UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Linda Russell and Jerry Moore
Museums

Interviewed by: Anna Burke
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AB: This is Anna Burke I'm sitting here at the Burton Cotton Gin Museum with Jerry Moore the Business Director and Curator and Linda Russell the Museum Director. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I'd like to begin with the history of the gin. I know you told me a lot of this on my tour for the last couple of hours; when was the Burton Farmer's Gin built and who built it?

LR: The Burton Farmer's Gin was built in 1914. It was the vision of thirteen local farmers. It was completed in eight months. So they actually could gin and bale, that August of 1914 and two brothers here in Burton, the Weeren brothers were the two builders that actually built the gin. In six years it will be a century old, so we are excited.

AB: For those of us that are not familiar with the function of the gin can you kind of do a run through like you do on your tours of how the gin functions?

JM: The farmer comes to the gin with his wagon loaded with fifteen hundred pounds of cotton. That's kind of the base that you need to make a 500 pound bale. You encounter the yard man who inspects your cotton to make sure it is dry and to make sure the odor is maintained. The first stop will be to the scales where they will weigh the wagon to determine how much seed cotton that the farmer brought. They will usually have the weight of the wagon empty in hand; they know that ahead of time. The reason they need the weight of that cotton because that's how they are going to charge the

farmer. In 1925 they charged the farmer 30 cents per hundred pounds of seed cotton that they brought to the gin. They from the scale they move to the succor pipe. The Burton Farmer's Gin is an air system gin invented by Robert Munger in 1883. The air is used to move the cotton to where it needs to be inside the gin. The succor pipe is a giant vacuum cleaner and the man who runs that is called the succor; which is where that term comes from because the succor man tended to be the lowest paid job at the gin. He vacuums up everything that is in that wagon so anything in that wagon is going to go up that pipe. From there the cotton, the seed cotton goes to the gin stands where the work occurs of separating the lint from the seed and that is what a gin is supposed to do. The lint is blown to the bale press. The seed is taken over to the seed house. The farmer tended to sell the seed to the gin to pay for the ginning charge. That way he didn't bring any money with him because he didn't have any. The gin would sell the excess cotton seeds that the farmer would sell into the cotton oil mills for a profit. The lint would then be sent to the bale press where it would be compressed into a bale of cotton and that is where the bagging and the bands, known as bagging the ties would be applied for the bale. Then it comes out of the bale press, it is weighed, that weight is recorded, it is pushed out to the loading dock and they are done with it. The Cotton Gin, the Burton Farmer's Gin can produce a bale of cotton in 12 minutes.

AB: Could they trade stuff as payment?

JM: Yeah that is what they did with the cotton seeds.

AB: Okay.

JM: They would sell the cotton seeds, the excess cotton seed that they did not want, because for every 1,500 pounds of seed cotton you would have 1,000 pounds of seed left

over. So they don't… the farmer doesn't need 1,000 pounds of seed to replant his acre so he would keep just enough to replant and he would sell the excess to the gin and that's about a penny a pound. So if he kept 200 pounds of seed, he'd sell 800 pounds to the gin he'd get $8.00. The Gin charge in 1925 for 1,500 pounds was $6.00 so he would get a discount if he… if the farmer did the job as the succor man and he would get a discount of 10 cents if he paid his bill within 30 days so he could take off, knock off 20 cents off that $6.00 charge and with the $8.00 he got from the excess seed he could walk off with $2.20 in his pocket.

AB: What did the gin do with the excess cotton seed?

JM: They would sell that to the cotton oil mill that would compress the cotton meat inside the hull and get cotton seed oil which is used in other products. The gin would sell that to the mill for an average of about 9 cents a pound so they would make quite a bit of money off of that.

AB: How many people operated the gin at any given time?

JM: On average five. You would have the yard man, you would have two of the gin stand operators, you would have the gin manager and you would have the pressman, maybe two press man.

AB: How often was it used by the farmers in the area?

JM: The gin was operated during the ginning season which starts in August and runs through about mid October.

AB: Was it a community cotton gin?

JM: Yes it was.

AB: Okay can you explain that, how that worked?

