

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DELBERT WHEELER

MAY 17, 2014

NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

INTERVIEWED BY PERKY BEISEL

ORAL HISTORY #813

EAST TEXAS RESEARCH CENTER

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Joanna Lovejoy transcribed this interview in September 2014. Erick Roy reviewed the draft of this transcript and incorporated his corrections into the transcript in March 2015. Katie Hutto made additional edits in April 2015. Greg Grant reviewed the transcript in September 2015. Perky Beisel prepared the final version of this transcript in January 2016.

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ABSTRACT

Robert Wheeler was born in September 27, 1932 in Arcadia, Texas. He discusses what life was like growing up in Arcadia, his family history, and a convenience store owned by his grandmother in 1914. He talks about his great grandparents, grandparents, uncles, and cousins and burial sites of his family. He describes his childhood, working on the farm and helping his father in the fields. He also talks about his mother's career as a teacher and the farm he grew up on, working in the fields at a young age. Additionally, he talks about his career as a commercial and private pilot and also a crash he was involved in. In addition, he discusses his time in high school, and how his graduating class of 1950 still meets at the Garrison hotel annually. He discusses some of the local businesses and buildings that have disappeared since his childhood in Arcadia.

Persons Mentioned: Edwin Wheeler, Cletus Goosby Wheeler, Jim Crawford, Dr. Carr, Ruben Smith, Ransom Wheeler, Anderson Wheeler, Martin Wheeler, Blount Wheeler, Henry Wheeler, Henderson Wheeler, Ezra Wheeler, Doc. Smith, and Van Hughes.

Places Mentioned: Arcadia, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Garrison, Houston, Center, Kemah, Carthage, Toomey, Texas, and Shiloh, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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PERKY BEISEL: Okay so that's going... So I am Perky Beisel and I teach up at SFA and I'm going to say this for the transcribers, the students that have to do this, today is May 17, 2014 and we're at the home of Greg Grant, in Arcadia, Texas. And today I am interviewing Mr. Wheeler, and you're going to tell us some...umm I've been told some excellent history about the founding of this town and some of the early families in this area. So umm to get us started before you start talking about the distance past if you could tell me when you were born and who your parents were just so we know a little bit about you?

ROBERT WHEELER: Okay. I was born 27 September 1932 . . . over in the uh uh Wheeler House and uh my parents lived there in the Wheeler house uh [clears throat] with my grandmother uh for the first nine years they were married. They lived there uh five years before I was born and they lived there uh four years after I was born. And that's when we built, they built the house over uh our Wheeler House over there in the uh area. [Clears throat] We huh ...when I was uh four years old, I can remember them building the house and I would go from the Wheeler house over to where they was building the new house. And my mother would stand on the porch and watch until I crossed the pond there and then there, then I'd walk on over to the uh the new house. And uh then my dad would watch me was when I was come back [chuckle]. At four years old walking that far was I think about that now that was golly uh strange you know?

BEISEL: How far apart were those homes?

WHEELER: Well uh ... oh probably three or four hundred yards I guess.

BEISEL: Oh yeah! That's a distance.

WHEELER: I would think at least that.

BEISEL: Mmhm. What were your parents' names?

WHEELER: My parents was Edwin Wheeler and Cletus Wheeler. Cletus Goosby Wheeler.

BEISEL: Okay.

WHEELER: [Clears throat] My dad was born on uh on this this place here the uh Wheeler place. My grandfather bought that place uh...in uh...1887 and then I, I don't know what year uh ... he and my grandmother were married. But I know my dad was born March the 30th 1900. And uh then uh my aunt was born uh in 1903. My grandfather passed away in 1903. My grandmother was just a few weeks old when he passed away.

BEISEL: Mhm.

WHEELER: And uh they umm. . . She was uh raising those two children and uh my her brother moved in with her to help her with the farm and uh to help uh raise the children and uh he, he uh... stayed with them for I don't know how many years, but several years. And in 1914 uh, my uh, my uh ... my uncle uh saw that my grandmother was having financial problems on the farm raising two children, Blount Wheeler was his name, and he uh ... helped my grandmother buy the, the store here in uh Arcadia and uh... she ran that store, and that was in 1914, and, and she ran that store until she was in her '80s and uh when she got too old to get around and she couldn't do it anymore, Gladys's husband Jim. . .

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: . . . Jim Crawford uh started running the store and taking care of it until he got too old to where he couldn't take of it. And uh...then it was gradually closed. Reginald gradually closed the store down. And um... then uh ... [deep breath] Later on the old store building was they was just sitting there empty. Reginald sold those. And umm [breath] I really, really missed I wish I uh would of made a bunch more pictures of those old stores. That I had...

BEISEL: Could you describe it? What it looked like?

