odd Fellows Hall, which he identifies as the Elks Hall.]

Martin: Where was the Elks Hall?

Armstrong: Well, it was up over the corner of the Scripture Building, I believe. That's the northwest corner of the square, and then I think they finally moved it. I think that they had a lot of them [parties] in the Wright Opera House, on the northeast corner of the square. That building's still there. It was a big hardware store on the bottom floor, and, of course, it had a stairstep. It was called Wright's Opera House. I know that they eventually quit having them, but

I know that the Elks had all their big dances up there, and parties.

Martin: Not any in the homes there on Oak Street?

Armstrong: Not that I know of, no. I don't remember them. After I got up [moved up] on that side, we didn't have many of them.

Martin: Then you remember there was a streetcar.

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am. Oh, yes. It would start at the depot, come up, and it went along the south side of the square. Then it turned and went down the west side, and then it turned on west Oak Street. One branch went down north Elm Street to go out. Then it turned over to [in the direction of] the College of Industrial Arts [now Texas Woman's University]. The other one went down Oak Street to a about where I remember Avenue A is now and turned over one block and went west. Then it went out to Highland Park. They've got a golf course out there now, and they're [currently] building a big ol' hotel there. There was nothing out there when it was a park. They didn't even have a golf course out there then, but that's where people would go; and that's where the car [the streetcar] went up to

that. It stopped there, turned around, changed [changed direction using a self-contained, turntable-type device] and came back into town.

Martin: There was a park out there.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. They had it. It wasn't much of a park, but there was an open place out there. It was pretty big, and I remember that it was very nice. I think that they have a big golf course out there now. I think that they are building a big hotel on part of it.

The first airplane that I ever saw come to Denton landed there. That was an open place out there--Highland Park.

Martin: For Goodness Sake!

Armstrong: I know that I was just kid of boy. I don't know whether I was eight or nine or ten, but I was just a boy. I don't remember my age then, but my grandfather looked up and heard that an airplane was coming down [following the route of the] the railroad and was going to land at Denton. We all got out there and hung around for thirty minutes to an hour, and finally it came in. It was a little ol' one-man plane, and it hit the ground, bounced two or three times, and stopped. Them

old-timers said, "Well, she got here, but she never will get off the ground." (Chuckle) Well, that was the first airplane that landed out there.

Martin: Did you ride the streetcar?

Armstrong: Yes, I rode it many a time.

Martin: Now, where was the depot for it?

Armstrong: Well, I...

Martin: I mean, where did it start from?

Armstrong: It started on the east Hickory at the depot. The depot is still there, I think.

Martin: Oh, you mean the old T and P [depot of the Texas and Pacific] Railroad?

Armstrong: Yes, it started right there. Back then, everybody who came into Denton, traveling people, all came into Denton on the train. We had two or three buses. Now, the big hotel was the Oakman House, and across the street was the Cottage Hotel, and the black hotel was way down on Hickory Street, a little ways east. Those hotels each had a porter go down there, and they had a bus to meet those trains and "carry" [take] those visitors and traveling men all up to their hotels.

Martin: You know, on east Hickory and east Oak, there is not much activity there now.

Armstrong: Well, it was pretty lively then. The black hotel was down there.

Martin: On Hickory?

Armstrong: On east Hickory, about halfway down. The Denton ballpark...every town had a big ball club then. The DAC, Denton Athletics Club, had fine ball teams there, and it had a big ballpark down there. Now, it has mostly business, but some of the prettiest houses mostly...one of the prettiest houses in Denton was on east Oak, the Witherspoon place. It's not there now. I consider Oak Street was and Hickory was...I guess that Oak Street was about the best street in town at that time.

Martin: Well, now, when did west Oak, where all of the fine Victorian homes are...when did it really start building up?

Armstrong: Well, all of those homes were there when I was a boy, and I guess they started to building brick homes and things along in the 1920s, as well as I remember now. I was living out on a farm here at the end of town. All of those homes are

beautiful homes. I'd say that they were built in the 1920s, and they went to moving in. They went to building brick houses, brick homes. You go up Oak Street there, there was Schweer's place, and Davis's, and Allison's. I think that the old [D. K.] Allison home is still standing there, a beautiful home. The Coits lived up there. You go on up and then there's the Wright home. Almost all the way up was the big Wright home. The big Wright home was way out on Oak Street a good piece. Then the [Colonel Alvin Mansfield] Owsley's home was on farther out. It might still be there. I don't remember. It was the finest street, I think, in Denton. Then some lived along Hickory, and a few, as you say, were on east Oak and east Hickory. Of course, businesses took them in now.

