

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Robert Sherar Frost**

Interview Date: 08/18/2014

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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7 Pages



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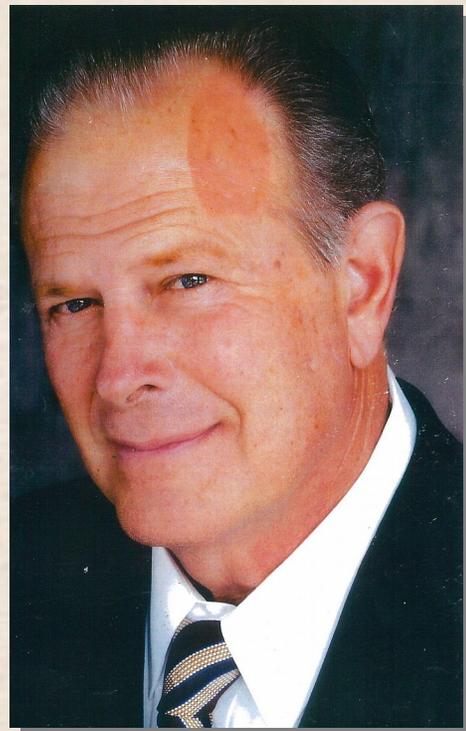
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Transcript

GOODSILL: Hello, Robert. Will you tell us your whole name?

FROST: Robert Sherar Frost. Sherar was my mother's maiden name.

GOODSILL: I understand that from the notebooks you brought me today that one of your ancestors, Mr. Hunter, came to Houston in 1822. And Mr. Samuel Miles Frost started 'Frostown'. So you have a LONG history in this part of Texas.

FROST: He sold Frostown and moved to Fort Bend County. I don't know the exact date but it probably didn't take too long to sell those lots.

GOODSILL: Houston's first subdivision! (laughter) He was a man ahead of his time.

FROST: Supposedly the Allen brothers lived there while they were building Houston. Samuel Miles Frost's plantation is now Pecan Plantation and Waterside.

GOODSILL: Where was the Hunter family's land grant?

FROST: It was around LaPorte and Morgan's Point. They had 4,000+ acres there. It was a Mexican land grant, around 1823. They lived there and almost starved to death, so they moved to Fort Bend County near the Brazos River where they could farm and prosper. His son, Robert Hunter, wrote his biography.

GOODSILL: I understand you have written a memoir of your own.

FROST: Yes. It's called *Episodes*. They are short episodes of various parts of my life, not as an autobiography. It's just episodes.

GOODSILL: Memories, events, things that happened that you thought would be significant to write down?

FROST: Yes. Right. They mainly would appeal to my family, my kids and grand-kids, which is why I wrote them.

GOODSILL: What year were you born?

FROST: August 9, 1939. I just had my 75th birthday!

GOODSILL: Tell me something about where you were born.

FROST: In Houston, in St. Joseph Hospital. My father was in the oil business and my mother was busy having children.

GOODSILL: How many siblings did you have?

FROST: Three. An older brother, Vernon Frost, Junior, and two younger sisters, Inza Ann Frost and Betty Frost. My mother's name was Frances Inza Sherar Frost. My father was Vernon Ward Frost. My father bought and sold leases and then he became an operator and drilled wells with his brothers.

GOODSILL: Did you see him a lot or was he gone for long periods of time?

FROST: We saw him a lot. He went mainly to the office in Houston.

GOODSILL: What was your childhood like?

FROST: Wonderful. I had all the good things young kids could have. I went to an excellent school, Saint John's, from 1946 until I graduated in 1957. I started in the 2nd grade there. It's become quite an institution since I left. It was a real positive experience.

GOODSILL: What did you do during high school? Were you athletic or scholastic?

FROST: I was mainly interested in football. I wasn't scholastic. (chuckles) Football was my favorite sport. I was a big fish in a little pond.

GOODSILL: How much better does it get than that? What did you do after you graduated from high school?

FROST: First I went to Europe for three months.

GOODSILL: Any stories to tell about that?

FROST: I went to Europe with a high school professor and four other people that I went to St. John's with. We started in England and went through Wales and Scotland, and then all through Europe. Almost every country. It was three months of traveling. It was a good graduation present.

GOODSILL: Did your family originally come from England or Scotland?

FROST: The Frosts came from Wales and came to America in 1700 or so. They were Quakers and went to Pennsylvania. For college I went to Southern Methodist University and graduated in 1961. I was a history major. I went to summer schools at Harvard and I went to University of California -Berkeley in 1961.

GOODSILL: That was a formative time!

FROST: It was.

GOODSILL: Did you write any episodes about that?

FROST: Well, about a car wreck I had there.

GOODSILL: That must have been interesting, growing up here, going to England, then Harvard, then Berkeley. You had some experiences outside of the nest.

