

ORAL MEMOIR EXCERPTS
OF
MARY KEMENDO SENDÓN

A Series of Interviews Conducted
4 January - 6 April 1994

Volumes 1 & 2
Interviews 1 – 12

Interviewer:
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Waco – McLennan County Project

Institute for Oral History
Baylor University

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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR ORAL HISTORY

GENERAL POLICY AND PURPOSES

A member of the Oral History Association, Baylor's Institute for Oral History (BUIOH) supports and embodies the goals, guidelines, and standards of archival quality prescribed by the national professional association to ensure long-term preservation of memoirs. It is the policy of BUIOH to select memoirists who have been participants and/or eyewitnesses to topics selected for oral history research. Their tape-recorded memoirs provide links between the immediate past and the present in a very human way. A scholarly, but relaxed, conversational atmosphere exists during the interview. To encourage completely candid recollections, the memoirist is asked to regard the oral history memoir as a highly personal journal. The transcribed historical document which the finished memoir becomes is the raw material used by historians and professional scholars.

The memoirist may choose to have the memoir:

1. Accessible to the community at large
2. Access limited to portions of memoir
3. Free for use after stipulated time span
4. Accessible at discretion of memoirist
5. Sealed until death of memoirist
6. Sealed until passage of stipulated time period after death of memoirist

MEMOIR PROCEDURE

Oral history at Baylor follows a prescribed plan which may be briefly outlined:

1. Initial contract with the memoirist
2. Arrangements made for interview(s)
3. Recording of interview(s)
4. Transcribing of tapes in the BUIOH office
5. Editing of transcript(s) by memoirist
6. Finished memoirs: one transcript for the memoirist, one transcript and tape(s) for The Texas Collection. The finished typewritten oral memoir follows the interviewee's stated wishes as reflected in his/her editing of the first transcript(s), with only minor further editorial modifications performed in the BUIOH office in preparing the completed memoir.

LEGAL STATUS

Scholarly use of the tapes and transcripts of the interviews with Mary Kemendo Sendón is unrestricted.

Mary Kemendo Sendón retains joint copyright with Baylor University.

The interview agreement was signed on 4 January 1994.

INTERVIEW HISTORIES

Mary Kemendo Sendón edited the entire manuscript for clarity and accuracy.

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Tapes and transcripts of these interviews were processed in the offices of the Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

steam, you know, and they had to pump it up. Oh, they don't appreciate what they have today—putting a fire out was a job. And in some parts around Waco they had a volunteer fire department, you know, and they just had a bucket brigade. My grandmother's house caught fire, about two doors down from our house. And the funny thing that happened in that fire—I told you all those boys had instruments. Well, my uncle, the one that ran away with the circus, had a trombone. It was an expensive trombone. He wouldn't let anyone touch that trombone. He'd just hide it away. The kids couldn't dare touch it. Well, the house caught fire. He found out the house was on fire and he came racing home—ran into the burning house to get his trombone. While he was in the house, the cat was there. He just—he lost his grip there, I guess. He was so anxious to get that trombone out of there, he picked up the cat, opened the dresser drawer and put it in the drawer and shut the drawer. And this is a true story. After the fire was over, the firemen went in to see how everything was going on. They opened all the drawers and the doors and everything to look and see if everything was out. Out jumped the cat, just as good as new! And the firemen said they couldn't understand how in the world that cat survived the heat. That's a cat story! (both laugh) But there were fires all the time. Oh, my goodness! A hardware store burned downtown, and that was—that fire lasted forever. And the Cotton Palace—the first Cotton Palace burned.

MYERS: When did that happen?

SENDÓN: See, that Cotton Palace was built in 1880-something. I don't know the exact date on that—the first Cotton Palace. They didn't have it very long. And all of a sudden, the whole thing burned, went up in smoke. And then they built the new Cotton Palace. Well, that one had a fire one day in one of the buildings, not all of them. And the zoo—they had a zoo on the territory there at that time. They turned all the animals loose. They turned them loose. One bear got caught up in a tree, and it took two days for the firemen to coax that bear out of that tree. The monkeys got loose, and we were all running to

watch the fire, and a monkey ran across my foot. I think everybody (laughs)—the monkeys were just running everywhere. They never did find all the monkeys.

MYERS: Yeah.

SENDÓN: But all of the animals got loose in that fire, but that's worth another tape—that Cotton Palace.

MYERS: Yes.

SENDÓN: Because there are just a lot of wonderful things happened. They still should have it. The Dallas fair kept its buildings. Waco should have kept its, but that was when we were little.

MYERS: You've kind of mentioned off and on the sideshows that came to town and the circus.