WHEELER: Pardon me?

BEISEL: Could you describe it? What it looked like?

WHEELER: They were just uh . . . uh big huh I don't know what the dimension were but they were big open stores they didn't have of . . . course shelves all around

them they was [clear throat] the walls of the stores. And they were uh, she had counters uh in in the stores and uh they had the uh showcases where they kept the jewelry and little what not things. And and she also where we also kept the uh candy was in a uh a showcase there. And uh then she had groceries, a line of groceries, and and uh she had . . . clothes she she sold work clothes you know khakis and overalls and uh that sort of thing and she had a line of shoes. She sold shoes and uh uh... and uh the the necessary things like that, that uh people would need. Sold and a line of groceries she had canned goods and things like that and then have uh some of the meal and salt and uh... and uh flour and the things you need for baking situations. And uh it was uh just a store of general a just general merchandise store. And uh it was uh they, uh it was uh, a gatherings place on Saturday and Sunday, well the uh neighbors around would gather around there and that was a talkin' point where uh they could elect the commissioners, and sheriffs, and uh all [chuckle] and all the candidates. They could get elected right there and uh the all the discussions that was involved in that [chuckle]. But uh it was an interesting thing that people didn't have any place to go particularly after they'd gone to church or something they they didn't have uh uh anything else to do and they would just gather around the store over there and and visit and uh it was just a gathering place.

BEISEL: Mhmm. Did she uh take... did she uh offer lines of credit to customers or take in farm goods? [8:40]

WHEELER: She uh she uh did she would buy the eggs and uh that sort of thing and yes she did uh give... credit during the Depression. She had let out... uh well uh people didn't buy anything much, but except the salt and the sugar and the uh things they had to have. And uh she had let that out until she was broke. She didn't have any. She said she could not, was not going to buy any more uh things out on credit. That she would let out on credit, you know. She had to have some money that's uh when the uh... the work programs started. Uh and uh people was doing work on the, the uh men was doing work on the corner roads and things that nature. And I believe they made a dollar a day, and uh

then they would come in and and uh they could buy things and pay for them that time. And she would was able to keep the store open, by by this uh. . . taking place. You know?

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: And uh the store gradually came back uh it was uh very hard on her it uh that time. She had [clears throat] she had let out somewhere between uh twelve and fifteen thousand dollars.

BEISEL: And this is during the Depression?!

WHEELER: And, and during the Depression. And that would be like a hundred and fifty thousand or so now, you know? But she had uh let that out. She said she was not going to buy any anything on, on credit and uh let it out on credit. She'd have to have money for it before she would let it go any further. And fortunately that's when uh... that's uh when those uh programs got started and was able to uh uh build the store back up to a normal operating. . .

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: ... situation then and uh ... She was a quite a...well she was a very determined person. She uh she went to uh work each day, just like she didn't open the store, well she wouldn't have anything to eat that day. I mean she she would keep it open she would uh six days a week uh through Saturday she would be there and then Sunday it would... the store be closed, but then they would open it for uh people going in getting drinks and little uh items candy and so forth, and uh during the visiting time. And uh that was normally uh open by Jim Crawford or my dad, Edwin Wheeler. They would open the store and let people go in, and shop if they needed to or wanted to, and uh that was that was the way the uh store operated back back in those days.

BEISEL: Did she ever put in a gas station? Or a gas pump?

WHEELER: Yes, yes there was two gas pumps. They uh [chuckle] when when it started out, there was uh it back in the early days, they had uh leaded gas red. What what they called a red gas and white gas. The, the white gas had no uh . . . no lead or anything in it, and that's that's what they would use in lanterns, things... that white gas, they would come on over and fill up the lanterns the

Coleman lanterns for the uh church over there. And uh then uh later on, they uh naturally they stopped the white gas and uh they put in uh a regular gas and a ethyl gas, a uh higher octane gas. And they uh had uh those two pumps are what we had. And we uh didn't have a, and they were, were just hand pumps and you pumped the uh gas up into the globes, on the uh pumps. We uh had no electricity so uh everything had to uh be hand, you know? And uh we didn't get electricity out here until 1940... I believe it was '47 I think '46 or '47 and uh when we... got electricity out here.

BEISEL: So very late.

WHEELER: They were in the process and prior, uh just prior to World War II. They were... had already staked out the area that, where they was going to put the lines and everything, but uh when the war started naturally that uh the the uh the material that they make the wire out of all, of the copper was uh and stuff was uh used for the the benefit of the war. And uh no one uh got any uh lines uh put in at that time so it was after World War II when uh [deep breath / exhale] that uh they started putting in the lines again and uh that's when it was either '46 or '47, I can't remember exactly when. When they put the electricity in and uh we thought we were just like uptown then. We could just turn on a light not have to fill up the lamps and so forth. [15:20]

BEISEL: Um-hm. That was good.