LR: The farmers would not only gin their cotton those four months but they would also grind corn. They had that 57 foot line shaft that they had added belts to that they would have a grist mill, a hammer mill, a _____ (6.4) mill because the German men and the… just the town of Burton basically German heritage, they don't waste anything, "Use what you've got, make the most of it." So they had all this power on this line shaft that they know that could be used for a lot more than just ginning cotton those four months so the gin was definitely a co op gin and community gin and was opened year round. Like Jerry said the five, basically the gin workers for those four months, the manager would continue on the full year and probably some of the better loyal hands would continue…

JM: To run the mill is what they would do. In fact, during the ginning season Saturday was mill day and when the ginning season was over then you could run the mill every day of the week.

LR: One thing that you had talked about prices a little bit earlier. The gin could get into a little bit of a pickle by honoring credit. Some of the farmers would get into a little snafu with owing the gin and they called it the gin toll. So as we have gone through those historic minutes and records we are kind of seeing that some of the farmers or the gin itself would get into a little bit of a tight because they had over extended credit to just family and that family, the good old boy concept.

JM: As a depression years started that because a serious situation because people couldn't pay. So there was a problem with people owing the gin you know the toll for making the bale or for milling for that matter.

LR: Yeah and it reached a point, they reached the point in even the signage that we have seen in the minutes, "Cash only." And it's kind of like "Hey effective this…" you know when the board would meet for the annual board of directors meeting. They would discuss "Basically this is what going to happen this next ginning season and it was determined that okay we've got to get out of that hole, so cash only." It helped it pulled the mill out of that slump.

JM: They survived for 60 years.

AB: Who was on the board of the directors?

LR: Oh boy there is an array of heritage from Burton there. Well the first gin manager was Carl Domeyer, he was also on their board. The officers…

AB: The president of the board was _____ (9.0) Whitener. R. A. Fox, he was the secretary. Fritz Domeyer was secretary briefly.

LR: Originally there were 116 originally shareholders in the Burton Farmer's Gin Association. They, how you got into, as far as a shareholder, they sold, for $50 they sold 200 shares because they needed to raise $10,000 to build the gin. No man could get more than six shares; that was the limit. So ultimately with, all of those parameters, 116 individuals and there were some women in there too, but 116 original shareholders and of course all of those board of directors were in that original 116 and it's really just the history of Burton. This is about all of those I guess you could say the pillars of the community.

AB: Were they farmers?

LR: Oh many of them were farmers, yes.

AB: Okay I was just wondering what their _____(10.4) were.

JM: Back in some of the minutes of the association that very subject came up on keys to be a member and they had problems with non-farmers in some of those early days and they passed a resolution that you had to be a farmer to be a member of the gin.

LR: And they also had as the years went by, if you were on the board of directors, or you were a shareholder, you know… if you didn't gin and bale your cotton at the Burton Cotton's Gin you were chastised.

JM: You got in trouble.

AM: You mentioned the record books that were found can you tell me a little bit about those?

LR: Oh that's an exciting part. The gin closed basically the last… well 1974 was the year when the gin in its hay day could gin and bale 50 to 60 bales of cotton per day. In 1974 they ginned and baled 7 bales the whole four months of the ginning season. They voted to go ahead and open for the next year but not one bale was ginned in 1975. So ultimately the gin served the community for 60 years. The gin closed. It was dormant for 15 years through now getting into the end of the 1980's. A man and his wife from Burton, Ohio, his name was Doug Hutchinson, he tooling down 290, "Oh look there's Burton, Texas let's go see what's in that little, you know compare." They go to the little, actually it was Modest Grocery and Feed which is now called the Burton Mercantile, got a soda water, looked across the street, "Oh my gosh what in the world?" Grass, weeds had grown and humungous. The gin was quite large. "There's only 350 people here in your population. Did everybody in town work in that building?" Mr. Modest the store owner, he informed him that was the cotton gin, "Would you like to go see it?" Doug with a camera around his neck… he discovered the amazing… I mean all dormant I'm

sure that squirrels and raccoons met him at the door but he was so excited to see a real genuine cotton gin and when he went in (and this is what all of our guests have the opportunity to see as well), the Bessemer, the Lady B, the diesel oil engine, all the gin stands, the office, all that the gin has to offer but he went into the office and got a little curious and started opening doors and there to his utter amazement were records, the gin records from every bale of cotton from 1914 to 1974, 60 years of the ginning records and most of them are in tact. You know there is a few that we haven't quite got our fingers on but what Doug Hutchinson did was amazing. He called the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and they came out. It was kind of one of those stories. "Mr. if what you are telling us is the truth, don't touch anything and we'll be there Monday." I mean they were so excited. They came out, they measured, took photographs and the bottom line is the Smithsonian Institution, the gentleman from that, the Smithsonian informed us that, "What you have here is a real treasure and if you get this Bessemer engine up and running again you will have the oldest operating gin that we know of in this whole United States of America." From that was born the Burton Cotton Gin Festival which was to raise money to restore that Bessemer engine and as the years went by that happened and in 2009 which is this next April we'll be celebrating our 20th Cotton Gin Festival and we now have thousands of visitors that come and see, tour the gin annually and to share the story.

