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Interview No. 1593

Max Render

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Max Render

Interviewer: Brady Banta

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Jonesboro, Arkansas

Date of Interview: September 22, 2008

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No: 1593

Transcriber: GMR Transcriptions

Relates his memory of bracero cotton picker cohosted through local and employed by his father. Discusses their work and living conditions. Also talks briefly of other tasks performed by bracero labor.

Length of Interview 44 minutes

Length of Transcript 19 pages

Name of Interviewee: Max Render
Date of Interview: September 22, 2008
Name of Interviewer: Brandy Banta

BB: Okay. We are now recording. It is September 22, 2008. I am Brandy Banta, and I am at the home of Mr. Max Render here in Jonesborough, Arkansas, conducting an interview for the Bracero Oral History project. Now before we go any farther, Mr. Render, do I have your permission to record this interview?

MR: Yes, Sir.

BB: All right, Sir. We'll get started then. Tell me, as a way of some background, a little bit of information about yourself, who you are, where you were born, where you went to school, and just brief capsule summary of what your career has been.

MR: I was born in 1942 at Lake City, Arkansas, four miles south at a place called **Rush Island**, at home by attending physician from the small town of Lake City. My mother, Ned – this was a place that's over on the St. Francis River on the West Bank, and they had a 32-acre farm, and my dad cleared it by hand, and my mother, with help, I guess, from other people. And they grew a small amount of cotton, 12 to 15 acres per year, and we were diversified. Fifteen acre – the rest of them is corn because we thought we had to have – raise feed for the animals and the chickens and the hogs, and we worked with mules, of course, at that time.

And I went to school, started in '48, I guess, at six years old at Lake City, Arkansas. I went there **[inaudible]** year, and graduated from high school. Then my folks moved out on to Cottage Home Road here, by where initially a sewer plant is. And bought 40 acres when the levy to the St. Francis River was related and put our farm into the river, and we had to come out there and relocate. I was about 18 at that time, and I stayed right there on the farm two or three more years, then went in the service. It was the second day of January of '64, and stayed in the U.S. Army for three years.

BB: All right. At the time that your father employed or used Bracero – or the Mexican migrant labor – roughly how old were you, and were you on the farm at Lake City, or here on Cottage Home Road?

MR: That was – the first year we used Bracero labor was 1956, and I was 14 years old. And he contracted to take five. And we fixed up

an old house that was on someone else's place, and made it livable. It had a hand pump. And got all the bunks and the mattresses and blankets that was required, and a two-burner kerosene stove is what they cooked on. And we had that farm, that 32 acres on the river where we lived, and he expanded to come out to Lake City there and rented 80 more acres. So we had, I think, around 45 acres of cotton that year. And so that made it more than the family could pick.

BB: Now, did the Mexican laborers live adjacent to your home? Or did they live on the other land that you had rented?

MR: They lived closer to where we lived, a quarter of a mile, basically, from us. So when we went out to work, we picked them up and they rode – we hauled them, and then when they worked at home, a lot of times, we didn't pick them up. They walked and was there before we got there to pick them up. They wanted to go early.

BB: Now, when you said you went to work, and you had five, six, Mexican migrant laborers, you were working with them?

MR: Yes, Sir. We picked right along beside of them. And no incidents or nothing ever happened. They just was congenial and quiet as they could be. And we rode in the front of the pickup truck, and they rode in the back.

BB: How did you communicate with them?

MR: Well, the first year we had one that could speak quite a bit of English. And then we have had groups that couldn't speak, and you just made sign languages. And if they wanted something, you kind of knew what they wanted. And if you didn't want to participate, you just played it ignorant.

BB: How did your father come to hire the Mexican migrant laborers?

MR: Well, a year or two before, we had had the shortage of local labor. A lot of them had migrated north to work during the Korean War, and it just kind of created a shortage. And [inaudible] cotton farmer, you had to get you cotton out in a timely fashion to get the best price. Because if it laid in the field, or stayed in the field, unharvested, the grade would deteriorate. But it's just imperative to get it out on a timely basis. And he chose to do this, so he had to have adequate labor.