Martin: That's about all that's down there now.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. I reckon that when I was a boy lots of people lived down there. The black hotel was down there. Witherspoon was a most famous family in Denton, and they had one of the finest homes in Denton. They lived out on east Oak.

Martin: I'd never heard that name before.

Armstrong: Well, as well as I remember, they were big in the cotton business because they had the cotton yard. They had a yard, a great, big place there, two or three acres, where they stacked that cotton, and that's where they finally put the Denton baseball park.

Martin: Now, you were talking about Cascade Plunge [reference to a public swimming pool] before we started this morning. It was down on Industrial, what's now Industrial. Do you remember who owned it? Was it city-owned or privately-owned?

Armstrong: Privately-owned, I'm pretty sure. As well as I remember, it was privately-owned.

Martin: Now, did the water come from a well or what?

Armstrong: Yes, they had a well. I just don't know if it was city water. City water was piped all over town then, and I don't know whether it comes from there or those big wells from the well right across the street there from it. They had a big well, water wells and things there, and that's where the well and the ice factory were located. They had wagons go up all over town every morning with the ice--two mules hooked to it--and they'd have two or three men on it.



Every house had a little sign, if you showed the sign for fifty pounds or a hundred pounds, that's how much ice you wanted that day. Of course, the man would cut it, put it on his shoulder--he wore a big leather flap over his back to keep the ice from melting--and go put it in your refrigerator, you know. They had the five or six of those wagons with mules, and they'd go all over town. Now, these mules learned that business like everything else. They're standing there, and the fellow would say, "Giddap!" Two of them would be going on each side of the street with ice, and that old team was just standing there (chuckle).

Martin: Was Cascade Plunge used by the kids in Denton at that time?

Armstrong: Anybody. Yes, anybody could go up there. They had some little charge. I don't know whether it was ten or fifteen cents. It was a public swimming pool. Anyone could go in.

Martin: You can't remember who owned it?

Armstrong: No, I can't.

Martin: Well, let's talk about North Texas [North Texas State Normal College, now the University of

North Texas, Denton, Texas]. "Quakertown" [reference to the former African-American section of Denton, Texas] is where the City Park is now, and TWU [Texas Woman's University] had already been built.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. I think that they built it in 1903 or something.

Martin: Now, the State [of Texas], you said...

Armstrong: I think that the State [of Texas] told [the City of] Denton to move them [African-Americans who lived in the vicinity of the woman's college campus] out. That's my impression of then. I was living out here, so this was in the 1920s. My uncle had several houses [in that area], and he hired a man to move them over across the railroad tracks.

I never will forget one of the good ol' Negro men from Denton who did all kinds of work for people. His name was Will Hill. Well, he couldn't agree with them on a price for his property, which--I don't know--wasn't very much. Mr. McClurkan was one of the city councilmen, and he said, "Oh, I'm good friends with Will. I'll talk him into doing right." So, he "hit

Will up" [pressured Mr. Hill] to sell the place:  
"Now, Will, you're a little too high on that house." "No, Mr. McClurkan." Mr. McClurkan had a big, nice, two-story house down a little piece from where the Denton County Bank is now, on Hickory Street. Will said, "Now, Mr. McClurkan, your house keeps you warm when it's cold, and it keeps you dry when it's raining, and you sleeps in it and eats in it." He said, "My house does the same thing for me." (Chuckle) I thought that was pretty cute, isn't it, compared what he could do in that big home to what he done in his little home. Anyway, I remember when they moved them all down [across the railroad tracks into southeast Denton].

**Martin:** Did the city choose that area that they were to be relocated?

**Armstrong:** I'm sure that they did. It was a vacant place, and they lined up some streets over there, made some streets, and the people who owned their house or bought one of them houses on one of them streets moved in. You see, it started back in around that north district, north of Alliance Mills, was where it was. I know that my uncle

owned several of those houses, and he had them moved over there. He bought several lots up one street and had four or five, six [rent] houses there on that one street. That's where they moved them, and that's how the town has changed.

Martin: Why did they want to move that? Because CIA [the College of Industrial Arts, now Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas] didn't take over that park.

Armstrong: No, but their female students walked through, up Locust [Street] and up them streets when coming to town. Now, there were many [African-American-owned] houses on Congress [Street], too. Now, there's some of those houses that went out on Congress, probably on up even across Bolivar [Street], right on out past Bolivar Street. I know that a lot of the colored folks were living out there. Now, I'm not quoting the law. I'm just quoting what I thought was happening then. I was under the impression that the city had to move them.

Martin: Do you know why it was called "Quakertown?"

Armstrong: No, I don't.

