

Notes on Video-taped Interview with
Mildred L. Cherry, former Coppell Resident,
April 4, 2002
Compiled by Wheelice (Pete) Wilson, Jr., April, 2011.

This interview took place at Coppell High School, so that students in the Broadcast Journalism class could do the video-taping. The interviewers were Jim Witt, City Manager, Jean Murph, and Pete Wilson.

Mildred L. Cherry now lives in Oak Cliff, on the edge of Dallas. She lived in Coppell briefly before moving to Seagoville, but she returned to Coppell in 1918 with her grandparents, Joe and Lou McCard (?), when her mother died. She stayed in Coppell until 1929.

Jeff Thweatt and his farm:

Mildred and her grandparents lived in a rental house on the west side of Jeff Thweatt's manor house, a two-story Colonial house that was 1 ½ miles northwest of Coppell. (This was apparently not the Thweatt farm located on what was named Thweatt Road, now the west extension of Sandy Lake Road. Probably this is another Thweatt family.) This farm was reached by going on a gravel road that extended north from Bethel Road. Mildred says that a row of trees are where that road was and where there were mailboxes. (This is probably what is now Freeport, north of Bethel Road.) Emmett Coats was the rural mail carrier. She says this was on the border of Dallas County and Tarrant County (although if that is very accurate, the county line is farther west of Freeport Road).

She and her grandparents moved into the manor house when Jeff Thweatt got wealthy speculating on oil and moved to Wichita Falls.

At Christmas, she and her family were invited to Christmas parties on the second floor of the manor house. Her grandfather and Jeff would always exchange gifts, and the gifts were always pony tails. But the last Christmas before Jeff moved to Wichita Falls, he gave her grandfather a beautiful fountain pen.

Jeff Thweatt was always up on the latest styles. He had purchased one of the first phonographs, an Edison that had a 2x2' square box and a big horn speaker. He played a record entitled "Uncle Josh," which was a song about a black preacher getting treed by a bear. The song ended with, "Oh, Lord, if you don't help me, don't help that bear." (Mildred sings the song during the interview.)

The old windmill on the Thweatt property was sold to someone in Grapevine and was moved.

Jeff Thweatt had a surrey with fringe on the top and red tassles on his horses. Before he moved to Wichita Falls, he bought a new car. It had silver vases on the inside, and Jeff would put roses in the vases for when they would ride to church.

He had a blacksmith's shop on his farm, with a room in the north side which held a Delco Electric System. Jeff provided electricity to his wife before others in Coppell had electricity.

Miss Minnie McGee's Soda Fountain:

When Mildred was a child, Minnie McGee and her husband Brian owned a drug store across the street from the Emmett Gentry garage and a few buildings south on Coppell Road. The drug store contained the post office and had a small soda fountain. The soda fountain blew up and blew off Brian McGee's head. His head rolled across the floor. The store was still being run by Minnie when Mildred left Coppell in 1929. After many years, Minnie had a nervous breakdown.

A Spelling Bee:

In the fourth grade, Mildred and her friend Lorene Gentry participated in a Dallas County spelling bee. All the elementary schools in Dallas County were represented. She and Lorene "spelled down" everyone else and were then competing against each other. When it was time to go home, they were still spelling, so they accepted the "reward" and split it between them. Each got \$2.50. Lorene bought a gold signet ring. Mildred bought a gold ring with a yellow topaz stone.

Mildred learned to spell using her grandmother's blue-backed speller.

The Railroad:

Coppell people went to the depot to wait for trains. They had to flag down the Cotton Belt train with an old-fashioned lantern. There was no electricity in Coppell when she was a child. As they waited for a train in the waiting room of the depot, the old men would see who could spit tobacco into the spittoons. Therefore, there were always a lot of tobacco stains on the floor.

In the early 1920s, the depot was a long building, built out of heavy lumber, painted yellow. There were benches inside in the waiting room. There was also probably a ticket room.

Years after Mildred had moved from Coppell, she heard that the depot had been sold to someone in Coppell and moved. (Wilson's note: The depot that was sold in the 1950s was not the original depot; it was a smaller one, sold to Hubert and Laura Faye Kirkland and moved to their chicken farm, west of old Coppell.)