BB: Did you use them only for picking? Or did you use them for chopping also?

MR: We only used them for picking. Those came for an eight-week stint. You could – I think you could get some for six-week contract or eight-week contract, and I believe those came for eight weeks.

BB: Now –

MR: But –

BB: Go ahead.

MR: Some people did get them to chop with. Weeding and hoeing their cotton. And there was a program, at one time, that they come here in this area and chop for six or eight weeks. Then they'd go to Michigan, to the fruit harvest, and do some type of fruit harvest work, or picking cucumbers, for six or eight weeks. Then they would drop back off and pick cotton in this area for another eight weeks. So those people would be gone, [inaudible] call three contracts, before they would go home.

BB: Now, is it your sense, or do you know, that the people with whom your father contracted to pick cotton for this eight-week period, were these people who were coming directly from Mexico? Or had they been someplace else under a contract, and were coming here as part of that recontract?

MR: What I remember, we never got any recontracts. All of ours came out of Mexico.

BB: All right. Now, was your father doing this independently? Or was he part of an association, or organization, that was arranging the Mexican migrant labor?

MR: There would be a gin, cotton gin, in the vicinity where there'd be a lot of people needing the labor. And they would have one man that would be in charge of taking everybody's application, how many pickers they wanted. And then he would do the legwork with the private hauler. And then, I think, the private hauler's the one that take care of the administrative – get them on the bus from Mexico.

BB: All right.

MR: Because we were never involved with the Mexican government on getting them on the bus. Someone else – there was a transportation fee to get them here and to get them home. And then, I think, with this first transportation fee, there was also an administrative charge because you had to pay low insurance and all that kind of thing to get them here. And then if they got sick, they – you didn't have to pay a doctor bill. They could see a doctor under this insurance program.

BB: All right. What kind of living arrangements did you have to provide for these individuals?

MR: You had a certain amount of things you had to have. We – in some of the earlier days – have had wooden homemade bunks with wooden bottoms. And when we started, we had to have the wooden bunks and the springs on the bottom. But my father, just bought government surplus army cots, and we stacked them two high, with a surplus army mattress and –

BB: Now we're back in business.

MR: The limit for [inaudible] had to have a house up to a certain standard, had to have a bunk, a mattress, and a blanket per man. And my father used surplus army stuff because he could buy that about as cheap as he could build them. He had to have a cup and a plate, and fork, eating utensils. You had to have a, minimum, two-burner kerosene stove for five men. And then a boiling coffee pot, and the [inaudible] utensils that was required for a badging outfit, what we would call it.

BB: How did they – did you furnish their food? Did they buy their own food?

MR: No. When they came off the bus, everyone usually advanced them \$5.00 on their next first week's pay. They went to the store, and bought their first set of cooking things, their basic food that they ate, their brown pinto beans, flour tortillas. And, of course, you had to have lard and salt to make those. And if we had tomatoes in our garden, my mother gave them to them. She shared with them because they love tomatoes and pepper. We did not grow the jalapeno peppers, we grew the red and green chili cayenne peppers, and they loved – they ate those better than we did. We only just used one or two to season the cha cha, but they could eat them straight down.

And then after that, well then they'd go to the grocery store weekly and buy what they needed. They did buy eggs. I guess they ate eggs for breakfast some way. And they would mix up peppers and eggs. And they would buy some kind of pork meat and stir all this up. I think they ate that for breakfast. They would bring bean tortillas for lunch to the field.

BB: You said they would go to the store. Now, did you take them to town?

MR: Yes, Sir. We had to furnish transportation.

BB: Now, this was part of the contract –

MR: Yeah.

BB: Okay. When you would – would you take them to town on the same day on a regular basis, once a week, something like that?

MR: Usually. Unless it rained. And then about twice a year, we'd go to Jonesborough, which the Big **[Inaudible]** they called it.

BB: What was it like – when you took them to town, I'm assuming if you took them into Lake City, that either you, or your father, or someone would have to stay around to bring them back.

MR: Yes, Sir.