Martin: I just wondered.

Armstrong: I don't know. I don't know why it was called that.

Martin: Well...

Armstrong: Now, they had a store down there, a real nice grocery store, and a school and all. It was a nice place, but they had to all move out.

Martin: You can remember the first car coming to Denton, too.

Armstrong: Well, as I remember, I know the first three (chuckle). I know that it was a great thing. Mr. Grim, the banker, had one; and L. L. Puckett, the grocery man, had one; Jack Fry, a big fellow who lived down there on north Elm, had a car. Now, they weren't much of cars, but they were big things for back then, you know. They didn't have doors on them and windshields. They just had a seat and a place to drive it. I read some history about that, how they passed a law...see, that was a big thing; it was a great invention. They didn't go very fast. But I think that they had a law in Denton at one time...oh, they had them go at a very slow speed. Of course, they couldn't go very fast. If I'm not mistaken, the people didn't "take to them" [accept them] at

first. They scared their horses, which just had a fit. Those things scared them to death.

Martin: They made lots of noise.

Armstrong: Oh, man! Well, it's a different thing. You could bring a colt in there and tie him up somehow, and he wasn't scared. He was just amazed. They did scare the horses and had quite a few runaways that hurt people. Well, I can remember a lot of people going down a country road, and they'd see one [automobile] coming down the road a mile away, and they'd get out [of their wagons]. Oh, women and children would crawl out, and the old man would pull the horse around there. But it was a wonderful thing. Those old cars had a crank on the side. I imagine that it was two cylinders. I know it made a lot of racket.

Martin: Can you remember your first car ride?

Armstrong: Well, no, I can't. I was driving a car when I was twelve or thirteen years old. We didn't have no driver's license then; you didn't have no registration on them. You just bought them like a buggy. My uncle had a car, and so did some of the doctors [in Denton]. The first cars had big,

tall wheels just about the size of a buggy wheel, you know. You didn't have too big a tire. Well, they had rubber tires just like a buggy, but they weren't successful. They were chain-driven by the engine, but then they finally came out with pneumatic tires, you know. The first people who went to getting them were doctors. All the doctors got one, and then the businessmen went to getting them. The first thing you know, we were headed for where we are today. Now we haven't got room for them (chuckle).

**Martin:** That's the truth. We don't. There's another story that I've heard about, but I wasn't aware of it because I didn't live here during World War II. Someone told me that there was some military training that went on in Denton in World War II. Do you know anything about that?

**Armstrong:** Yes, ma'am. They formed a company there, and the man that was the captain was named Rohr. I don't know his first name. I seen them drilling right up on the square, you know, marching. It was formed right in Denton. I guess that it was maybe [sponsored by] Denton County, but it was

all people that lived there in Denton. They formed that company. I did know that a fellow by the name of Rohr was the captain, and he was running it. I was a little too young to be in it then, but I know a lot of the young people who were in it.

Martin: Now, this was volunteers?

Armstrong: Yes, they volunteered. War was breaking out, and they was going to get ready for it. They had...oh, I don't know. I'd guess that they had maybe fifty, sixty, seventy of them--a great, big bunch of them, because I seen them training there on the square.

Martin: Did they go into the service then as a company?

Armstrong: I think so, yes. Of course, I imagine that they worked them into some other bunch, but they were all Denton boys, and they went into the Army. See, didn't that there war start in 1914?

Martin: No, this is World War II.

Armstrong: Oh, I'm going back.

Martin: Was it World War I? I could have been mistaken.

Armstrong: I lost that.

Martin: Maybe it was World War I.

Armstrong: World War I was the one I was talking about.



Martin: Okay, okay, World War I. As I understand it, along about where you lived, there was a German Baptist church at one time. Now, is this before your time?

Armstrong: No. Now, there was a German church just a little bit farther down Bolivar Street about two blocks. Now, there was a church right across the street from my house. I don't want know what business is there now. It was a Presbyterian church. The Presbyterian Church that we attended was right down, oh, a good piece [farther] down Bolivar, about three or four houses. Now, the church had split [into northern and southern branches over the issue of slavery] before the Civil War. Ours was the Southern Presbyterian, and the other was the Northern Presbyterian.

Martin: And so you attended the Southern?

Armstrong: Southern, right. Down on Bolivar Street about four houses.

Martin: Well, I'm wondering about the German Baptist church.

Armstrong: Well, actually, it was a German church, and it was there up to just a few years ago. It was

right on down Bolivar Street about two blocks, I think.

Martin: And why they called it the German Baptists...I didn't realize that there was that many Germans in Denton. Of course, I knew there were many out at Blue Mound [Texas].