AB: Is there, are they housed at the museum these record books? Oh they are here I did not see those.

LR: Yes. In _____. (15.0) The Smithsonian also has copies of the minutes and records that we have, all the original records are right here in fire proof safe.

AB: Do you ever display any of them under glass?

JM: No.

AB: Are they very fragile?

JM: Yes. I just completed transcribing the gin association minutes from December 1913 to 1989. That took a while to do, especially reading some of that hand written script.

LR: Calligraphy.

JM: And the calligraphy. But there are some other things I want to do with getting information on the different years. The number of bales that the gin, who the farmer was, how much the bales weighed. That information is there it just needs to be.

LR: Plus the economy of… it's not just Burton, this is something to share too, we spoke of this earlier, Jerry and my goal is that the guests in researching this that come to the Burton Cotton Gin Museum that they go away with a deeper appreciation of the history that not just in Burton but all across the cotton belt and even textile mills, it's really not just the cotton belt; but the impact of cotton on American history and have fun doing it while they are here.

AB: Back to the operation of the gin, can you tell me about the safety precautions they used or were there any accidents here?

JM: There was never a major accident at the Burton Farmer's Gin.

LR: OSHA would shut us down.

JM: Yeah, but at that time in our country's history there was no such thing as OSHA. The inside of any gin, not necessarily the Burton Farmer's Gin, but the inside of any gin was not… was a dangerous situation, not just physically but, you know, just health wise.

The inside of the gin was like a smoke storm with the cotton lint. It would be everywhere. Of course the workers had to… they breathed that so health issues for gin workers was not uncommon; certainly the safety factor and the handling of the gin stands with the saw blades. This gin, the Burton Farmer's Gin never had an accident where someone lost a finger or a hand or anything like that but that was not uncommon in gins. In fact, in most communities that had gins, you could always tell who the gin workers were, the former gin workers because a lot of them were missing a finger, a hand or even arms. In terms of fire hazard, that is the number one problem that gins would face. Not that you would have the lint burst, you know, into flames like you might find at a grain mill or something like that but if you got a rock or something into the saw blades that created a spark you could cause a smoldering ember could be baled inside of a bale of cotton and creating what they call a "hot bale" and it wasn't uncommon to have a hot bale combust while it is sitting on the loading dock or even in the warehouse. So that is something that they were always very cautious of and that stand operators learned about smells and sounds because changes in sounds or smells may indicate a problem. So they were real in tune with that sort of thing. This gin never had a fire.

LR: Interestingly two years at our Cotton Gin Festival, because that is where we make our annual bale, gin and bale. After all the excitement the bale was made, a beautiful, it is like a baby being born so we were all excited and it was about twenty minutes and folks came running in going, "the bale's on fire, the bale's on fire" and sure enough we run out to the bale dock and inside, what Jerry is talking about, a hot bale and it could have been from during that process that maybe the cotton that was sucked up in the reception tube and going through the stock may have hit a little screw, maybe that

came… that may have hit a little piece of rock that sparked something but it… our piece of barb wire from the fence, you just never know what could.

JM: The only way you could put out a hot bale was to: either cut those bands and spread everything out as fast as you can without catching it, or you couldn't pore water on the bale. It is so compact that the water wouldn't penetrate it. Strange enough what would penetrate, kerosene gasoline so that is what they would put on the bale and it would _____ (20.4) the flame. You wouldn't get the fire because there's no oxygen inside the bale but the wetness…

AB: How did the gin change with the technological advances over the years? What did they add?