BB: What was – what did they do when they went to town?

MR: Well, they stood around, and they'd be **[inaudible]**. You couldn't, as the old saying, stir them with a stick because everybody else would have his there also. And you give them – you'd say, "We're gonna leave at 8:00 or 9:00 at night, or 7:00." You'd set a leaving time. And we never had anyone that got left. They'd always be there.

BB: How long would you spend in town?

MR: Oh, we'd go visiting and buy our groceries, two or three hours.

BB: And the businesses, I assume, catered to them because of the cash flow here.

MR: Yeah. They liked them. And there was always a rumor that in places where they were really thick, that they would raise the price

of groceries while they were here. Now, I cannot verify that, but that's a rumor.

BB: Okay. And so you made the trip to Lake City once a week.

MR: Once a week.

BB: And you made the trip into Jonesborough –

MR: Twice –

BB: Twice during the season.

MR: Well, when we moved over here on to Cottage Home Road, we carried them to Jonesborough to get their groceries because we were closer to Jonesborough [inaudible] Lake City.

BB: Let's talk for a minute about when you were still farming in the Lake City area, and you would bring them to Jonesborough. Would they buy things in Jonesborough to take back, or to ship back, to Mexico?

MR: Yeah. They'd buy clothing, a lot of them. And in later years, I guess they got TV transmission. They would buy every loose used TV nearly they could find. And when the buses leave, it would just be mounted up on top with used TVs and things like that. And they liked to buy transistor radios in the late '50s when they became more cheaper and more prevalent. In the early '60s, they got relatively inexpensive compared to what they were in the early '50s. Well, I never heard of one until maybe mid-'50s.

BB: That sounds about right, yeah.

MR: The transistors and the batteries got cheaper, I guess. Well, I guess they got them from making them in Japan. It's what made them cheaper.

BB: Do you remember the amount of the wage or hourly rate that you paid these individuals?

MR: We paid – it was \$2.50 per hundred, most of the time.

BB: All right.

MR: And the snapping price, which was pulling, was \$1.55 per hundred.

BB: Okay. For the people who may not be familiar with the harvesting of cotton, explain to me the difference between picking and pulling.

MR: Picking is picking it clean. Getting all – you leave the burrs on the stalk. Pulling it is when it gets scrappy, a smaller amount on the stalk, or it's – you can't pick it, well you just snap the burr and all off with your hands and the gin separates it.

BB: All right. Did it pay the same rate?

MR: No. The snapping was \$1.55 –

BB: \$1.55. And that's something you would do –

MR: You could do it faster.

BB: You could do it faster. Is that something you did toward the end?

MR: Yes, Sir. Usually.

BB: All right. How much contact did you have with the Bracero laborers?

MR: Well, we was around them every day. And, occasionally – they had radios. And they would – if there was a Hispanic fighter coming on on Friday night, they'd get to talking about that. Of course, back then, they had fights on Friday nights, which you don't have any more. And my dad would ask them – they'd say something to him about it. And he'd ask them into our home, two or three of them, and they'd watch Friday night fight, if one of their Hispanic people that they were keeping up with, and usually my sister would pop popcorn, and they'd eat popcorn and watch TV like we did.

And they would clean up. They wouldn't come in their work clothes; they'd be cleaned up like they were going to town.

BB: Was there any one, or small handful, of these individuals that became especially valued employees to you?

MR: If they could pick 400 or 500 pounds of cotton, he was more value than one that picked 200. They was not supposed to do mechanical – be around mechanical operation, like operating a tractor or mechanical equipment, as I remember.

BB: So there were here for a specific task.

MR: Hand work only. Hand work.

BB: Okay. So could you put them to other types of labor if you didn't have cotton that needed to be picked, like cleaning fencerows or something like that?

MR: Yeah. We get the corn with ours. I mean, we got twenty acres, or so, of corn. And my dad, I remember him saying the price to have it mechanically harvested was \$5.00 an acre. He did the math. He paid them \$.50 cents an hour because they get an hourly rate on that. And we got ours harvested for about \$2.50 or \$3.00 an acre. And plus, he thinks he got more corn harvested because the mechanical means wasted some. And they picked up chunks with them. And if they had new ground –

BB: Okay. Explain to – again, I know what you mean, but explain to a person who isn't from around here what picking up chunk is about.