Armstrong: Oh, there was a good many of them living in Denton then at that time. There were lots of them, and there were lots of them living out through the country. But there were also quite a few of them in Denton at that time.

Martin: Now, you attended school in Denton?

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am. Now, the school that we had then was right in back of the Methodist Church. I think that there is a school there now, isn't there?

Martin: No, the Methodists have that.

Armstrong: But there was a school right back east of the church, I know, and it burnt. Well, it was a two-story building. Somehow or other I was going to school there, and it burnt. I think that it burned in the early spring. I don't remember now--February or March. So, what we did then was that they just moved the school up to the courthouse. I went to school in the courthouse

for three or four, five months. The whole school was up there. They took the second floor and, I guess, the third, and they put curtains in the courtrooms there, you know. I know that in the big courtrooms, they'd put curtains up. Anyway, the whole school was there, and I attended until the next year, until they could get that school built back.

Martin: But they rebuilt it?

Armstrong: Oh, yes. I remember that ol' building. I went to school there. They had a fire there. Oh, it must have been in 1908 or 1910. I'm judging just from my age, because I was going to school, and I know that they removed us all up to the courthouse, and we finished up that term at that time at the courthouse, (chuckle) on the second and third story.

Martin: You were talking about going to the old Wright Opera House. Did you happen to go to any of the performances that they had? Had they stopped having them when you were old enough to attend?

Armstrong: They stopped them, and then they had a skating rink up there (chuckle).

Martin: Roller-skating?

Armstrong: Yes, roller-skating.

Martin: So, you didn't get to see any of the performances.

Armstrong: No, I wasn't old enough to take in any of the operas, but I was up there when it was a skating rink.

Martin: Now, Dr. Kimbrough was your uncle.

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am.

Martin: Where was his office?

Armstrong: He had two or three. His first one was up over the Curtiss Building on the corner of the square. Then he moved up over the Raley Building, a drugstore about in the middle of the way on the south side. It was called the Raley Drug Store. Then he finally moved over on the west side, up above the Brooks Drug Store. Then he took a notion...he owned some buildings over there at that time, over there on the north side of the square, and he took a notion that he wanted a store over there. So, he got Ray Tobin and his brother, Joe Kimbrough, to start a drugstore there, and his office was up over them. So, he got his own building, and his office was up over there; and Ray Tobin and Joe

Kimbrough started that drugstore there. Joe finally sold out to Ray and went over to Denton County Bank. Ray, up until just recently, ran Ray Tobin's Drug Store out there by the hospital.

Martin: Can you remember any stories that happened maybe to patients that your uncle treated? Any unusual things that happened? There were always horses running away with people, and there were injuries.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. At that time we didn't have a hospital in Denton. I'd go with him a lot in the buggy and horse days. I took care of the horses when I was big enough to do that. I made lots of calls with him.

I know that one time we went out to Krum [Texas], and he "carried" [took] another doctor with him. I thought that they stayed in the house a long time. I was sitting out in front (chuckle). I found out that they had just taken a fellow's leg off in that house out there in the country (chuckle).

Martin: Oh, my goodness!

Armstrong: Right at his house (chuckle). Of course, all the children were born at home, too.

Martin: Oh, yes.

Armstrong: Then, if they had to take an arm or a leg off, they did it right at your house.

Martin: Or in his office, probably.

Armstrong: What?

Martin: If he had to do something like that in his office.

Armstrong: Oh, they done lots of work right in their office, yes. Nowadays, if you get a scratch, they send you to the hospital.

Martin: That's about the truth.

Armstrong: Well, they didn't do nothing to you (chuckle).

Martin: That's right; that's right. Do you think it was exciting growing up back then?

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am, just as exciting as it is today, only we did different things.

Martin: What really excited you as a boy?

Armstrong: Well, there was lots of things. We had things to do. I've seen them dig a hole in the square out there and have a balloon ascension right over the square. Up there they dug a hole to make a pit for the fire, right there on the square. The

balloon would go up. I know that that was a big thing.

Martin: Did you ever go up in one?

Armstrong: No, ma'am.

Martin: I've always wanted to.

Armstrong: I don't care how high I go, just so I can keep one foot on the ground (chuckle).

Martin: That would have been exciting.

Armstrong: I've been in airplanes, of course, since then.

Martin: But what else was exciting? Of course, watching those balloons go up would have been exciting.

Armstrong: Yes. I don't know, but I know that we passed the time just like we do today, but there wasn't the meanness like what's going on today, you know. We were a little bit wild, but there wasn't the meanness going on like there is today. We didn't fill our jails fully. Today you have to build new ones to fill them up [again].