WHEELER: Yeah.

BEISEL: When your parents built their... their new house, when you were four, what kind of house did they build?

WHEELER: It was just a house that was uh, my dad uh tore down uh three old houses that was on the place, and uh took the lumber and carried it to uh... to uh a mill that did the planing, and uh ship lap and different uh lumbers, tongue and groove and things. Because these old house were just uh well what they call board houses. They were just made out of old rough lumber. Just big uh one-by-tens and uh and that... that sort of rough lumber wasn't any of it planed or anything. And uh Dad had this oldest lumber planed, and used that and uh building the house. And if I'm not mistaken, he told me when that when he

started to build that house, he had uh 350 dollars, to build a house. And uh he hired... my mother's uncle he was the he was the main carpenter. He had uh, a lot of carpenter experience, and he was the main carpenter and then she, they hired two of her brothers to come there and work and and those men built that house over there. Then house was just a plain . . . uh [exhale] open house it was uh going to be uh, three rooms on one side of the house, and two rooms in the other side of the house. A fireplace room and another bedroom uh on the west side of the house and uh they uh [clears throat] ... uh ... the house when uh mom and dad moved in, and they hadn't put on any walls in, they didn't have any ceilings, or anything just a plain shell of a house. And as dad had time, when uh uh in the wintertime when he wasn't farming, and he had, he had a little bit of time, well he would uh put in the walls and ceilings and so forth and like that. And he would just uh gradually finished the house like that, you know? And uh it was uh it was just a plain shell of the house, when they... we moved in there.

BEISEL: Did you have any siblings?

WHEELER: I have, I have a sister that was uh was born uh... uh in 1939. October uh the 22, 1939. She was born, she was born in that house over there. And uh uh we uh . . . she, she uh grew up in that house over there. It was in the front room, in the fireplace room was the room she was born. And uh back in uh those days it, it wasn't a running to the hospital and then the baby being born it was they were born right there in the uh house there wasn't any... Well first of all, an awful lot of the times the roads were so bad that uh... it would be very difficult to get into town. I can remember when we would go to town and it would take uh maybe an hour, an hour and a half just to go to town... twelve miles.

BEISEL: And that's to Center?

WHEELER: Pardon?

BEISEL: You were going to Center? Is that correct? Going to Center?

WHEELER: Yeah.

BEISEL: Okay.

WHEEKER: Yeah mmmm yeah. It would take as much as anywhere from an hour and an hour and half and if the roads were good it would take you at least thirty minutes or forty minutes. You know? Uh . . . because the roads were country roads and were so rough and uh [exhale] we uh couldn't get out and, and, and and do that that much. You know? But uh and we didn't go to town very often. We uh uh unless it was during the time when mom would be having ohh... a lot of uh a lot of eggs and vegetables and stuff like that. We would take into town and sell and we might go, we'd go for a week deal like that but uh if it wasn't a carrying things in like that or [exhale] or we might go three or four weeks and and, and never go to town. You know?

BEISEL: Mmmm.

WHEELER: My dad uh... when he got uh... a pickup in 1940 it was uh '39 model GMC pickup [chuckle] and they would put three thousand miles a year... on it. You know. . .

BEISEL: . . . just.

WHEELER: And he would put most of that on there, uh going picking up... uh people to work, cotton pickers, to pick the cotton and then uh and hauling it off the calves, and that sorta stuff or take them to Nacogdoches or Carthage you know? And that's where most of the mileage was put on there, then rest of the time it would sit there in the garage and doing nothing you know. And we didn't jump in the vehicle to run over here to the store or to uh run somebody we walked over there and you walked back and uh that was uh that was your mode of transportation. And uh the uh... things now it uh if its two blocks down there you don't walk you ride down there and get what you need and come back.

BEISEL: Right, right.

WHEELER: But that's just the difference in times [clears throat].

BEISEL: Which school did you attend?

WHEELER: I went to school at Cooper when I first started uh... the uh school that's a little of a mile up over here. Uh...I went to Cooper uh through the seventh grade and uh...that wasn't teaching past seventh grade there anymore and I started

school then catching on a school bus into Timpson and I graduated from school in Timpson, high school.

BEISEL: Which year did you graduate high school?

WHEELER: 1950.

BEISEL: Okay.

WHEELER: And our class still has a class reunion. We just had the sixty-fifth class reunion uh... last month.

BEISEL: Really?

WHEELER: And, and we have one over at Garrison where is we where we meet now in the old Garrison hotel over there. We uh that's where we have our class reunion. Unfortunately, this year I wasn't able to get around well enough to to go and this...one of the years is the only two years I've ever missed from from the time.