MR: Well, land that is newly cleared, brought out of the woods, timber production, and brought in to grow crop production, they cut the trees off – or most of the trees – and then we'd start plowing as we did in those days. You plowed up chunks and roots that had to be picked up, so you could plow and not drag the cart down and get hung in the cultivators.

BB: All right.

MR: You'd plow [inaudible] in or around the stumps and pile them up and burned them.

BB: Did you have a – did you employ a foreman? Or did you have a small enough group that you did the management yourself?

MR: My father did all of it. He does the weigher, and paid. And then my sister – the first group we had – on Friday night was a chore. You had to figure out their – they had books with the daily amount they picked. And you [inaudible] them down, and you priced per hundred, and you tallied that up and figured that out. And we paid – we figured those up on Friday night, and then we paid them Saturday. And the next Saturday went on next week's pay. That we speeded up the paying on Saturday.

BB: In paying them, did you pay them cash?

MR: Paid them in cash.

BB: Was that a requirement? Or do you know?

MR: Everybody got paid, picking cotton, cash.

BB: Okay. So that was just the standard.

MR: Only one or two people in the area that paid by check.

BB: Okay. So that was just standard operating procedure. There was nothing particular –

MR: With the gin – brought a picking on whatever you'd haul up there to the bank and get the cash, and pay everybody off.

BB: All right. What did these individuals do when they had a day off?

MR: Well, a lot of them washed their clothes. And they'd take their Saturday baths, I guess. And a few of them went to church with us. And some of them would go out walking to other groups and meet and visit them.

BB: When you said that some of them would go to church with you, what kind of – what denomination was –

MR: Baptist.

BB: Baptist.

MR: What we were.

BB: How were they received when they went to the church?

MR: Good. Nobody singled them out or anything. And the first year we had them in 1956, there was a Hispanic revival in Lake City. Our Baptist group sponsored it. And they had a tent revival, and a Hispanic speaker. And several people came and –

BB: Now does that operate in the same fashion that you would think of a revival or tent services today? Where this would be something that would go on nightly for four or five days?

MR: A week.

BB: A week?

MR: Um hm. As I recall.

BB: So you would take them to – provide transportation to Lake City. So you would have to, in effect –

MR: We went ourselves because there was an English speaker there that spoke first.

BB: So then –

MR: We was big on religion.

BB: So everybody shut down work a couple hours early, so everybody could get home, get cleaned up?

MR: 15, 20 minutes.

BB: 15, 20 minutes.

MR: We weren't very religious. We were [inaudible].

BB: Yeah. There you go. There you go. Okay. Did they have any – did some of them, or all of them, have any special privileges?

MR: No, Sir. They all – we treated them all just alike.

BB: Okay.

MR: If my dad gave one of them a radio [inaudible], he gave them all one.

BB: There you go.

MR: And they smoked **Giggler** themselves, mostly.

BB: Hand-rolled cigarette.

MR: Hand-rolled Giggler, and maybe on the weekend they'd buy **Ready Rolls**, they called them. Of course, they maybe might have smoked **Prince Albert**, if he wasn't smoking Ready Rolls [inaudible]. But they smoked that Giggler.

BB: You said you had contracted for several years.

MR: Well, my dad contracted in '56. It was the first year had five. In '57, [inaudible] were reduced cotton program, and there wasn't a need as great. And in '59, they increased the cotton program, so we got ten that year. And then I think 12 is the most that he ever got. And that's when we moved over here, initially, on the Cottage Home Road. And we had a home, and then a car garage right out beside it. And we didn't have no place to house our Braceros, so he boxed up – closed up the end to this garage, and they lived in our backyard. And our garden was out there, and he would share the garden with them.

And that's the time that they come in to watch the Friday night fights more because it was just right there. And then they would cause no incident of any kind – of misbehavior. But now, he did not take them to DeWitt County to buy liquor either.