Martin: Why do you suppose that...

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Martin: ...people are meaner, for want of a better term?

Armstrong: Well, there's several things. One is a bigger population. You can't keep up with them. Back then there was a smaller population, and you

knew people's business more. Another thing is cars. Cars let them go and come and run and scoot around. They couldn't come in and get to do those mean things and get away in a buggy and horse like you can in a car. Today they travel more from [out of town]. They come in from one place and do some crime, and they're off and gone. We didn't know what drugs were then, you know. I never heard of drugs hardly.

Martin: How about alcohol?

Armstrong: Oh, we had that. We had some pretty "good" [heavy] drinkers, too. Now, the young folks didn't drink then, not like they do now. But they had some "good" drunkards. There wasn't as many. There was a few who were alcoholics, I'd call them, in the early days, but there wasn't as many [as there are now].

Martin: What about during Prohibition [reference to the Volstead Act, which gave legislative enforcement to the 18th Amendment]? What about during the 1920s?

Armstrong: Well, in the 1920s, yes. That was funny. We had bootleggers. Nobody hardly went without it, that had any money. So, we had bootleggers. Every



place had them. The people learned to make their own beer. We called it "home-brew." Man, everybody made their own "home-brew." It was just about like beer. Well, everybody had their crop and a bunch of beer bottles, and everybody had a capper where they could put the caps on.

Martin: They did?

Armstrong: Yes! Why, we'd buy us a box of caps, and they had a machine that you could put a cap on just like they do at the factory now. Of course, lots of people made beer, and some of that beer, if you forgot to put it on and then take it off at the right time--if you'd take it off too quick--it was still wild, and it'd blow up those bottles in three or four months (chuckle). We had beer, and there was lots of other things. I believe that people bought about as much whiskey then as they do now. They had lots of bootleggers, and drugstores went to selling it with [bogus] prescriptions. You had doctors who wrote lots of prescriptions, and they'd give people prescriptions, and they'd go buy the whiskey.

Martin: For medicinal purposes [facetious comment].

Armstrong: Yes, for medicinal purpose. That's right.

Martin: But did you notice in the Prohibition days more drunks out in the public?

Armstrong: No, we didn't have them back then. No, it's not like it is today. But there was fewer people back then, and they didn't have the money to do that. Nobody had too much money to waste on that.

Martin: And you can remember, I'll bet, when they started paving the streets?

Armstrong: Oh, yes, ma'am. I remember that the square used to be sand (chuckle). The west part of Denton was made up of blackland soil, and the southeast part was still sandy. Now, south Elm Street, they used to call that "Sand Street" just because it was so sandy. Then, they had a water wagon. A man had a great, big tank on it. He hitched two horses to it. He'd fill it full of water, and he'd wet those streets. He'd wet Oak Street and around the square and hit Hickory Street and all to keep that dirt and dust down. That old water wagon, that was his business. See, in dry times he'd fill that thing up from fire hydrants and drive way up to the end of the

square. It didn't cover nearly the whole street. So the sprinkler man was busy keeping that dust down. It was awful.

Martin: And you can remember when they started paving?

Armstrong: Yes. I've got a picture. There's a picture in last year's calendar of Denton. I've got one here. Of course, they had a different thing. They'd grind their rock right there and put them in and fix it. Old man Weggs (?) was the cement man who did the first paving around Denton. He had a great, big engine to dig it up. It wasn't like it is today (chuckle). They'd pave one street for a piece, and then the next street would get it--just like they do rows.

Martin: Did you ever put your name down there in the wet concrete?

Armstrong: Nope.

Martin: You never did?

Armstrong: No! I never did do that (chuckle).

Martin: Not even your initials?

Armstrong: No, I don't know anybody that did. I don't know why. I've never seen anybody's initials in any of it.

Martin: Well, I can remember a little bit--I'm old enough to remember a little bit--about the Depression. How did the Depression here in Denton affect your family?

Armstrong: When I was seventeen years old, my uncle put me out on a farm two miles west of Bolivar [Texas]. That's where I was living during the Depression. I went out there in 1918, I think, 1917 or 1918, and I was living out there and married. I was a young man with a wife and two children when [the Stock Market Crash of] 1929 hit. Well, we was all on the farm then, and we made it fine. We got tired of eating the same stuff a whole lot, but we had plenty of it (chuckle)--what there was--to eat.

Martin: What can you remember about the general feeling in Denton itself about the Depression?