BEISEL: In sixty-five years of them!

WHEELER: Yeah, well we just didn't have one when we first started having a class reunion we didn't have one, I believe for the first ten years. And then after that then we started having them each five years. And then uh . . . they said it was uh so much fun for all of us to get together that we would have uh a class reunion each year. And so that that's what we've done for the past, oh I don't know, from uh I don't know... how many years uh uh now that its been every year but uh we uh... have have enjoyed uh uh reunion like that. And there's twenty-four of our graduating class still living and they were fifteen of those that are still living that was at the uh class reunion. So that I think is remarkable . . .

BEISEL: That's...

WHEELER: ...to have uh our our class was very close. It was just like uh all wasn't like uh uh uh strangers or just friends, the class was very very close. And I don't guess there is all... very many classes that would be doing like like we do now, you know? It really hurt me so bad that I wasn't able to make it uh this, this past one, but uh. [exhale] And one other time they had uh uh class reunion

that I was sick that I wasn't able to make it but other than that I've made each one of them.

BEISEL: Mhmm

WHEELER: And I really, really had an enjoyable time [exhale] getting to see people because living in Houston and all the people are a bit, lot of people living up in this part of the country I don't ever get see, except during the class reunions. And uh its its been a pleasurable thing for me and uh we uh... uh and and. They already got one scheduled for next year you know? And they uh have uh an arrangement with uh the uh the people that own the Garrison hotel. And we go there and there's uh they have uh volunteers that come in and prepare the meal, of course we always, always tip them pretty heavy, you know. And uh, but its very nice of them coming in, and uh and uh preparing they may have steaks or chicken and dumplings or, or different kinds of food, but uh we always enjoy that very much.

BEISEL: What, what kind of farming did your father do? Cotton, crops?

WHEELER: They had cotton and corn and then, of course, we had raised, raised our vegetables gardens. We raised uh uh we would have uh, anywhere from two to four or five different, uh gardens where we raised vegetables and stuff. We would raise uh peas and beans and, and squash and turnip greens and just, just whatever uh potatoes, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes and all, all kinds of vegetables, we had. And my mother uh had multitudes of vegetables uh all the time, you know and uh . . . and well she had raised her raised her chickens and we'd have uh dad would raise either two or three hogs each year and uh then we'd have uh uh... He would uh have one or two calves that he would have butchered and uh for our meat and so we had multitudes of meat and uh vegetables and enjoyable things like that. You know?

BEISEL: How much cotton did he plant? Did he...

WHEELER: Oh, we wouldn't have uh big lot of acreage, we would have the fifteen or twenty acres of cotton, and uh anywhere from six to eight or ten acres of corn, and [clock chime] and that sort of thing. And uh, that was uh basically we uh wasn't able to get a tractor until after World War II. Uh we we had had done it

with horses all our farming with horses. In fact that field right up there behind that uh the Crawford House [exhale] uh, was where I plowed my first, and and I was so small that dad had to lower the handles on the plow, for me to be able to uh uh to to plow. And uh I I um... then I went there to right on I started, of course from the time I was uh ohh six or seven years old, I was helping hoe in the fields and things like that, you know? And I, it wasn't something that you just go to the field for... two or three hours and then go back home. I went to work when dad went to work in the morning and I came home for lunch or dinner, we had breakfast, dinner, and supper on the farm here. We didn't have breakfast and lunch and all that stuff we had breakfast, dinner and supper. [chuckle] And we'd come in for dinner and uh, uh then we'd go back that afternoon and work until, oh relatively close to dark about, ... uh 5:30-6:00 o'clock and then we would go home have to take care of the animals. Feed the, feed the horses, hogs and uh all take care of all animals and while mom was fixin', fixin' supper for us. And uh and we would go home and . . . [30:24] [Sneeze] ...after we had supper we didn't have any fans or any air conditioner or anything and we would sit out on the porch because normally there would be a little breeze. And we could sit out there and and cool off a little bit, yeah know? And uh that was, that was our life back in those days. And uh ... I uh... I feel like that that was a great contributor, uh to my being able to uh... [clears throat] have the kind of life I've had.