BB: Did they ask?

MR: Yeah, the asked for [inaudible] occasion or two. And he said, "No sabe," he didn't understand.

BB: Were there any problems that you can remember? Any incidents, trouble?

MR: We had one that wanted to go home once, early. And he got these letters, and we'd take them to him. And it was – had some Spanish in school. And he said the best he could tell me, he had some peas that need picking, but I think he was just mainly homesick. But he finally went back to work and got over it.

BB: These are all men, no family members with them.

MR: No, Sir.

BB: All right.

MR: Now they could be a father-son, but they were above 18. I think that was the minimum age.

BB: Okay. But, again, since you worked with this associate through the gin, that was all taken care of before you –

MR: You knew you was getting so many warm bodies. You didn't know anything about them. And they had a number, some Social Security number, or transport number, and you put this down on

their pay book, and that's what you went by. And then we'd give them an individual field number: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on.

BB: Other than the pay book that you had to keep up with them daily and weekly, was there any other paperwork that you can remember that your father had to keep up with on these individuals?

MR: We kept a log, or weight book, all week of what we picked, and everybody's name, if it was our kind of people, Caucasian, we had their name up there, and the Hispanics, we had their numbers. And we kept their weights and numbers by the day. Then we transferred them to these logbooks at the end of the week. My sister helped him with the first group. But she got married and left. So the '59 group, I had to move up and start doing – start filling the books out.

BB: Do you remember any instances where a representative from the Mexican Consulate in Memphis came to inspect your living quarters, or to monitor the type of work these individuals were doing, or to interview them to see if they were unhappy, or anything like that?

MR: The only contact that I know of we had before we got them one year, someone from the counsel, or somewhere, come and they looked at our house. And he said, "I wouldn't mind living here."

BB: All right. So you –

MR: But now you were subject to inspection in the field, or your weigh books, like any government operation, any time.

BB: All right. Do you remember any instances on your own place, or on neighboring places around there, where any of these Mexican migrant laborers took off, ran off, instead of going back to Mexico?

MR: No, I don't.

BB: All right.

MR: Now, I wouldn't say that they didn't. Now, in [inaudible], where it was sold liquor, occasionally you hear of one of them getting too much to drink and causing a disturbance and getting in jail.

BB: But that –

MR: Which that wouldn't be any more than a Caucasian –

BB: Yeah, that wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary for anybody else. And, again, I guess this will call for a subjective answer on your part, but give me your sense of a comparison of the kind of work and the amount of work that the Mexican migrant laborer did compared to the kind of work, quality of work, amount of work that you might have been able to get out of someone that you could have hired locally, if there was someone to hire.

MR: Well, the Mexican laborer knew he was coming to pick cotton. And he knew how much he was gonna make. And he didn't complain about what he made, or what he didn't make because he knew he was gonna get a set amount. Now the Caucasian laborer, they always come in and started for a set amount, usually picked for \$.50 cents more a hundred. And their first – if they were public laborers that lived in their own house in town, and wasn't tied to your farm, they said, "Well, over across the river, they're paying \$4.00 a hundred." That was a standard – that made my daddy angry. And that could have been so, or it could not have been so.

Usually, it was in \$.50 cents per hundred increments more than what they were getting is what they would start – that's a negotiation thing. And if you had a lot of cotton, and the more cotton there were, the more you had to pay because there's less laborers. But the Hispanic contract was the same. That didn't go up.

BB: So if you signed at the beginning of the year, if it was \$2.50, it was \$2.50.

BB: That's right.

BB: Okay.

MR: And they knew that. And occasionally they'd hear that if it went to \$3.50, they says, "They getting \$3.50." Well, my daddy says, "Well, I gotta pay you down there and pay you back, and you didn't have to furnish your cooking oil, or kerosene." And if they had electricity, we had to furnish light bulbs. Lights wasn't much, but at first, they just had a hand pump, water pump. But then, like I say, the next group we got we had in our backyard, and we had an electric pump and they used that, same as we did.

