

Karen Nace Interview Transcription

March 19th, 2021

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

I am here at the Old Jail Museum in Granbury. I'm with Miss Karen Nace, who is the curator of this museum and a local historian. Today is March 19th. The year is 2021 and this is Sylviane Greensword for the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. Okay, Karen Nace, thank you so much for joining us and for helping us with your knowledge, your wisdom, and the experience that you have with this museum. All the research that you have done with the Hood County Genealogical society and all the history research that you have been doing over the years. We know that good research is grounded on fact, and just the fact that you have gathered all of this information is really helping us make a credible approach to the Race and Reconciliation Initiative. So, let's start by talking about your role. I know that you're kind of informal museum curator in your account, informal local historian, can you tell us how you came to perform these activities?

KAREN NACE:

I've had a lot of history pretty much all my life, grew up in Pennsylvania. There was a lot more history, in fact my first encounter here was where are your other 200 years? So, it seemed natural to get involved and dig into the history. There are a lot of really fun stories. Everybody has the same amount of history, but what did they do with it and the people here were proud of their heritage and wanted to share it. So, I just ended up getting involved in, I'm pretty much one of the last researchers left, most of the rest of 'em passed away. The new people coming in don't seem to be quite as interested.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Could you name some of those past historians?

KAREN NACE:

Mary Kate Durham is the first one that comes to mind. She and her husband R.E. Durham were very active. People like Mahota Hensley, Randall Rash, and I actually worked for his son, who became a county judge here. So, I had some ties with that. The Nut family in its entirety. Melinda Ray is a local, she was a librarian, and now she's doing a lot of history. There are people popping up all over. Some of the new people are just repeating old stories and, in some cases, we know that they're not accurate. So, it's kind of disappointing because we're trying, when I say we, Jim and Mary Sutton, Jewel Thompson grew up here and has become active with us. We're trying to uncover factual history to the best of our ability. We don't think that we need to glorify anything, but we don't need to hide anything.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Now this community here in the Granbury area, how knowledgeable are they about Thorp Spring and the history of Thorp Spring?

KAREN NACE:

Again, it would depend on who you talk to. When I came in the late 80s, the whole county or we had a population about 28,000 people. We now have a population of probably over 65,000. Those new people don't have roots here. Some of them may have, that might've been what brought them here. But the Thorp Spring area, I mean as you've seen in your study, AddRan itself ceased to exist here before the turn of century, and the college became something else. And then there were runs at making it other things that never worked out. The actually being a college campus, Thorp Spring Christian, closed in the, what 1920s? And after that it was just kind of a summer camp place where they did Christian education, but it wasn't prominent. So, when I talked to local people here, they have parents and grandparents that may have come and gone to the university, and that's part of what brought them here. But most of the newcomers, they're not even aware of it. Because so much of it is gone.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

How much did Thorp Spring contribute to the economy or the culture of Granbury area and Hood County at large?

KAREN NACE:

Obviously, they would have paid out of the lore of tax to the county and help support the county endeavors. It doesn't seem like Thorp Spring and Granbury had what you would call a close working relationship. They were two separate communities, each doing their own thing, and the people that live there dove into that community. Now some of the people from Thorp Spring did move over here to Granbury and took up a livelihood here. The amount of stores and things that were over there, I can't even speak to most of them because we don't know all of them. During the census it might say store owner, merchant or whatever, once in a while we'll see it. The local papers were in Granbury. They carried the school advertisements to let people know classes were going on, but as far as advertising their businesses, not so much. It appears they may have had their own doctors that traveled in that area, predominantly that might have crossed over some of ours crossed the other direction, but I think it was a harder time to travel. We don't think about travel like you would in the 1800s. We talked about that driving over in our car today took us less than 10 minutes.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

KAREN NACE:

But by horse would have been every bit of half an hour, I think, to get from where we started at the train depot to get into Thorp Spring. And then you have the outlying farm areas that would have taken even further. So, I don't know. It's one of those unknown factors, whether we'll ever be able to figure it out.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And for the record what is the status of Thorp Spring today? Is it a city? Is it a town?

KAREN NACE:

It's a community under the Granbury postal system. It is considered an area of Hood County, so the county actually oversees all of it. Granbury hasn't spread over and encompassed any of Thorp Spring. I think right about where the river, where we cross the river was where Granbury ends. So, it still has its own community, but they're not incorporated. I don't think they ever were incorporated. I've never seen any history of that. So, it's just a little community area and I could name 30 others that have disappeared in Hood County.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Can you discuss a little bit the influence of the AddRan College in, you know, making this area, just put on the map so to speak?