I uh ... I after I came out of the air force, well I went to work at a airport out west of Houston. And I worked out there maintaining airplanes out there and I learned to fly out there. I and uh got my ratings, got my private, pilot, and commercial, and instrument rating and so forth. And uh then uh the man that had that little airport was having financial problems and uh I went to work then for a company, a pipeline company, and because I had done some flying for them taking some, hauling their people to one place or the other for service jobs. And uh they uh wanted me to start to work for them full time and so I did and I worked for them for uh thirty . . . thirty something years. And uh I was uh . . . I started out working I running a shop running a shop for 'em

it was an engine shop and things. I ran a shop for a while and uh they were going to move the operation from Houston to Tulsa, we had acquired a company in Tulsa, and they was going to do the manufacturing up there so uh they put me in there in the aviation department full time we had quite well they had several airplanes and I went in the uh aviation department full time. And uh uh... stayed there then the company got . . . much larger got uh . . . we got in drilling business and oil field business and uh we had uh uh [clears throat] well one of my jobs was uh customer entertainment. And I uh had a DC-3, and I flew the uh customers to uh... Mexico... hunting and fishing that that sort of thing. That was primarily uh my my business back in those days. And then later [exhale] we uh... got uh got a jet, and uh got a Sabreliner, and I checked out in and that. And uh we, had in the meantime had got uh uh another gentleman for our chief pilot operation. The chief pilot we had so much he was try'n to do work'n in the company, and being a chief pilot, and it was just more than he could handle and we got got this uh... uh... and uh new chief piolet and uh and he taught me they how to fly the Sabreliner and everything and I got rated in it and uh we we did uh awful lot of fly'n' back in those days. And unfortunately January the 16, 1979, I had uh . . . aircraft failure. I was uh making a landing over at a airport west of Houston, and uh it was another airplane pull out on the runway, and I attempted to make a go around and they uh, one of the engines failed. Uh the... left engine failed and the aircraft went straight over and straight in, unfortunately my co-pilot was killed, and uh I spent like in two days, two months in Herman Hospital. Uh them trying to patch me up and get me to where I can get around. And uh they did uh a good job and got me all back together, but uh it is is it uh... has been a problem from time-to-time like when well like right now that's one of the reasons I can hardly walk right now.

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: Cause uh I was beat up so bad and uh . . .

BEISEL: Now what company were you flying for? Was it the same one?

WHEELER: No I was flying for, yes, I was flying for the company started out as Crutcher, Rolfs, and Cummings it was uh it was a pipeline equipment company we had all the equipment it required to lay a pipeline. [Clears throat] We manufactured different equipment and so forth and later they branched out oh and uh got uh in the drilling business and we had uh the the name would keep changing it was CRC and then it was CRC Corp and uh uh . . . then they changed it to Crutcher Resources uh and uh that was uh primary name company when at the time when I uh had my accident.

BEISEL: Right, and so did you live in Houston?

WHEELER: Yes ma'am.

BEISEL: Almost all this time?

WHEELER: Yes ma'am.

BEISEL: Oh, okay.

WHEELER: I moved in the house that uh I'm livin in the day before my son was one year old. Fifty years ago the uh... past 30th of August. And uh I've, I've lived in the same house. I got too poor to leave, I got too poor to leave and ain't going anywhere else. [chuckles]

BEISEL: Well now when you graduated from high school is that when you went into the air force or did you take some time off?

WHEELER: I was I, I went into the Air Force in '52. I, I worked for uh the John Deere dealer here in Center after I came out of high school, until the time I went into the air force. They, uh I was fix'n to be drafted and I didn't want to go into the army and I went into the air force for four years. And uh uh got ah nice education there and in aircraft maintenance and so forth. I was a mechanic for the time I was, after I got out of school and uh Air Force. I was uh uh there until I got discharged in '56 December of '56 and uh then that was when I started work at uh this little airport out west of uh Houston there and uh uh was got my rating and so forth.

BEISEL: So you're in Arcadia. Could you tell me a bit about some of the buildings obviously you've mentioned the store that's not here anymore, some of the other buildings you remember from when you were a child that don't?

WHEELER: Mhmm they was right there on on the corner of of of the road there. There was uh Jim Crawford had his automobile garage there. And at one time it was uh they had another little building on the side and that was uh uh a barber shop at one time and the gentleman that run a barber shop became a doctor. Well he first became ah... Dr. Carr became uh... a dentist and then he made a doctor. He had uh had been a barber, ah dentist, and uh doctor. [39:41]

BEISEL: [Chuckle] Did he go to school for any of them?

WHEELER: All of them!

BEISEL: ALL OF THEM!

WHEELER: And he uh said that the only money that he ever really made was during the time when uh the doctor could write you a prescription and you could buy you a pot of whiskey. And he was over, he lived over in Nacogdoches for a while and uh worked for one of the drug stores there, write prescriptions. And uh but he but there's not a house in this country that he hasn't helped people through illness and delivered kids and and uh helped people get patched up after accidents and that sort of thing. He he worked uh right here in and lived right down the road toward Aiken... just uh ohh it's the uh house that uh uh that Van ... ended up buying, the house down there. And uh uh his that was that was where he lived and my dad they had an old country telephone over here in the Wheeler House. And Dad, he would get a call that someone needed a doctor. And Dad would go out and uh put saddles on a couple of horses and go down and get Dr. Carr, and they would go to wherever in the community that uh that they needed to go and uh to doctor somebody or to deliver a baby or or uh whatever you know? And uh dad said he lost a lot of sleep like that. It might be cold and rainy and, and bad, bad weather and he would have to go and get those horses and get 'em, put the saddles on them and um take Dr. Carr one because Dr. Carr didn't have a riding horse and uh dad would have to go down and get him and take him to wherever.