Armstrong: Well, I can't tell you. See, I was living out there. Well, nobody had any money, but everybody got along. If people owed anybody any money, they didn't sue nobody that couldn't pay them. I know some people lost their land, and lots of stores went bankrupt, that had extended their credit to people, which they used to do a whole

lot. They closed up. After they got to going around to collecting bills, they didn't ask for the full amount. They wanted to know if you could pay them \$5.00 on that bill or \$10 (chuckle). Yes! The reason they got along was that everybody was broke then. Now, if you get everybody broke, they're in the same boat; but if you get some of them without money and some of them with it, it makes pretty hard going. But there wasn't nobody that had any money then.

Martin: Did you have any money in the First National Bank when it closed?

Armstrong: No, see, I doing business over in Bolivar. I knew that it had closed. My uncle had some stock in it, and I think that he lost a little money. In them days it seemed like if you owned a \$1,000 worth of stock or \$2,000, and they went broke, you had to put another \$1,000 in there. That's how it was then. I don't know how banking rules are now.

I remember when First National went broke, and then I remember when the Exchange National Bank across the street went under. There was a rumor that started going around that they were

going to [go under]. You know, if anybody started a rumor that a bank was going under, people went there and were drawing their money out, so they had to close it. Well, I know that my mother had some money there, and she eventually got all her money. Nobody lost any money. They just made them quit operating for a while.

We had three banks here in Sanger [Texas] and had pretty good times in the early 1920s, you know. Then they got down to only one, and it just barely could get along.

Martin: But living on a farm made it a little bit easier than living in town.

Armstrong: Yes, I'll admit that. We don't have any farmers today. On a farm we made our living. You could go out in the country out for five miles in any direction, and they had a lot of chickens, and they had hogs, and they had milk cows, and they had gardens. They don't have that anymore. I can take you out now, and there won't be a chicken on the place, nor a hog, and they won't have a milk cow. They may have a pasture, but they buy their milk in town. Those farmers aren't doing

their work. Your hardest work is mostly done by machinery now, but them that don't have all that machinery, they just hire it done. I know they'll get their hay down, and they'll come into town wanting to know where they can get some hay haulers. Well, we used to hire some workers as cotton pickers. Our family did our own work. I got along pretty well farming.

Another thing is that those farms are all being cut up. I had a nice farm of 800 acres right out west of Bolivar two miles. I sold that about...it seems to me it was eighteen years ago, and I moved in here. There's ten people on that farm now, and there are houses on it. There was my house and my aunt's house, and now there are ten pretty nice brick homes on it. They cut up that 800 acres. Now there's ten different people on it.

Yes, there were lots of farms out there. One man and his wife had a farm, and now there's three or four houses on it. Our country's "thick" [filled with people], and I just look down here and know that all the rest of them are crowded into our school. Our schools are growing

so fast that they can't build them fast enough. You can go out through the country there now, and where there was a farmhouse and a barn, maybe they've pulled the barn down, and maybe there're four or five houses on that farm now. You'll have a hundred trailer houses out there.

**Martin:** In your opinion, having been a farmer, do you think that a big part of the problems the farmers are having today is that they have sort of brought it on themselves?

**Armstrong:** To some extent, yes, and some not. Now, you couldn't farm like we did then. You couldn't make a living out there as easy as we did because of the laws. The laws have been made so that you can't sell a hog. You can't butcher a hog and sell it. You can't bring in eggs to town and sell them because they weren't graded (chuckle). We used to bring eggs to town and cream and butter, but you can't sell that now. If it wasn't inspected, you couldn't sell it. Everybody used to raise a big bunch of turkeys. Nobody raises them anymore. I don't guess that they could because they poison all the crops [with pesticides], so I guess they'd kill all



the turkeys and poultry that was raised. I have an idea that they couldn't operate the way we did (chuckle). No, you couldn't farm today like I did. Well, you can't bring a big ol' bucket of eggs in here and sell it. They have to grade it. They have to come through some big process. You have to put them in cartons and sell them as grade "A" or grade "B." The same way that you can't get your hog and sell it. I once sold me a pound of sausage in town here. Of course, you could, but you'd have to have a state inspector come out and inspect that hog just before you killed him, and then when you dressed him, you'd have to have another state inspector (chuckle).

Martin: In other words, the bureaucrats in the government...

Armstrong: Too many laws.

Martin: ...were responsible.

Armstrong: Yes, too many laws.

Martin: Were you still farming when World War II started?

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am.

Martin: And you just continued?

Armstrong: I stayed there until I was eighty years old. Then I sold it out and moved here to town. Then I had a son go to World War II. Yes, my son went. He joined the Navy. He wasn't never drafted. He got in just as soon as he was old enough to get in. He signed up for the duration of the war. As soon as the war was over, he got out.

