

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE



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Abstract: **John Elbert Pirtle**

While John Pirtle is not famous, nor is there a street named after him like his father, Jess Pirtle, he was born in Sugar Land in 1931 and enjoyed a front row seat to the lives of its residents in this company town. Sugarland Industries, the parent company of Imperial Sugar Company, formed the town known as Sugar Land. Most of its residents worked for the sugar company or served those who did.

Mr. Pirtle lived a charmed life growing up in this quaint town where boys were boys without worry of danger. His tale of setting a hay barn on fire where an escaped prisoner was hiding out will put a smile on your face as well as other stories of those who resided or passed through Sugar Land.

34 Pages

∥ *Scroll down for Key Words from the Interview.* ∥

Interview Summary

People (in order mentioned in interview)

I. G. Wirtz – city engineer, county commissioner
 Martha White Abernathy Pirtle – mother
 Jess Reynolds Pirtle – father, city engineer
 Jess Reynolds Pirtle, Jr – brother
 Sara Jane Lemmons – great grandmother
 Polk H. Pirtle – grandfather
 President Polk
 George M. Dallas – Vice-President under President Polk
 John Pirtle – great grandfather
 Ann Chambliss Pirtle – wife
 John Mark Pirtle – son
 Stephen Elliott Pirtle– son
 James Reynolds Pirtle – son
 Martha Elizabeth “Betty” Pirtle – sister
 Benton Reynolds – Betty’s son
 I. G. Wirtz, Jr – veterinarian & county commissioner
 Jack Aymonds – city engineer
 Reggie Wearman – city engineer
 Jimmy Hall – friend
 Reverend Easterly
 Syb Fowler
 Jack Olive
 Leaseman family – neighbors
 Kirkwood family – neighbors
 Edward Hastings- Alief Postmaster
 Arlene Hastings – mother’s best friend
 Mrs. Schumann – teacher
 Ms. Mitt Webb – teacher

Mrs. McLaughlin
 Eva Beth Keyes – 3rd grade teacher
 Jane Webb – author
 Byron Webb – P38 pilot in World War II
 Corky – wire haired terrier dog, Pirtle pet
 Rudy Pierce – neighbor
 Arthur Hill – neighbor
 Sonny Topolanek – neighbor
 Robert and Joe Bowen – neighbors
 Lillian Seeber – neighbor
 Jimmy & Johnny Miller – neighbors
 Mr. & Mrs. Scarborough – dairy operator
 Old Man Blair – carpenter
 Vernon Blair – carpenter
 Esther Vavrecka – owned exotic chickens
 Kempner – business family
 Walter & Mrs. Prikryl – hotel owner
 Martin Agronsky – radio newscaster
 Mrs. Worthington – newspaper customer
 Willie Worthington – Mrs. Worthington’s son
 Jimmy Miller – Imperial Sugar employee
 Charles Kelly – mechanic at Imperial Sugar, Chuck Kelly’s grandfather
 Dr. Slaughter – family doctor
 Aunt Collins – John’s step-aunt
 Wyatt Collins – FBC Sheriff in the 20’s
 Bill Stinnett – bookkeeper
 Curtis Hall – worked for Stinnett
 Mr. Briscoe – extended the Dinky train route

Old Man Eldridge – unsuccessful date farmer	Alief, TX
Eileen Blair Petrosky – John’s dad’s secretary	Char House
Willard Petrosky – married Eileen	Sugarland Industries
M. R. Wood – educator	Imperial Sugar Company
Ms. Johnson – teacher	Spanish–American War
Kenneth Scarborough – Baylor football player	Territory of Oklahoma, Indian Territory
Ms. O’Neil – teacher	Fort Worth Medical School
Nell Edith LaBatte – teacher	Arkansas
Ms. Wiley – teacher	Albermarle County, Virginia
Blas Rodriguez – friend	Pulaski County, TN
Ignacio – best school friend	I. G. Wirtz Bridge, Sugar Land
Ms. Dix – teacher	Texas A & M, College Station, Texas
Miss Booth – teacher	North Texas State University
Edith Head – dashion designer	Germany
Frances Jean Kuhn Tice	Fort Bend County
Mr. Daniels – teacher	New Orleans, LA
Hoot Gibson – early cowboy actor	Sugar Land Methodist Church
Bob Steele – cowboy actor	Pulaski, TN
Ken Maynard – cowboy actor	Turkey Island, TX
Buck Jones – cowboy actor	Spindletop, TX
Roy Rogers – famous cowboy actor	Alief Post Office
Skeet Gunther – student	Hastings High School, Alief
Bill Krehmeier – student	The Quarters Mexican Elementary
Mr. Bardon – teacher	Sartartia
Kenwin Nelson – student swimmer	Mexico
Ken Hall – star Sugar Land football player	Richmond, TX
Larry McMurtry – western author	Rosenberg, TX
Places / Businesses	Sugar Land Railroad
Laura Eldridge Hospital, Sugar Land	Imperial Butter Creamery
Sugar Land, TX	Sugar Land Mercantile Store
El Campo, TX	Hobo jungle, Sugar Land
Houston, TX	Galveston, TX

Mexican Baseball Park	Sugar Land Plantation
Russia	Rosenberg Railroad Museum
Visco Chemical Plant	Sealy Mattress Company
Char Lake/Stink Creek – Sugar Land	Marshall Canning Company
Frost Ranch	Acid plant/paper mill
Prikryl Hotel, Sugar Land	Webb Printing
Battle of the Bulge – eastern Belgium, northeast France, and Luxembourg	The Texas Commerce News
Europe	<i>SS Grandcamp</i> – cargo ship explosion, Texas City, 1947
World War II	Bellville, TX
Humble Oil Company	Cook's Dam
Dinky – small, diesel engine train	Okinawa, Japan
Stafford, TX	Korean War
Missouri City, TX	Little Pal Record Shop, Houston

Events

John Elbert Pirtle was born at the Laura Eldridge Hospital in Sugar Land on March 8, 1931 and raised in this company town until he joined the military in 1954.

His parent, Jess Pirtle and Martha Abernathy, met in El Campo as teachers and moved to Alief to teach for one year before moving to Sugar Land.

He has a sister Betty and a brother Jess, Jr.

John began his working career at the Imperial Sugar Company boxing powdered sugar and brown sugar quickly rising to Foreman.

John's father Jess surveyed land in and around Sugar Land until he retired at age 65. He also served on the School Board and the Board of Equalization. He was well-dressed and his signature bow ties are remembered by all. His mother, Martha was a beloved teacher who inspired many students including Hispanic students at Sartartia Elementary.

John and his wife, Ann Chambliss, had 3 boys. He substituted for his mother in her First grade class when he was only about 13 years old mainly playing games including "Still Water" which kept the kids quiet.

John shares several stories of his childhood including setting a hay stack on fire when a prisoner was hiding out and his dog, Corky, messed with a skunk that sprayed the dog, John, and his friends.

His mother was kind to and fed the homeless (called hobos at the time) during the Depression. They were 'marked' by the homeless as good people.

He shares the layout of Sugar Land as to the names of each family that lived on various streets including "rats row" on Imperial Blvd, Ulrich, Brooks, Main, Guenther, and Hwy 90.

John produced numerous photos of old Sugar Land, family, and friends from his childhood.