BEISEL: So your father would go with him on a calls? Your father would go with him to where he had to go?

WHEELER: Correct yes everyone knew that they could call here to the Wheeler House. At that time they had two lines over in the Wheeler House. We had uh a Center line that went towards Center and was and then a line that went to Timpson and uh the two lines weren't connected. They uh had to have two telephone boxes, the old crank telephones, and they had two of those and as I said one of those was the Center line and the other was Timpson line. And uh people uh around the person that was uh that needed to get a doctor, might have to walk to somebody's house near there, that had an old telephone that they could call up here, you know? And they would uh call and uh and he would uh go get Dr.Carr and they would take him to uh wherever they needed to go, you know. And uh uh the old man was a he was, was a brilliant, brilliant person evidently. Dad said that often times that they would uh if it was someone sick in a neighborhood people around would go sit up with him and help doctor them and give them their medicine and help do whatever they needed to do through the night. And maybe somebody goes and sits until midnight somebody else would go uh relieve them at midnight and then they would go home. And Dad said many times at two o'clock in the morning that he had walked past uh Dr.Carr's place down there and he would be sitting up reading reading medical books and uh he was uh quite, quite an interesting person. And uh uh but he he didn't live the 8-5 job it was uh twenty-four hours a day you know he was quite uh well he he he was a wonderful person doing what all he did. [44:50]

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: Uh uh every everyone they would really appreciated what he had done you know. And he would a lot of often times he would uh the the persons wouldn't have any money to uh give him they might give him some chickens, or uh give him something, some vegetables, or whatever they had to offer they would give him. Uh uh they would pay him that way you know? And uh it was uh people just lived by what they had. They didn't have any money, so uh if somebody needed uh uh if somebody needed something, needed some vegetables or something they would be somebody that would have uh... a

garden but with what they needed and they would say “Go out there and pick a mess of them turnips greens, or mess of peas, or beans or or whatever,” you know. And that was that’s just the closeness in this neighborhood.

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: Uh it was uh things that I can remember back in of course I didn’t know that much about what was going on then but, as I as I grew older, well I that’s what I uh had taken place you know.

BEISEL: Well now if Dr. Carr was one of the good ones were there any trouble-makers or wild moonshiners type in town?

WHEELER: Yeah they was sometimes that uh uh well they was uh young boys back in those days. And uh well it was the young men that went to World War II and they would be out there at the store and there might be uh six or eight of them out there and actually get a difference of opinion on things and lot of times what uh fisticuff for a little while and uh the men would go out there and get them all separated. And, but they was they might a big deal, but I remember I can remember uh. . . uh . . . being around out there and uh because I was always out around the store. That was my deal. I would go over to the store and uh [exhale]. I would uh see them out there and out there and they would be old barn out there and uh out there in that lot, was where a lot of them would go fight. And uh . . . they was some, but not a great deal not uh everyday thing or uh every week thing it was occasional. You know? Just like they they uh only uh young boys around here young boys around here at that time, a big lot of them my mom had taught. In school, she was a school teacher.

BEISEL: At Cooper?

WHEELER: Uh huh.

BEISEL: Okay.

WHEELER: She had taught at Cooper. And uh, well she taught her first school in Kemah, Texas. She came out of college and taught her first school in Kemah, Texas. And then uh then she came back up here and then she taught at uh little school up up that Huber road up there. With Myrtle Springs and she taught

uh... I don't know if she taught one or two years but the the uh... uh people with the the uh school here [clears throat]. Wanted her to come down here and work cause she had done such a good job with the students there that they wanted her down here. And so she came down here and taught. I don't know how many years she taught over at Cooper but uh... after I was born well Dad didn't want her to teach anymore, you know? He wanted her to be at home. And uh . . . uh... that was uh, she she loved to teach and loved to... well she just loved school. Loved to go to school and loved to teach school and uh that was. That was and she couldn't understand why I didn't like school.

BEISEL: Now where had she gone to college?

WHEELER: At Nacogdoches.

BEISEL: Oh at the State teachers college. Okay.