Martin: What changes did you notice in Denton when the war started? Of course, there was no Army camp here. There was one at Gainesville [Texas].

Armstrong: There was one at Gainesville [Camp Howze]. Well, not too many changes. Not too many changes. Like you say, we never had a camp there. Of course, war makes business [prosperous]. Things go up [in price because of wartime inflation and scarcity], and everything's salable. You have a hard time making enough stuff [to fight the war and still provide consumer goods].

In World War I, they asked the farmers to be sure and save all the wheat we could and be sure not to waste a grain of wheat, you know. In the 1920s...now, you see, the war was over in 1918. I'm talking about World War I. Now, we had

a pretty good amount of inflation then. Not an inflation like we have today, but, shoot, land went up, you know, to \$100, \$150 an acre. A team of mules went for \$200. We had lots of mules and horses then that went for \$600 or \$700 for a team [after the war]. Wheat sold for \$2.40 a bushel then, and it never had been over \$1.00 before. Cotton went to forty cents a pound, and it had been ten cents. If a fellow got ten cents a pound, he made \$50 for a bale of cotton, and he made good money.

Then the Depression came in 1929. I think that it made us smarter people today. I think that anybody who went through that learned a pretty good lesson.

Martin: Hopefully, they did.

Armstrong: Oh, they did! They learned that you'd better go slow. You've got to get all your business [taken care of], and you'd better save a few dollars and not spend every dollar and go into debt. The only people that really got hurt in them days were people in debt. If they owed for their car, they lost it. If they owed for their home, they lost it, or their farm. But those that owed

nothing on those things, they coasted through pretty good.

Martin: Now, that was during the Depression?

Armstrong: The Depression was in 1929. I think that we learned a lot that these young people today don't know. We never had very much.

Martin: I'm not sure if they could handle it or not.

Armstrong: Anybody can do anything if they have to. The whole world today, with all of these darned credit cards...when you go to the store, they'd rather charge it to you than take the cash. Well there's something wrong [with that]. They'd rather you just use your credit cards. I've never had one. I wouldn't keep one. This inflation hurts everything. Anytime you have inflation...I think that with more people getting turned off now and losing jobs, with more people failing, with more banks, the big banks, failing, we have more of that now than we ever have had. It's because they're planning too big [over expanding]. Now, in little things...if they had banks like we had then to give farmers little loans--a \$500 loan or \$600 or \$1,000 loan--you could have a whole lot of failures

then and not ruin the bank. But today they have those million dollar loans, and it don't take many of them to close the thing up.

Martin: That's right.

Armstrong: I don't understand that. The old banks, oh, they'd loan a little money without collateral, but if they was going to loan you \$1,000, they wanted you to have a whole lot over \$1,000 worth of stuff already. Collateral, they called it. Now then, these banks have got full of money. They've loaned it and even loaned it to foreign countries and with no collateral (chuckle). They're all greedy--trying to make more money too fast.

Martin: Thinking back, now you have lived eighty years-plus.

Armstrong: Yes, ma'am. I'm eighty-six, soon to be eighty-seven.

Martin: Goodness! What period can you think of as probably being the most satisfying, rewarding period in your life?

Armstrong: Well, that'd be hard to say. We had a good life from love. I just don't know. Right now is a wonderful time, if we can get out of it without

going to pieces. There's more pleasure now and less work; people have less drudgery work to do, less hard work.

Martin: Is that good?

Armstrong: In a way, yes. In a way, no. Our young people are [physically] weaker. They're not as strong as we were. It's because we have to learn [teach] them. The schools today have to have learning classes--learn them to run, learn them to walk, learn them to exercise. We didn't have that. We took more exercise than we could stand. We had to walk to do everything, and we had hard work picking cotton and chopping cotton and shocking wheat and threshing. I see the young people today, and they don't know how to use their bodies enough. Nobody's going to walk up the steps if they have an elevator. They've got to park their car close to a place. They don't walk anywhere, hardly. If they do walk outside, it's just for fun early in the morning. They don't work in the business.

I remember when everybody in Denton, a lot of those bankers and the lawyers and the big merchants, they'd walk to their offices. I saw

the ones walking on Oak Street, and I know that they were going down all the other streets, walking to work early in the morning. They didn't get to work at 9:00 then. They tried to open about sunup. The banks, I think, opened about 8:00. At dinnertime [lunchtime] they had to walk right up to dinner--way up the street. I've seen them--bankers, clerks, and all of them--do that, and then they'd walk back to work in the afternoon. Now then, you can't see that today. We were exposed to more weather. Now, we've got air-conditioned houses--cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Back then, we didn't have that. We had to tough it out. We had to take heat, and we had to take cold. Our houses weren't near as warm, and we had to chop wood and bring that inside. I remember when they first put the [natural] gas in Denton.