A watermelon story:

Mildred and her friend Ruth Dickerson, who was a year younger, traveled down the creek to the back of Uncle Burl Howell's watermelon patch. (Mildred says that everyone called older persons "Uncle" and "Aunt.") Howell's farm was east of town. They traveled along the creek because it was shorter than going by the roads. Besides, Mildred says, they might have been hit on the road by one of those new Model T's. At the watermelon patch, they took a watermelon, broke it open, and ate it. The next day, Mildred having been taught by her very religious grandmother, felt guilty. She and Ruth went to Uncle Burl's back door and confessed to taking the melon. Uncle Burl said, "That's all right, Honey."

Electricity and Radios:

No one in Coppell locked their doors or windows. The houses had to be kept open in hot weather. No one had electricity until the mid-1920s.

Uncle Jack Dickerson built the first radios that Coppell people used. Each radio was a square box that held the crystal with earphones hooked up.

Climbing a Windmill:

Mildred was a climber. She would often climb a tree or get on top of a barn and be too scared to get down. Once she took her grandmother's old black silk umbrella and climbed onto the windmill. She loved the idea of traveling, and she hoped to open the umbrella and float off the windmill over the horizon. Her grandmother had to talk her down. Her grandmother said that the umbrella would just turn inside-out and that she couldn't float with it, anyway. Mildred was persuaded to come down.

Attending School:

Mildred attended Coppell School for the first four years of her schooling. Coppell School was a two-story building with large windows that were opened in hot weather. The older boys would jump through those windows and play hooky. When that school building was no longer used and was condemned, the lumber was bought by Red and Pearl Stringfellow. They used the lumber to build two houses, the Stringfellow house and a rent house. (Wilson's note: We think these two buildings were called, in the 1950s, the Woods house and the Arnett house, both located just west of the First Baptist Church.) Red and Pearl Stringfellow ran the water well, and Pearl was the first telephone operator.

The Kirkland House, built in 1904, was built with new materials.

While Mildred was in school, the Cummings boys beat up the principal of the school, who was a mean principal. When he left, the government sent a temporary principal until a new one could come in. Mr. Flagg wore a World War I uniform, had dark hair, and was loved by the girls and

respected by most of the boys. But the Cummings boys tried to beat him up, also. When they confronted him, he stood his ground and took off his wide leather belt and said, "Come on." They didn't fight him.

These boys were Shorty Cummings, J. C. Cummings, and Patrick Cummings. Their father was Will Cummings, and they lived in the old Sanders' house on a rise west of old Coppell on Bethel Road. Uncle Wiley and Aunt Lela (?) Sanders had moved to Grapevine and had rented their old house to the Cummings.

Mildred never saw or knew anything about Bethel School.

The Baptist Church:

The Baptist Church had stained glass windows. Years later, when Mildred painted a picture of a church, she realized that she had unconsciously painted what she remembered of the old Baptist Church, with its stained glass windows and a small brick house behind it which held coal.

Stores in Coppell:

When Mildred's mother first died (which would have been about 1918), Uncle Bill Stringfellow ran a store that sold both groceries and hardware in a brick building along Bethel Road, on the north side of the street. Upstairs there was a coffin containing a skeleton. Across the street was where the Woodmen of the World Lodge met, and when they were initiating new members, they would take them up to the coffin and skeleton.

Mildred was 3 ½ years old when her grandparents took her inside the Stringfellow store. They were drinking Cokes out of small bottles. Mildred said she wanted to drink some of that whiskey, and they all laughed.

The bank building was to the east of the Stringfellow store. It went broke in the early 1920s. A lot of Coppell people lost a lot of money. Earnest Gentry was the President. (Wilson's note: I don't think this is correct.)

West of the bank was the Stringfellow store, the water well, and the old phone building behind the barbershop.

There was another unpainted grocery store west of the bank, evidently closer to the barbershop. It was run by Mildred's step-grandfather, Willy Dickerson, until it burned in 1928. Looking at an old photo of children in the yard of the Kirkland House (Coppell Historical Photo #144), Mildred thinks that the strange frame of a store exterior in the background of that photo is the remains of that grocery store.

East of the bank were residences, including one owned by Tom and Maud Standifer, whose daughter (name not clear) was a little younger than Mildred.

The Coppel Name:

When Aunt Nora Stringfellow was renting rooms on the south side of the corner of Coppel and Bethel Roads, Mildred went to see her because Nora had a parrot that would kiss her. Nora was fussing about Bob Russell and some old men at the gin who were gambling. Nora said, "Coppel! It ought to be called Hot Hell!"

Mildred never heard any story about how Coppel got its name.

Her grandfather's new car:

In 1923, Mildred's grandfather bought a Ford. He would sing a song about owning a Ford and about how it would run forever. (Mildred sings the song, at least two verses that she remembers, but the song went on and on.)