LR: If first operated with steam power, 1914 to 1925 and then they got the internal combustion engine, the 16 ton Bessemer type 4 oil engine, came from Grove City, Pennsylvania. That was an exciting time in Burton. We are still looking for maybe from the local newspaper, pictures that may have been taken of that coal project; that will be fun to find. But from 1925, almost 40 years, 1925 to 1963 the Bessemer engine powered and served the community and the cotton gin. Then in 1963 they got the Allis-Chalmers Electric Motor, 125 horsepower, the same power that the Bessemer was and the electric motor served until… and the Lady B was, they say, kind of reserved for back up if something should happen to the electric motor but they never needed her. You know I think at one time the thought was to sell her off but praise the Lord that never happened. You know it is amazing the course of history what could have been, but those technologies and then the progress with… and Jerry?

JM: Yeah originally they could only accept hand picked cotton. They could not accept the machine picked or the pulled cotton because that with the seed cotton came the stems and the burs what they called the _____ (22.1) and originally the Burton Farmer's Gin had no way to separate that and you don't want to get that mixed in with the lint because that lowers the value of the cotton. As more farmers got the equipment to machine pick cotton the Burton Farmer's Gin was losing money. So they had to come up with a way to solve that problem so they wouldn't go broke. Well they did, they bought a burr machine and a stick machine to remove those things from the seed cotton. Of course as they added the new equipment the only way you could do that is through the roof so as new equipment was added it changed the profile of the gin to what it appears now. They also added in 1949 the power dryer because before they couldn't gin, in fact by law, to gin wet cotton. So they solved that problem in 1949 by buying a power dryer that could heat the cotton, the seed cotton up to 300 degrees which makes it nice and fluffy at that point and able to gin. So equipment like that was added. Every time a new innovation came along they kind of lagged behind a little bit but eventually they were kind of forced to get the new equipment in order to stay up.

LR: One other thing, the United States government, because cotton was big business for our government and the economy and so forth. The boll weevils, that little tiny insect had really an impact on the cotton industry and the ginning process. The government mandated that every cotton gin install a heater, a heat system to kill the eggs and larvae of the boll weevil and also the pink bowl worm just in an effort to try and eradicate that little critter. I think it did more for destroying the pink bowl worm than it did the boll weevil but as the years have gone by, even in 1999 when our museum first started the Federation

for the Eradication of the Boll Weevil began, almost ten years ago now that it will be a full ten years but the boll weevil was about eradicated in the state of Texas and in a lot of other states. But yeah, he said that equipment, we highlight that, we have it lit that the inspector would come totally unannounced and all of that equipment to heat that, that had to be in place.

AB: Compared to modern gin methods how efficient was this gin?

JM: In its day it was the Hilton of gin stands of cotton gins because they could produce 50 and 60 bales a day and using that air system required fewer employees because that air moved the cotton to where it needed to be. Prior to the air system it all had to be done manually. So when the wagon came up with the cotton you had to have everybody and probably the farmers helped too, hand carry the seed cotton to the gin stand and then hand carry the lint to the bale press and hand carry the seeds to the seed house.

LR: That process took hours just for one wagon you were there hours. So the proverbial wait message in, you know waiting in line, that is true, that truly, truly happened until our air system…

JM: The air system and the set up changed all that. Now a bale of cotton could be created in 12 minutes.

LR: Never touched by a human hand.

JM: Never touched.

AB: Is cotton still growing in Burton?

JM: No unfortunately not.

LR: Not commercially but at the museum we have got an amazing, we are so honored and proud to share it with our guest a patch, we have the cotton patch and about eight different varieties and there's more, but the United States Department of Agriculture is very gracious to share antique cotton seed with us several months ago and we got to plant it and Jerry put the signage out, even under the flag pole, we've got another, and most of those are five _____ (26.3).

JM: That's Lone Star that's who has developed around here. Commercially, no they don't grow cotton around here anymore. The primary reason for that was after World War II, Korea, Vietnam, when the kids came home from the service they chose not to go into the cotton farming. They had seen how hard their fathers had to work and their families and after you've seen the world…

LR & JM: They say, "How are you going to keep them on the farm after they've seen Paris?"

JM: And it's true the kids left home. Then in the 1950's the government started the subsidy program trying to shore up commodity prices.

LR: There was too much cotton.

JM: Yeah there was an over abundance of cotton and the price was falling. So in order to jack those prices up they started substance. So if you had a 50 acre farm and was able to produce 25 bales on that 50 acres you would get a letter from the government informing you that you would be allowed to plant half of your acre in cotton and the rest you could do whatever you want to with. They would include a little subsidy check which unfortunately never covered what they lost in their production.