Martin: Oh, you do?

Armstrong: Yes, everybody would burn wood and coal [for heating and cooking]. My grandfather got the word that we were going to run out of wood. All of those creek bottoms were getting cleared, and about that time the gas came in. I remember that

they were digging the...they didn't have the diggers [mechanized trench digging equipment] that they now have. They had about forty or fifty men with picks and shovels digging those ditches. It got to the point then that you couldn't sell a rick of wood. Now it's gotten up so high that you can't buy it now. It's now \$30, \$40 a cord, but back then they'd try to get \$1.00 for it, and they couldn't (chuckle). Everybody wanted that gas.

I've bought many a gallon of gasoline at ten cents a gallon (chuckle). Now then, oil is a funny thing. Everybody was prosperous when they were getting oil at \$2.00 and \$3.00 a barrel. I had some oil wells out on my place east of Bolivar, and we were all prospering when we had oil that was making \$2.00 and \$3.00 a barrel. We got a pipeline that went out there. Now, when it went down to \$15, they were all going broke. Why is that (chuckle)?

Martin: I'm not sure that I understand that, either (chuckle).

Armstrong: The banks are going broke, and the people are going under because there's big oil speculation.



I don't understand it, but they are. We can't stand \$15-a-barrel oil, and we say that it's going to ruin us. It used to bring prosperity. I remember when East Texas oil sold for ten cents a barrel. We didn't use that much of it then, you know. We didn't have airplanes. The trains were all burning coal, and then they went to burning diesel. And we didn't have many cars (chuckle). They had more gas and more oil than they knew what to do with. I can't understand why we're going broke with \$15 oil--when it went from \$29 down to \$15. Now here today--I read about it--they said everybody's going broke making that much a barrel. Well, I do know why--expenses.

Martin: That's right.

Armstrong: Expenses. Everything is high, and that's what is responsible. And they went in debt with \$30 oil. Now, they're going out to try pay back loans with \$15 oil. I'll say, "That's all there is to it."

Martin: Nobody pays cash anymore for anything.

Armstrong: That's the most disgraceful thing you ever saw. Now, when I was a young fellow, it was against

the law to charge over 10 percent interest. The banks would have been prosecuted for usury. They called that usury. Then, the first thing you know, they got to raising that, and they got that stuff up to 15 percent and 20 percent interest, you know. These young people are buying these homes for \$30,000 or \$40,000 on a thirty-year straight mortgage (chuckle).

Martin: Young people today have it kind of hard.

Armstrong: Yes, and that's where inflation hurts. They'd get everybody up to that, and then they'd fall down, you see. Well, plenty of people are getting laid off today at these factories, and there's lots of things going broke, and factories are shutting down. Some of them have quit making money and are shutting down. People, if they don't owe nothing, they were not hurt very bad. Of course, they've got to have a job, but if they didn't owe nothing, they'd still have their homes and everything. But they've all built these high-priced houses with these big interest rates on future [speculation] that everything was going to go just as good as it is

now. But it's not going to do that, see. It's said that everything is going down now.

Farmers can't make money raising beef now. We used to make money when it [beef] was cheap. They've gone crazy over this land [and have inflated the price of farmland], and they can't nobody farm. You can't farm today with all these expenses we have today. You can't do anything. I read that these farmers are in big trouble, losing their farms. It's more so up north than they are in this country. I read that some of them owe \$200,000, \$300,000. Well, a farmer can't do that. They can't owe that much money and operate. They just can't do that and operate. They can't owe that much money for their machinery. They tell me that this spring they can't find enough money to buy their seed to plant. Well, we didn't used to have that trouble. You can't do that now. If you raise wheat out here now--and oats and stuff like that--you can't save your own seed because they combine [harvest] the stuff when it's just 14 or 15 percent moisture. You can't put that in the

granary. It's got to be put in these mills where in a day or two it's dried out.

It's a funny thing--machinery. Now then, they plant two bushels of wheat to the acre. I always planted a bushel. We had to plant a bushel of wheat to the acre, and we had to get our wheat seed out of the [harvest that we took to the] granary, our top seed. We'd go to the barn and sell our seed corn. Now, it really takes two bushels of wheat, and it has to be treated. Now then, they have to fertilize it, and that's expensive. They have it sprayed [with pesticides]. We didn't do that. All those things have just gotten expensive.

Martin: That's right.

Armstrong: Yes, it just costs too much money. That's the condition that you got into.

[End of interview]