SENDÓN: Um-hm.

MYERS: When you think about going downtown for special occasions, what parades do you remember when you were a child?

SENDÓN: Well, of course, the circus—the circus parade was the big one. And then they always had a parade at Christmastime.

MYERS: Oh.

SENDÓN: They always had a parade on Labor Day, and that's where the labor unions, whatever they had, you know, came in. Labor Day was the big thing. And they had a Christmas parade, a Labor Day parade, a Fourth of July—that was a big one—and the Fourth of July parade, and—anything that, you know. When they won a football game, they would have a parade. (Myers laughs) They didn't have a [Baylor] homecoming parade until—oh, I guess it was a little after—oh, about 1906, I think, or something like that. But now, of course, that's our big parade now, the big homecoming parade. But they would have a parade at the drop of a hat. (Myers laughs) Societies—you know, they had a lot of fraternal organizations in Waco, like the Maccabees, and the Odd Fellows. Even they sometimes would put on things. And it was—and Armistice Day.

That's a day to remember. But they don't have parades like that anymore. You know, they lost their touch for it or something. I don't know.

MYERS: Okay.

SENDÓN: Oh, but those were days we looked forward to. We always had to go to the parades. The Cotton Palace parades were fabulous, though. Oh, they just really put on the dog out there.

MYERS: Yeah. They really did, and we'll want to talk about that some more.

SENDÓN: Um-hm.

MYERS: There were some other things going on. What about the Waco Public Library? Do you have any remembrance of that?

SENDÓN: We had one public library, and it was on Eleventh and Austin. There's an apartment house there now. It's right across from Reed's flower shop. And that was our public library, and I loved that building. It was not a big building, but it was—had a mellowed atmosphere there that you could just smell the books. And I would go after school and take my homework sometime and had something to look up, and I would spend a couple of hours in the public library studying because it was so quiet. And you just had little corners here with a table and a chair and a lamp. And you could just get off to yourself and just really do a lot of good work. And the first time I went to the public library, (laughs) I had a neighbor that had moved into one of my grandfather's houses. Their name was Blossom. They had a daughter named Cherry. And I thought that was the funniest thing: Cherry Blossom. Cherry Blossom took me to the library for the first time. I was in the fourth grade and she was going to get me a card. And I got it, you know. She helped me sign up for a card in the public library. Well, this librarian told me I could pick two books. Well, I had heard—I didn't know how to pick a book. I was just goggle-eyed at all these stacks of books. I didn't know which way to go. I decided—well, I had heard the teachers talk so much about Charles Dickens, and we read *A [Christmas] Carol* every Christmas, so I was going to find something by Charles

Dickens. What did I pick for the first book to read? *Little Dorrit*. That book was three inches thick, I know. (Myers laughs) And that was the book I picked. Well, I took that book home, and, honest to goodness, I was ready to give up, and I said, “No, I am not going to give up. I am going to read it if it kills me.” I read that book. I had to renew it three times before I finished. But that was my first library book that I read, *Little Dorrit*. And I never—I said—well, out of all of the books to pick, I had to pick something like that. But then after that I began to, you know, understand the library. I would look around and see what I could find, you know, in books my size. (both laugh) But I said I’ll always remember that. I hated to see that old library move because it was a nice spot. Now, the new library is fine; it’s wonderful. And even our library out at Lake Air, you know, is a nice place, but it’s so modern. There’s not a lived-in atmosphere.

MYERS: When we talked about Austin Avenue and what downtown Waco was like—and I noticed in looking through the directory there were a lot of hotels.

SENDÓN: Oh, yes, I noticed that, too.

MYERS: Yeah. Do you recall anything of that?

SENDÓN: I remember the—the only thing I know about those hotels is hearing my father talk about them. I remember my father talking about the Waverly Hotel. That was one of them, and then there was—oh, what was the other one? The Turf—no, the Turf was a saloon, but there was a hotel right by it. I forgot the name of that one. And there was the St. Charles Hotel and the Metropole. And the most that I know about the hotels is from hearing my father mention them, you know, just in passing. But they were not big hotels; they were small. And a lot of—they said a lot of murders were committed, you know, around in those areas because men would gather and they would gamble and all that sort of thing. But that was the extent of my—

MYERS: (speaking at same time) That was not a place for families.

SENDÓN: I think there was one hotel there called the Artesian Hotel. And, you know, we had a lot of buildings. Now, the Geyser Ice Company had this well down on Sixth

and—Fifth and Franklin, I guess it was—or Sixth and Franklin. There was a building there called the—no, it was Fourth and Franklin—the Natatorium. And it was right next to the post office—the old post office. And that had a natural well, and that’s where people went to swim.