LR: For the Burton farmer it was really a death sentence for farming cotton.

JM: Then in the early '70's the garment industry went through a tremendous change.

LR: Polyester.

JM: Polyester.

LR: You didn't have to iron those.

JM: Yeah that's all I like to say that the leisure suit just about put cotton out of business. But in essence the farmer lost his health, he lost half of what he could produce and what he did produce he couldn't make any money. So that's when they gave up on cotton in this area and they all raise cows now.

AB: How many residents are here in Burton?

JM: 350.

AB: Were they all cotton farmers at one time?

JM: Well not all but…

LR: A big majority…

JM: You get outside the community and that population goes up.

LR: You had your bankers and your store keepers and post office and rail road; but the majority were cotton farmers. At one time the Burton community had over 3,000 residents and that is documented by the Texas Historical Commission. Of course with all of those… got to make a living and you can't do it farming are the kids not staying home and, you know, the property next door and raising their family and so forth because you have to remember too the government if you were a G.I. would pay for your education so a lot of them took advantage of that opportunity and it really changed the course of the little community of Burton, Texas but interestingly a lot of those kids, of course you know now they are grandparents themselves, but they pretty much came back home to

the country to get out of the rat race of the big city. We are seeing that more and more. Burton is growing, still… but to think at one time there were so many more people but because of the economy to try to make a life.

AB: Whose vision was it to start the museum in 1999?

LR: I would say the vision… it started with Doug Hutchinson, the gentleman from Burton, Ohio and his vision sparked the beginning of "Operation Restoration" and that was to restore that Bessemer engine and that spring boarded into "Wow we have a treasure here we need to show the world!" What better way than to have a museum you know… one thing lead to another so in 1994, this group "Operation Restoration" board of directors, etc., etc., the wheels were in motion, "What do we need to do to make a museum to generate, to have a museum? A master plan: what's the first step we need to do?" That dream was fulfilled in 1999 and, you know, of course the documentation, Burton Cotton Gin and Museum.

JM: The rest they say is history.

LR: Yeah it's been real nice.

AB: Can you detail the restoration process what exactly did they do to restore this place?

LR: Well not really the museum… well this building right here, the actual museum building used to be a laundry mat, a liquor store and the office for Mr. Ray Shreiver who had purchased the cotton gin with the dream and goal was to with some other investors, tear the gin down and we're going to build a shopping strip because in the '70's those were very popular. Come to find out if you recall the 116 original share holders, the descendants of those shareholders, it has now grown… "Well we'll give this child, that

child the grand kid part of what they had." So now the numbers of who were involved who owned the cotton gin grew in numbers and when Mr. Shreiver and his group started calling to see, "Hey can we get your share?" The majority of them said, "Oh no that's been in our family for all these years and no." So the gin stayed again (thank you) but he did build his shopping strip and we are sitting in it right now. In 1999 this is the building that was converted to a museum and it's been a work in progress. As a matter of fact less than a month ago the carpet was put in so we are a non-profit organization so the ware with all, you know we have to be very selective and prudent about where our money is spent and what it is spent for and our fundraisers are basically the annual Cotton Gin Festival which will be number 20 in April. This year marks our fifth year for the, we have an annual barn dance which is our fundraiser for the Burton Cotton Gin and Museum.

AB: Can you tell me about your archival holdings and what researchers can expect to find here?

JM: The type of things that we have, like I said earlier, I've just been transcribing the minutes of the association which comes to 294 pages worth. There are ledgers of various years that the gin was in operation. There are receipt books where it is showing receipts for bales of cotton. It shows who made the bale, how much it weighed, how much seeds was involved, how much they paid for it, you know, that kind of information. There are some financial books that shows some of the basic expenditures of the gin, some of the payments it made for various things. We have some additional records that are not really of our gin but exactly the plans that we recently discovered because we have been told over the years that the gin was built without plans.

LR: With no blue prints.

JM: No blue prints. But as we discovered…

LR: In the minutes…

JM: There were blue prints but they weren't of this gin they were of another gin.

LR: We borrowed them.

JM: We borrowed them and those are the ones that we used to build this gin.

LR: A gin in I think it was Smithville wasn't it?

JM: Elgin.