FROST: The summer after I went to Europe, I apprenticed at the Alley Theater. Then I went to South America for three months.

GOODSILL: What did you do when you apprenticed at the Alley Theater?

FROST: I was lucky. I was in a play for about 3 months. It was in *Mr. Roberts*, a great play. It was a comedy about sailors on a boat. Jack Lemmon played the title role in the film. I was a midshipman. I was on stage a whole lot but had only two lines.

GOODSILL: Then you went to South America. Any stories about that?

FROST: Yes, I wrote about it in *Episodes*. I had great summers. I went to Berkeley the next summer and got in a play in San Francisco. After that I came back and was at Theater, Incorporated, here in Houston. I kind of fell into acting. Some people said I had talent. I didn't know what else to do and I really enjoyed it. I played in *Caligula* in San Francisco. I don't need to give you all the plays I was in, but I did play Conrad Birdie in *Bye, Bye Birdie* at Theater, Incorporated.

GOODSILL: And that involved singing as well?

FROST: Yes. I'm not a singer, but I was loud. That was fun.

GOODSILL: So how long did that go on?

FROST: Two months.

GOODSILL: And after you stopped acting, what did you do?

FROST: Oh, I got enthused about acting at Theater, Inc., so I went to the Dallas Theater Center, a repertory company, for four years. That was great!

GOODSILL: You really were very interested in this?

FROST: Yes, I sure was.

GOODSILL: Did you make your fame and fortune as an actor?

FROST: No. (laughs) I had fun.

GOODSILL: And then what happened?

FROST: I decided to have children, a family. I had five kids. I've had three wives: Lisa Sjostedt, she's Swedish. Her adopted name was Lisa Anders and she was a model in New York. We had two children, Jeanette and Vanessa. Then I married, Lucy Goodrich and we had Caroline and Claire. My third wife was Synda Anthony and we had David Anthony Frost.

GOODSILL: What did you do as a career?

FROST: I was a rancher for about 7 years. Then a real estate broker, specializing in ranches, until about 10 years ago.

GOODSILL: Was that interesting work?

FROST: I would go around and get to know my neighbors, introducing myself. I got to know a bunch of people and some of them needed help selling their ranches so I would advertise them and sell them.

GOODSILL: In the local area or did you go all over Texas or the US?

FROST: Four or five counties in Texas. Not too far from my home.

GOODSILL: That's quite a decision when a family decides to sell their ranch.

FROST: Yes, usually it is, unless they are in trouble financially. A lot of people would have weekend farms and they would sell those and get something else.

GOODSILL: Did any of the properties that got sold become developments?

FROST: None that I recall. You can't make any money in the cattle business, but they'd have horses and some cattle.

GOODSILL: Did you do any acting as you grew older?

FROST: Yes, a few plays. It didn't mix with having little children.

GOODSILL: You were showing me the activities of your father, Vernon Frost. All the charitable activities; working with the Houston Livestock Show. Were you involved with a lot of things yourself?

FROST: Yes, over thirty years as a director of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. I also founded the Chocolate Bayou Theatre in Houston.

GOODSILL: What kind of a personality did your father have?

FROST: He was a wonderful, friendly, loving person who had lots and lots of friends.

GOODSILL: And he must have had a lot of drive?

FROST: He was very energetic.

GOODSILL: Was he one of those people that if you met him you felt as if you'd known him forever?

FROST: I think so.

GOODSILL: So he could meet people and put them together and put deals together, and say, "Here, come help me with this project."

FROST: With ease. He would get his buddies to do things with him.

GOODSILL: You aren't that same kind of personality?

FROST: No. I haven't been driven to do that.

GOODSILL: Our fathers' generation were busy men, weren't they?

FROST: They sure were.

GOODSILL: How about your mother? What was her personality like?

FROST: Totally, unconditionally loving, always positive.

GOODSILL: She was devoted to the family?

FROST: Very much so. She had four children who kept her busy with related activities.

GOODSILL: If I ever get to look at your *Episodes*, what would be the one you would have me read first?

FROST: Start at the beginning!

GOODSILL: Do they go chronologically?

FROST: Pretty much so.

GOODSILL: Do you have any episodes about your acting?

FROST: Yes. Quite a bit. But also growing up in Houston which back then was a special little community. Not anymore. Houston just keeps going and going. Back when I was in high school, the Galleria wasn't there. All that's happened since.

GOODSILL: People who lived in the generations before television were outdoors a lot; playing, talking to family and neighbors, sitting on the porch, walking here and there. When television came along, we stayed inside more. I really think it changed America. Your early days were active, outdoors, an active type of life. Am I right? You made your own drama!

FROST: Right. Exactly!

Interview ends.