WHEELER: Yeah because back then uh. [exhale] Well her and dad got married in 1926 so this was back in the early '20s. Whenever she, she didn't finish college over there. She had gone up to teacher's certificate and so forth. I don't know how many years, two years maybe. And uh that was uh all the college that she was able to get uh go uh out and go to work to try and pay the few dollars that she had borrowed to go to school over there. She had to try to work and pay that back you know? And uh uh she wasn't able to go back to school to finish but uh that was uh, that was uh. I don't know exactly what year she started there, I just know that she evidently she had taught . . . maybe four or five years when when her and dad got married in 1926. So uh uh my mom was born in 1904.

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: And uh and uh she uh went right on to college at a very young age and uh and came out. And uh taught for that amount of time, you know?

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: And uh, she uh, she, she really, she really enjoyed it, enjoyed it and some of those guys that uh was young boys back then in this age, she had taught at one time uh uh big lot of them and over over to Cooper school over there and she had a lot of them during WWII that would write her letters. [Clears throat]

When they was overseas, they would write letters, to her. And uh and she would immediately sit down and and write them a letter back you know?

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: And uh and really was uh. . . uh interest to her, you know?

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: Uh. In fact in my high school, I went to school with uh a girl that her uh brother, Mom taught her brother. And and uh at Cooper over here and uh she she didn't know that, we were talking with one time and I said well uh uh my mother taught your brother in school. And she said well my goodness I didn't know that you know?

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: I said oh yeah he he used to write her letters when when he was overseas. And uh and she would uh she would answer those letters.

BEISEL: Well now tell me a little bit about, we know that you brought in some information about early land grants here. Can you explain a little bit about that?

WHEELER: Yeah, Yeah. I I can tell you some of them. [Exhale and clears throat] Ransom Wheeler was uh uh, he came here from uh migrated here from Tennessee. He came by wagon train and had uh uh oxen pulled uh the wagon. He came here in 1839. And this property right here, was property that uh that he uh uh got a land grant on. There was 460 acres land grant on the west a here on West Creek and so forth. And he, ran some uh [clears throat] a lot more Wheelers around I guess uh. [chuckle] His first wife died having her fifteenth child.
[54:32]

BEISEL: Oh my! [Heavy sigh]

WHEELER: She was forty years old.

BEISEL: Mhmm.

WHEELER: And uh then uh Martin Wheeler was his uh younger brother. Martin Wheeler and Anderson Wheeler in 1860 drowned crossing Attoyac that had flooded and uh he uh they drowned crossing the Attoyac.

BEISEL: Two brothers?!

WHEELER: Yes two brothers, Anderson Wheeler and Martin Wheeler. And uh Martin Wheeler uh had two sons Henderson Wheeler and Henry Wheeler and Henderson Wheeler was uh my grandfather he, he was uh uh he had bought uh land here in uh 1887, and I don't know what year he and my grandmother got married. I don't know that. But I know my dad was born in 1900 so they had been married, I have no idea how long. And uh he uh Martin Wheeler he uh uh uh . . . as I said had uh those two sons and uh. Henderson Wheeler was the older of the two sons and he had uh . . . my dad in 1900 and my aunt in three years later. And they uh were uh [background noise] uh uh he passed away uh in uh 1903 and and then uh well we've talked about this before. [exhale] But uh uh uh then uh . . . when uh Ransom Wheeler passed away, he passed his land on to uh his older son. Uh and uh his his oldest son lived uh on the place and raised his family and uh then uh uh . . . [clock] Blount Wheeler, that was his older son, Blount Wheeler then passed the land on to his uh to his older son, uh uh Ezra Wheeler with the uh agreement that uh Ezra would give uh Uncle Henry Wheeler uh uh the Martin's younger son a home for the rest of his life. Henry Wheeler never uh married and never had a family.

BEISEL: Hmm?

WHEELER: And uh uh they uh uh . . . they wanted to wanted Henry to uh to to have a home there for the rest of his life. And uh that was uh. [exhale] Also uh the Ransom Wheeler married uh Martin Wheeler's widow uh after, after uh uh Martin Wheeler had uh been, had drowned two years prior to that [clock chime]. Well they, [clock chimes more] he buried Martin Wheeler and had four more children [laughter].

BEISEL: Oh my. [chuckle]

WHEELER: He had a total of nineteen children. [laughter]

BEISEL: My goodness. Now is Ransom Wheeler the one that named it Arcadia? Or was it already named Arcadia when he got here?

WHEELER: No it was Toomey, Texas. T-O-O-M-E-Y, Texas and uh then uh uh later on and I think it was uh after my grandmother ran a post office uh and the store and the post office and I'm not sure of this, but I think that uh that was when

the name was changed from Tommey to Arcadia. And it's it's in the book listed as uh Arcadia, but uh I think that, uh I know that it was Toomey prior to being Arcadia but I don't know the date that it was uh changed to uh Acadia from Toomey, Texas.