KAREN NACE:

Well, when you look at the history, they talk about having 400 and some students and how many are out of county, some were even out of state that they were coming by train. Unfortunately, to Granbury, Thorp Spring didn't get the train, so they would come this far and then go on over from there, or they'd come by wagon or buggy. Some came by horse. In fact, some of the early records, it seems like they were allowed to board their horses for free. It kind of indicated that somebody had put up some sort of a stall area or something, kind of like our wagon yard would have been here. But it reads like there was no charge for that if you were going to the school. So, it was well known, and I can't remember now, I saw an advertisement in a in an out of state newspaper for AddRan College. So, somebody was spending some money to let people know. But we also had the Granbury Methodist College, and both of them were well attended and well received.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And at time was Thorp Spring a town?

KAREN NACE:

Yes. It made a run more than once at becoming the county seat. It wanted to overrun Granbury.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

So why do you think it didn't work out?

KAREN NACE:

Typical politics. Why does not work out today? I mean, you have one faction wants one thing and one wants another. After AddRan left, there was a faction to make an orphanage out of that whole area, that fell through. There was another case where one of the state's, I wanna say it was a senator- it could be either house or Senate, from another county recognized that that whole

campus was there and wanted the next university that was being proposed by the state of Texas, to be located there. Turns out, in doing the research, it was University of Texas. It's in Austin and I'm pretty sure the powers would be weren't gonna let that happen, but the fact it was even proposed.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

KAREN NACE:

Somebody was far enough thinking far enough ahead to say it's all right here; we don't even have to grow anything. But it didn't happen. So, there's a lot of stories around here about things that were proposed that didn't happen or happened and then ceased to happen.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah. Let's switch to the topic of the Black community in the area, because that's actually what we're investigating. We're trying to look at their contribution to the community and what happened to them after AddRan left. What can you tell us about how Black people, first of all, how did they even end up here? We know that it was mostly Indian territory. So how did Black people end up arriving in here?

KAREN NACE:

From the earliest history, and this is all word of mouth or written from oral stories, so I take it with a grain of salt. We had, when this was Johnson County in the 1850s, we had people moving in and at that point they were bringing slaves with them. Now there is a story, the 40 families, that basically made up the colony. That is said that they were freed slaves and free Black men.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

And that was in the 1850s?

KAREN NACE:

I'm not exactly sure. That was after emancipation when all of the colonies formed.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Oh, so that was after the 60s.

KAREN NACE:

Mhm. So, it would have been in the 60s. But to say that they were free Black men here to begin with, I'm not certain what would have brought them here, other than to be away from all the politics that were going on. So that's what formed the colony, as far as the people that came into town here, they carry a lot of the same names as our founding fathers did.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Which are?

KAREN NACE:

Well, you have in Thorp Spring, you have the Thorps, but over here you had the Hightower's, you have- now that you asked me that I'm not gonna be able to come up with them. There on my computer (laughs). Oh, shoot. Yeah, I really can't come up off top my head with a lot of them. I know when I see them, and most of them end up inter-marrying with the Hightower's, and that's where it started to come from. As far as Thorp Spring, you're talking to me about the Blacks over there was the first it ever even occurred to me. And we discussed not knowing where Shanell Hightower's property was 'cause it kind of makes me wonder. Well, Dan Condell had a Black maid in his house and apparently had- and there's no record that I'm aware of, that he had slaves, but he did hire a lot of the Blacks that lived around here. In fact, that's how I think the colony supported themselves. They're out on real hardscrabble land, but they maintained additional jobs with the local farmers and ranchers. During the Depression is when that village failed, and it failed because they didn't have the secondary income and they couldn't make a go of it where they were. So, they either moved into town here, somewhere up to Fort Worth, and a number of went out to California, followed the harvest out there. So, it's a short-lived history, but it still is our history and it. And I don't find anybody running them off or any of the stories that you hear from other places, so.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Any indication of Blacks in Thorp Spring in the AddRan college?

KAREN NACE:

Actually, going to school?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Not necessarily going to school, just being physically present.