LR: Okay Elgin and just tweaked it to fit. The Weeren brothers used those.

JM: So it's not quite true that we didn't have blue prints we did they just weren't of our gin.

LR: We did _____ (33.1) go through but all those records we just had the greatest respect and delicate with age and so forth.

AB: Do you have many researchers?

JM: No.

LR: Not yet. I think as word gets out what we've had here and the history of the economy.

JM: I think the more work we do on transcribing various records because I'd be a little hesitant to have a lot of people handle those records, I would rather have copies or transcriptions that can be looked at. Right now the only thing that has been transcribed are those _____ (33.7) minutes which is excellent information but…

LR: Another thing that this has been very recent… her name is Kathryn Henry, Kathryn Bowie Henry, she is the Chairman of our Advisory Board and what is so

exciting, Marcellas _____ (33.8) who is our most recent museum director, she wants to volunteer and take photographs of these minutes and those… you don't have to go through a scanner so… and those will go on the web site so that a researchist at University of Houston, you can hop onto our web and go to the link and in the comfort of your home or office, someone in Massachusetts can research so we are excited. That hasn't happened yet but that is on the…in the pipe.

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AB: Can you tell me why this particular structure is "unequaled in this nation" to quote your mission statement online?

JM: Well quite frankly we are the oldest operating cotton gin in the United States. We are the only cotton gin that has all of its original equipment in place and it's all functioning. Now there may be gins that are older but they don't work. This one still works because we can actually gin and bale cotton which we do. Plus with all the records, a lot of gins no longer have their records and documents but we do. So that in of itself makes us unique. The Smithsonian tells us that we are the only turn of the century air system gin that is functional.

LR: That they know of.

JR: That they know of and I have no reason to doubt the Smithsonian.

AB: What purpose do you see this museum filling for the community?

LR: I would see it as a booster for our economy, you know, for tourism and just to have…

JM: Well it is also part of education. One of the things that museums are supposed to do, something that I was always taught, is that museums either should tell people

something they didn't know or confirm something they already knew and that's what we are doing. We are telling people the story behind cotton and cotton ginning that they didn't know and those visitors who have experienced it, we are confirming what they already know.

LR: Another factor too is you mentioned the Burton community is to have a sense of pride in their history. You know, where you have been, where your roots are and it's so amazing that it connects you with others. The guests that come through say, "Wow we have something in common." So it is exciting.

AB: Has this site received any official recognition or awards?

LR: Yes. I'd just be glad to tell you. We were designated a National Historic Engineering Landmark, the 109th recognized by the ASME, American Society of Mechanical Engineers and we are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and we are also a Designated Texas Historic Landmark by the Texas Historical Commission. That is so far… and we will see what the future holds.

AB: In what ways do you seek to involve the community in the museum?

LR: Volunteerism.

JM: Volunteerism. We have quite a number of volunteers who participate not only in our festivals and our fundraising activities but they are also the ones that help us run the gin when we start it.

LR: You have to realize there is 350 population in Burton; our core of volunteers for our festival is over 250 so it is quite a tribute to this community that… again I think it is a sense of heritage and pride for that festival element to share and show what we've got here.

JM: And the truth is we have also gone way beyond just Burton because we are starting to pull in volunteers and people from other communities.

LR: Other counties.

JM: Other counties…

LR: And Cities.

JM: Even our Board of Directors now has representation from the Lummus Corporation, that is who our gin stand remained by, by the Texas Cotton Ginners Association, by the marketing arm of the Cotton Ginners Association, by cotton gin managers so we have people representing, outside of Burton even outside of the state. We have had visitation from the American Cotton Ginners Association. So we are making contact with people beyond our… Burton itself.

LR: We have fifteen members on our current Board of Directors and like Jerry said they all bring to the table a unique, again the future is so bright because many of those board members have just come on the beginning of 2008. As a matter of fact the next board meeting is coming up and several have said, "Well we've got some great ideas to share." But they don't want to just jump in and so they are being very professional about it. We are excited to see what ideas they do have.

AB: Where do you see the Burton Cotton Gin Museum fitting in among the cotton museums of the U.S. south?

JM: Well I'll be very honest with you we are the only cotton gin museum in the United States. Now there are other cotton museums but as far as cotton gin museums, we are one of a kind.

AB: Is there any collaboration between this facility and other cotton museums?