MYERS: Oh.

SENDÓN: And then, there was another building downtown in another place. It was close to a drug store. And it was just a small well but it was wide open. And on Eleventh Street, at the Buchanan’s laundry, there was another well. And when the water would get bad in Waco, we’d go down and take jugs and fill our jugs full of water. But I think they’ve closed down some of those wells. But that’s early Waco. That’s in that directory with the ads.

MYERS: Well, I appreciate all of this today. We’ll kind of wind up talking up about Waco a little bit. Then, next week, I want to start with your elementary school years.

SENDÓN: Uh-huh. Oh, that’s a—

MYERS: But—anything else about Waco? What about theaters?

SENDÓN: Well, we had one movie theater when I was just a kid, and it was called the Crystal, and that’s where I saw my first movie. And it was an Indian story with an—all I can remember—it was done in brown, sepia color. All I can remember is seeing Indians running up and down the mountains and the soldiers chasing the Indians. That was the first story I saw. And they had their own music; the piano player would play the music to suit the action, you know. That was one of the big attractions of the movie. But there was one movie to start, that was the Crystal. Then they got the Rivoli and the Strand, and they began to get more movies in. And then, of course, the Waco theater—the Hippodrome came in. That’s what we have now. That was the big movie but that was in much later. But they had the Garland Opera House, and that was a famous attraction. They had two—they had an auditorium, too, on Sixth Street. I found that out in that book [*Waco City Directory 1902-03*]. I didn’t know about that. They had it, and then they

had—I learned a lot by looking through that book. All my life, I've been trying to figure out where we went, because my aunts would take me and my sister with them and we would go to see plays. And we'd get on the streetcar and come out this way somewhere. And we'd go till the end of the line, and it was called West End. Well, I found in the book, that there was the West End park, and they had a theater there.

MYERS: Oh.

SENDÓN: And they put on melodramas. And I would go with them, and it's—and the location of that street was on Sanger Avenue.

MYERS: Oh. Okay.

SENDÓN: And real close by here, not very far. I finally found out where that place was. I remembered it from childhood, but I didn't know which way we were going. But I remember going to that theater. Now, the Garland Opera House was a fancy place. Oh, it had seats, red plush seats, and a beautiful stage. That's where I saw *Julius Caesar*. But I was disillusioned after some years when I found out that all of the soldiers standing in the background with their helmets and their spears and their togas—the men with their togas—and I thought those soldiers were real. But they were high school kids from Waco High School that they recruited to come put on those uniforms. (Myers laughs) That disillusioned me. Well, let's see. What else was there in the way of a theater? Well, they had kind of a rodeo thing down on Eighth and Mary. That's where the Katy ball park used to be. And they would bring Wild West shows. They called it 101 Wild West. We didn't go to those. I didn't care for those. My dad would take my brother to those, but we didn't go to those too much. Oh, and another thing, they would have the medicine shows.

MYERS: Oh?

SENDÓN: They would pitch a tent on a vacant lot. And they would put on these crazy shows. I think they were like the dime novel stuff, you know, that kind of thing. And they would get the men out in the audience with these bottles of this medicine that would

cure everything. And—oh, it was wild! They sent—put out flyers the day before on your doorstep and had this big medicine show. And it would last two or three days, and then they'd go to another town. But Waco was wild for entertainment. Now, at one time, Waco was called the Athens of Texas because of its culture. And they said that Waco was a great town for entertainment. They were always wanting, you know, having something going on.

MYERS: Well, let's see. Ad-Ran [College] was still here?

SENDÓN: Ad-Ran was—became TCU [Texas Christian University]. That was out this way too. Ad-Ran College, and then they had St. Basil's College—was located right behind North Junior—where North Junior High School is. It was a boys school for Catholics.

MYERS: Oh.

SENDÓN: And of course, St. Mary's—the Sacred Heart Academy, where my mother went to school, was on Eighth and Columbus. And there were a lot of private schools. There were just a lot of private schools. I noticed that—I listed the teachers that I knew were at all those schools—Central school over on Webster was called Central High School. That was before Waco High was built. But then they had private schools. They had private schools in elocution and private schools in music, dancing—all sorts of—and there was an expression school. That was a little bit later. It was called Martha Faulkes Haun. She taught elocution.

MYERS: Did you ever take elocution courses?

SENDÓN: My daughters did.

MYERS: Did they?

SENDÓN: But they called it—she called it expression then. And—but it was good. It was good training. No, I didn't get any of those extra things. They just didn't have them for our age.

MYERS: Right.