KAREN NACE:

The Charlie Thorpe that is written about, that he worked at AddRan, that was the only one and his wife, Kate. And then I have looked for some of the children, and we have a difference of opinion as far as, you know, some of the local people said there were these like Colonel Thorp and a couple of the others were his children. But that didn't show up in your records. And I don't know how that'll ever shake out, but I think it was a very small number as far. And in the whole history I think I found about 70 total Blacks that I could account for in the earliest censuses. I don't know that much exceeded 100 or so in the area, but then you know, it's 100 out of say 2500 in the whole county population. That's what it was. I'm not sure what would have drawn them here if they had caught the story with Y. Gene Riley. There are two stories about how his Rock house got built. One is 18 Black slaves that he brought built it. And then there's a story that they also helped build some of the rock buildings on the square, and another one was no, it was a bunch of traveling Italians or something. And so, I don't know how you ever prove that.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

KAREN NACE:

You know, it's just this is the story, this is the story, and we have both. Where the facts lie, I'm not sure.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Yeah. And that's the next topic that I wanted to talk to you about is how can we rely on history? Like, how can we get data that we can use and then 100 years from now, we can actually have a legacy of knowledge to transmit to the next generations.

KAREN NACE:

Well, we've uncovered a number of mistakes here that were passed down through oral history, some of them with the use of newspaper articles and comparing that to what was said. Sometimes if we have a huge number of like actual county records that were handwritten at the time, and I rely on that, I mean, if the county clerk wrote something in 1872 in a document, just like a deed, then I have to believe that what he wrote at that time was factual as it could be. The fact that somebody in 1970 or 1980 said what they believe, but that doesn't match the document, I give more weight to the written document. Now the newspaper articles, that's a crapshoot. And today you can pick up and read an article about something that you saw happen and you're not sure you actually there the same. So, it's people's viewpoints are very different. We rely mostly on the written county records when it comes to court records, documents that kind of stuff. We take what the families have passed down. We take all the stories we have and we try, and sort out to the best of our ability what makes the most sense. We're probably not always right, but we do the best we can with what we have.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

That's interesting (laughs). The chair of the Race & Reconciliation Initiative always ends his speeches with that very quote.

KAREN NACE:

Seriously? Alright (laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Word for word (laughs). So, I have one last question. What advice do you have for anybody trying to conduct historical research looking at those primary sources? What advice do you have for them to be able to discern what's factual from what is just historical gossip?

KAREN NACE:

My one comment is be very careful what you consider a primary source, because when I first got into this, I was told that all published books were considered primary source. Well, our first

primary history book in 1895, written by Yule, was mostly oral history that he got from people that he wrote down. In many cases, we've been able to prove it wasn't accurate or entirely true. But let's face it, what was his target audience?

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Do you have any examples of things that you found out to be nonfactual?

KAREN NACE:

Absolutely. One of the first ones we ran across was that Peter Garland was the first county treasurer and that is stated in his book, and he's from Thorpe Spring. And it's like, wow, we have the first election result and in it, Peter Garland ran as County Commissioner and lost. The first county treasurer was DK Turner, who eventually was shot and killed. Had a bit of a temper, I believe, but I can't prove that. But anyway, now, Peter Garland, I believe, was a county treasurer by about 1872. But that's six years later. That's three more elections. He was not the first. Now his family to this day will stipulate in everything they write, after his name, first County Treasurer. I don't, you know, you have to get rid of the word first. How do you fix that? And we can't go back and unwrite the things they wrote. So, all we can do is go forward. Same thing when I came here, I was told that Cody Mitchell, Nelson Mitchell was hanging from a tree I bought into it because everybody here said it and believed it. And then we find the county records where they paid the sheriff to erect the gallows. And the current newspaper articles, you know that you're finding, and they're in socks about the gallows. But however, the story came to be, it got passed down as a tree. So those are those are two that just kind of scream, "sorry folks, you didn't get it right." You know, and I'm sure 20-50 years from now, people will come through here and say we didn't get things right either, but we're doing the best we can based on what we have.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

KAREN NACE:

And we try to cite everything, we tell you where it came from, we're not hiding that. But I told you about the news article on the hanging of Nelson Mitchell that was printed in the Boston paper. They got it off the AP press from Galveston, you know, and the author sitting there. And he said the man was found guilty of murder in Hood County and hanged in Galveston. And I thought that is forever in Boston News and anybody that only has that article, clearly does not have the right information.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Right.

KAREN NACE:

But I doubt that the newsman in 1875 knew where Galveston or Hood County were unfortunately. And it's forever in print that way. So, all I can say is my advice is, just be very careful.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Well, thank you Karen Nace for sharing your words of wisdom with us.

KAREN NACE:

Yeah, for what they're worth (laughs).

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

(Laughs) And for touring.

KAREN NACE:

Well, thanks for your interest. I mean, you know, this has been, we have these pieces of history that we've never really put it all together well. And you know, we'll get you to come down here and help us with the timeline of all this stuff too.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely.

KAREN NACE:

That would help a lot.

DR. SYLVIANE GREENSWORD:

Absolutely. You got it.

KAREN NACE:

Okay.

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