BB: I have heard other people in interviews and in casual conversation talk comparatively, I guess, in groups about the amount of cotton

that the Mexican migrant laborers would pick per day, compared to what the local laborer would pay.

MR: Well, some of them are extremely good. But we always got these mediocres that could pick from 250 to 400, very few 400-pounders. And myself, I think I could pick 300 when I was in the high teenage years. And some white people pick more, too, than others. It depends on how you work at it.

BB: That's true.

MR: And my dad wanted – if he had ten, he wanted to get out two bale a day. Which that was 300 pound average. And we had one or two that pick 400, 450, but we never did have one that could pick 500, which I've heard those stories. Most of ours ranged 250 and up.

BB: When – and you've probably told me this, but I can remember – when was, to your recollection, when was the last year that your father used the migrant laborers.

MR: I think he used them the year I went into the service, it was '64, and after that, he started – he teamed up with the neighbor and he bought – the neighbor bought a mechanical cotton picker. And he hired him to pick his cotton, and he worked for him some to [inaudible] the price of the picking. This program, some people didn't like it, and we never could figure out who it was. But it kept – I guess the cost of living, they kept raising it so much higher than the cost of getting here, that it became economically unfeasible, is why it was stopped.

BB: So where the escalation was in the cost, was in the overhead of getting the laborers here, and getting them back to Mexico.

MR: Right. And mechanical pickers were getting better, and the quality of the job they did were getting better. So the two met and hashed, and this area here – and they probably used them longer up in here because it was wetter land, and it wasn't as adaptable to mechanical harvest, if they had a lot of rain in the fall. And over in Lake City in the sand and [inaudible], it pretty well all went mechanical cotton pickers in the early '60s, but they had them out here four or five years longer.

BB: All right. And that was just a function of the technology adapting to the type of the land that's here.

MR: Right. Yeah.

BB: Okay. To your knowledge, in your memory, did any of the Braceros you had working for you, once arriving here and starting to work, did they complain any about their living conditions, or the food, or the wages, or the contract that they had signed?

MR: No. But they would contract – complain about – anybody would complain if you had – if the cotton was hard to pick and it hurt their fingers. Of course, you just had to pick what you grew, and the farmer had no control over that. But they occasionally would kind of grumble about that. And one year we got some, I don't know how it happened, but their wrists would swell up for two or three days after they got here. And that lasted for about a week. I don't know if it was strenuous work or not. And finally, they got over it.

BB: And these people worked five and a half day week? Did they work Sundays?

MR: If they – they would work if the man wanted them to. We went to church on Sunday. If we worked, we usually quit between lunch and 4:00 on Saturday afternoon, and cleaned up and went to town, and got our supplies. And that's what they did. And we never compelled any work on Sunday. Now some people worked them 24, seven days a week. And then they went at night to get their supplies.

BB: Do you have any particular humorous incidents that you can remember that haven't come up in our conversation involving the Mexican laborers while they were here?

MR: Humorous.

MR: Or things that you found interesting?

MR: Well, they had this one the first year that tried to teach me Spanish. And I couldn't master his technique, and it just took a lot of time. So I got disinterested. He didn't want me speaking slang. He wanted me to pronounce exactly. And we learned a few words, and I guess it wouldn't be humorous. The only – like I told you, the only time I'd ever heard of marijuana was one that came out one morning, and he told my dad that this one was malo, which meant he was sick. So he came to the doctor, and I don't know what they did to him.

And then about a week later, the man told my dad that he needed some marijuana. So my dad told him, he said he didn't wanna be associated with that, didn't want anything to do with it. So we think that the next week, or so, they went somewhere and someone got some in the mail, and cut him a cigarette or two. But he was always [inaudible] disassociated with the rest of the group [inaudible], wasn't as talkative as the others in the group. He was kind of isolated, is what I'm trying to say.

BB: Yeah. He kind of self-isolated –

MR: Right. And my mother told my dad, she said, “Well, if he went to the doctor and he was on drugs, the doctor probably knew it and just didn't say anything about it.” So that was her analysis.