JM: Actually there is, we have established a link between us and American Agricultural Museums in Lubbock, which has just gotten started. We also have a link with George Ranch.

LR: They just celebrated…

JM: That's right.

LR: I think just a few weekends ago.

JM: We've made…

LR: Star of the Republic…

JM: Star of the Republic Museum. So we are not in a vacuum here. We understand that and even though we are unique, we do share with other museums similar problems and these similar things that they do. So we have that core between them and us.

LR: You mentioned going to Winedale. Barbara White is the museum director there so very good connections, friendships and bonds and it is, it's like family that you can connect and share ideas.

AB: Where do you see this museum's contribution specifically for the residents of Texas?

JM: Well Texas is the number one producer of cotton in the United States and that in of itself lends to that education not only to… well and not only to Texas but every person that comes in here no matter where they are from whether it's Mississippi, New Zealand… we had people from Hungary yesterday. So we are telling that story, we are maintaining that heritage and you know certainly within the state of Texas (which is the number one producer of cotton in America), there is a very strong heritage there and this museum maintains that.

LR: Many of our guests that come in, they are also… I mean the story of cotton but that genealogical link. "Can you help us find?" They may be from East Texas and you know but they… somewhere in that line their roots were in the Burton area and it's amazing for… again the threads that combine us and join us.

AB: I'd like to talk about the actual complex itself can you give a run down of what people can expect to find here and the different buildings and how they are part of the site?

LR: Well basically the cotton gin that's the mother, that's the heart of what we are about and the seed house and the whole shed are really connected, its part of that. Of course the museum, this is the newer. Historically the Werren, the shoe shop and leather shoe shop and residents that is… that was donated to the Burton Cotton Gin Museum in 1990 by the Weeren family. It has… like taken a step back in time. Going into the old… the tools of the trade and when our guests have the opportunity… again when we go on a tour of the gin our focus is mainly on the cotton but if we've got a larger tour group where we do a round robin, you've got to have this group here, that group there, this group here, we do take them to the shoe shop and show them things on the complex. Again it is like taking a step back in time and the Weeren house is also now a facility for meetings. This is where we have our board meetings, different organizations have the opportunity to meet there and it shows the family history of the Werren family here in Burton.

AB: Would you tell me a little bit about that the history of that building and the family?

LR: Well actually the Weeren house, there were three children the grandfather was William Weeren, he came as an immigrant from Germany at the age of 15. He met his future wife. He came over here as a… you didn't just hop on the boat and come over to America you had to have a sponsor and he was sponsored by the Buck family, which was from Burton and as a young man of 15 he was an apprentice for a shoe copper in Germany. So he brought that trade over with him and he met his wife to be and as it turns out William Weeren who ultimately had the first shoe shop in Burton, it was a little bitty six foot, but very, very small it's still an old _____ (16.7) still out there. He was...

JM: One of the first gin managers.

LR: One of the first gin managers. I think he…they had three children. There was Otto Jr., Alvena and Gus. Those three children grew and the one, Gus Weeren…he ultimately one that we talked about, he went to the service, "after you see Paris how are you going to keep them on the farm?" He wanted to be an accountant and he became an amazing, successful accountant in Alice, Texas. He is the gentleman with the grace of his family donated the Weeren, his family's home, the residence and the shoe shop. But his father, Otto, one of the children of William, Gus' father followed in his father's footsteps as a shoe cobbler in leather and…

JM: He was also a shareholder in the Burton Farmer's Gin.

LR: Yes.

JM: Plus the location of the shoe shop, when the farmers were in line waiting for their cotton to be ginned, it was an opportunity to have their leather harness or their tack or whatever they needed repaired to hold their shoe repair or momma came to town with them that day because she wanted to go to the shoe shop and have something worked on.

A lot of the community, in the community a lot of the businesses sprung up around the gin because it was kind of a focal point. When the farmers all came to town, they didn't come to town every day but when they came to town it was an opportunity to go to those different businesses while their wagon was waiting in line.

LR: Because that is where they made their money was through their cotton bale. Another place of business in Burton is the Burton Auto Garage. That was donated by the Muehlbrad family and the Felder family and there were August and Lillian Muehlbrad. They, I guess for the Burton community they had one of the first Texaco stations in the state of Texas. Boy there is some history there with August Muehlbrad. He lived to be almost 100 and his wife Lillie will be turning 100 in October. Actually, you know we have these sites on our web site, the buildings that we show for those who want to visit our web site. At this time the structure of the Muehlbrad, the Burton Auto Garage is… it needs attending and some considerable structural work. So we are at that crossroad as to what we need to do. So as far as safety issues, we really don't go touring through the Burton Auto Garage.