BEISEL: Now where did Ransom come from in Tennessee? Do you know where he was?

WHEELER: Yeah uh uh he he came from uh between uh uh . . . wish I had let me see that little uh. [pages turning]

BEISEL: That's okay if it's in there we'll, we'll get it.

WHEELER: Oh, okay well it's.

BEISEL: Yeah.

WHEELER: It it's uh over close to uh where the national park is there in in . . .

BEISEL: Oh in West Tennessee? Shiloh area, Memphis, or East Tennessee? East, West Tennessee?

WHEELER: It would have been over towards East Tennessee

BEISEL: East Tennessee.

WHEELER: Mhmm, yeah

BEISEL: Chattanooga area that's uh okay.

WHEELER: [Mumbles] Ransom there, I don't see it, it's in there, right here, but I don't see it.

BEISEL: So he came overland the whole way from Tennessee?

WHEELER: Correct, correct. They came in a wagon train and pull boxes and

BEISEL: And and did he come through Natchitoches over or come up north through the Red River and come south?

WHEELER: I, they came in from from I think uh uh I think they came in from like uh his father had migrated into uh Arkansas. But uh uh uh it it says in here that uh Ransom never lived in Arkansas, he came directly from Tennessee into uh uh right here into Texas and uh uh got a land grant . . . got that land grant. And then two years later, two years later well uh William Wheeler, uh his father, moved to Texas and he got a land grant up by uh [exhale] well, uh umm, I can't tell yah exactly where but it was uh up close to where uh Ruben Smith

used to live up uh up this way a ways. The land grant was fairly close to that area up there but I can't tell you exactly where. Ruben was going to show me exactly where the land grant was, and, but I kept putting it off and putting it off and unfortunately Ruben passed away and I was never able to and there was also a cemetery there where uh uh they was uh I believe it uh said that uh there was uh twenty graves in that cemetery, but it was I guess but it was mostly the Wheelers uh. I know Martin Wheeler and Anderson Wheeler were buried there and uh I don't know.

BEISEL: Do we know where that cemetery is today?

WHEELER: It's, it's uh grown up in pine timber, a lumber company bought that land, ended up buying that land. And uh uh it was uh uh grown up in in pine timber. They couldn't find uh Mr. Doc. Smith uh carried uh uh uh lady over there that wrote this uh thesis out there. Carried her over there and they knew where the home place was, and said there was still crepe myrtles and stuff there and uh, oh they said over behind the house on a hill over there was where this cemetery was, but they could not locate it. And uh it it as I said it's grown up in in uh timber now.

BEISEL: Right. Right.

WHEELER: uh I I really. I'm sorry that I didn't go with Ruben and didn't go over there and and see that particular location you know?

BEISEL: Right. Right.

WHEELER: But you know, I didn't do that.

BEISEL: Well as we finish up here, is there anything that you think somebody who's not familiar with Arcadia should know about Arcadia? Why does it make...why is this place important?

WHEELER: Well course naturally it was important to me because it was, uh uh there was so many of the Wheelers this was kind of like a Wheeler settlement. I uh uh quite a few of the the uh areas around here. Well well of course the uh Ransom Wheeler place here and then Martin Wheeler had uh a land grant for uh property up uh where the up uh little bit north of here where uh the Crawford place was and uh had uh well then of course William Wheeler's

land grant and uh uh it was they was so many of the Wheelers around and uh and and around this area and it was always important to me because of that, you know?

BEISEL: Right.

WHEELER: And of course my grandmother running this store for as many years as she did. And uh all all the neighbors around, everybody was so so friendly and and uh and nice and it was just a pleasurable place. And uh that that was I guess why it was so close to me and uh I uh, even though I lived in Houston for so many years, in my house for fifty years, but still when I go home I come over here, this is home over here. And uh that's uh that's uh basically what I can say about that.

BEISEL: That's a very good reason.

WHEELER: [Chuckle]

BEISEL: Well I really appreciate you taking the time out to talk to us about this.

WHEELER: Well, and and thank y'all its been a pleasure for me to be able to to do this and I never had thought of anything about it until I heard that uh Greg was uh gathering up this. And uh I didn't know about the uh uh getting to talk and that sort of stuff until this morning and he asked me about if I'd be interested and I said, "Oh no, I don't think I'd be interested," but uh my daughter-in-law and uh... granddaughter and son, decided that I ought to do a thing like this so here I sat.

BEISEL: Well good, I'm glad you listened to them. Well thank you very much we really appreciate it.

WHEELER: [Chuckle] Well and, and thank you all. Thank you for taking the time.

BEISEL: You're welcome. [1:07:18]