BB: Did you ever hear, in this vicinity – because, again, maybe not your farm – but when you went to town, did you ever see any instances of animosity or difficulty between the Mexican migrant laborers and the rest of the community?

MR: No, Sir. I've heard that most have taken place where there's heavy concentration of Negro, black people. Because they always said they didn't like one another. Now, I cannot prove that yes or no.

BB: But there wasn't a great deal of Negro, black, African American labor in this area.

MR: We had to do our own work.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Other than mechanization around here, and the associated cost advantages, or the associated efficiencies, is there anything else that you can recollect that contributed to the demise of the Bracero program?

MR: Well, like I say, it got cost-prohibitive compared to mechanical harvesting because one got better and they got more expensive and they passed one another, and it became economically imperative just to drop the program.

BB: Okay. Has there been any talk with any different crops that are grown around here now, of any need for a renewal of this type of a program? Or is everything so mechanized that you wouldn't need that hand labor?

MR: Everything is mechanized, and it would be cost-prohibitive to use the hand labor, even with today's standards.

BB: All right. Well, is there anything else you want to tell me about the program, or your perceptions of the program, because I think I've asked pretty –?

MR: One thing that we didn't touch on, they came by bus in '56, that's when they start coming by bus. Before, people hauled them – you could haul your own. And if you had a truck that would make the trip to Texas, you could haul your own. And I do not know the details of it, but I do know that some people did that.

BB: But your father did not.

MR: No, he did not.

BB: Okay.

MR: And the gins that had their big [inaudible] seed trucks, two or three weeks before the cotton picking started, they'd run those with tarps over them at night, I guess. And then they had four rows of seats in them, and they sat just as thick as they could sit in those trucks. And haul them up here. And sometimes they would be sick, and they'd have to be doctored to get well enough to work. And I don't know if the temperature change, or – and then those buses, they were, I guess you might say, heavy-duty school buses. And every how many seats they were wide, there was one folding seat in the middle that someone sit in it, the aisle also, which would be prohibited today. And no seatbelts, I'm sure.

BB: Oh, I imagine you're right. Yeah. It was a different time, though.

MR: Oh, yeah.

BB: How much – I mean, we've talked about how the Mexican migrant laborers that your father employed lived. How much different was that from the way you lived?

MR: Oh, well, we ate a variety of foods. And my mother fixed a balanced diet, and they mostly – like I say, their staple was brown beans and tortillas, which was rolled out. They were flour, they weren't milled, I don't think, a flour tortilla. And with water and salt and lard, or shortening, I forget what they used. And then they rolled them out real thin. They'd toast them in a pie plate on a burner. Then they rolled them up with beans.

BB: Do you have any conception, maybe from your own observations, or your dad's conversations, about them being here. On a good week, I'll say an average week of picking, what would one of these individuals be able to have made say in the mid-1950s?

MR: Probably between \$35.00 and \$45.00, depending on how much they made.

BB: Now, how much of that – again, this is probably somewhat supposition on your part, but what is your perception how much of that did they spend on their living here, and how much of it did they squirrel away in one fashion or another –

MR: Well –

BB: To get home or send home.

MR: A lot of them, every Monday morning, they would bring an envelope with money in it, and they'd want my dad – they'd say, "Go buy a money order and airmail it to Mexico."

BB: So they wouldn't do that themselves when they were in town –

MR: No, you had to go to the post office and buy the money order, and sew up the letter, and take them the receipt for the money order.

BB: Do you have any recollection or memory of – if they made \$40.00 in a week –

MR: They probably sent \$20.00, or either save it up, and in about four weeks send \$80.00.

BB: So they're sending at least half of it home.

MR: Probably, yeah. And another item they like to buy – I forgot to tell you – was sewing machines, [inaudible] sewing machines, mechanical sewing machines.

BB: So they were, by choice, living frugally here.

MR: Yeah. Right.

BB: Okay. Well, all right. I don't have any other questions unless, again, you have something else you can remember. We can think a minute.

MR: That's about all I can think of. It seems like I may have told you more than –

[End of Audio]

Duration: 44 minutes

DRAFT