JM: The other building is the cotton warehouse. Originally the gin did not own that. That had it's own board of directors and everything. It was a separate business. But the Burton Farmer's Gin acquired it in 1967 so they ran that along with the gin. That's where the cotton was stored ready for shipment where it was weighed and sampled and there was another form of revenue for the association. Today that houses a lot of our farming equipment that has been donated to us. Old farm tractors used on cotton farms, some horse drawn, we have some like where we store bales of cotton to use them today and we have displays of some of the wagons and some of the equipment used on farms,

cotton farms. That can be toured though because of the distance, normally by the time people have seen our program here at the museum and then tour the gin, we sometimes have gone past an hour and half and so we don't get many visitors over there but it is available to them.

LR: During a large tour, again, when we do the round robin we may open up…like antique car clubs, Model T, Model A and there may be over a 100 guests so you have to break them into groups of say 25 and they can't all go to the gin at once and this is where our core volunteers and hostesses come into play to accommodate the very large tours and another thing that one of our goals is to have signage. We are sort of looking into the future that a guest could come and just walk over to the warehouse and do a self guided tour we would have the signage for all the… everything that is in the warehouse would be documented signage so that our guests would come out of there going, "Wow, amazing!"

AB: How important was the Houston and Texas Central railroad to the function of the cotton gin?

JM: There wouldn't be a cotton gin if the railroad hadn't come through here.

LR: 1870 is when the Houston, Texas Central Railroad when from Houston to Austin and this was just the path it took and just as fate had it the person who owned the land that was in this area, when the railroad was coming through was owned by John Burton. So when the railroad came through and once the railroad purchased that land from John Burton and John Burton… he said, "You know this is an opportunity." So he started the Post Office and of course the depot was built and the town of Burton began. There were a lot of settlements around, just as in all over Texas. There was Kerr settlement, Union Hill, very grown communities but when the railroad came through, now there is Burton,

Texas, those other communities started moving in closer to Burton and those little settlements really rather through the years lost their identity as was known because they were moving closer into town.

JM: Prior to the railroad cotton could only be moved by water. So most of your cotton communities were associated near like the Brazos River, Colorado River where boats could move the cotton back and forth. The railroad changed all of that and that particular railroad because of the route it took, went through areas that established a lot of little communities, all of these little communities had community gins and now instead of the farmer having to take his… days in fact to take his cotton to the gin by the river, like I say Hempstead maybe, then he could just come here to Burton and have that done. So the railroad just changed everything.

AB: Do you hold any demonstrative workshops for the visitors?

JM: Not per se.

LR: Only… I would have to say during our tour we demonstrate just like he did earlier, where you actually can with your hand, you feel the cotton, feel the seed. It's kind of a hands-on tour experience.

JM: As far as a formal workshop, no. But as far as letting visitors have that hands-on, that is part of the package when you go on a tour.

AB: Do you have any plans for expanding this site?

JM: Yeah. Our dream is of a whole new building one of these days.

LR: A new museum building. As far as on the site… and possibly you know how you dream, the little creek bed gully that connects the museum property with the warehouse, to just get over there we have visions of a bridge, you know, making a bridge to go over

there. Another vision is a pavilion where busses can pull our guests and under the shade of a pavilion and if they want to do a sack lunch then whatever or in the community for reunions, etc. Again, the future is bright but the big one… the big one is some day… and Jerry and I both hope it's not in the too far future, we hope… what did we say, before 20 years, and we'll just see how it all goes. We've started an endowment program that we are really excited about for the preservation. Folks that love history have an opportunity to give to our endowment program because the interest from that would be used to fund our annual budget for operating expense which is about a quarter of a million dollars just to keep the doors open.

JM: We are reaching a point that we are… we need to expand. There is so much that we need to do, and with the size building we have we can't really do those things. So as in all museums you have to have things restored to collection and displays and exhibits and we'd love to have a theatre to show our program so, you know, we are at that point where it is time to expand.

LR: Maybe there is one… during the week, one restaurant, café in Burton and who knows what the future holds that we may have a little soup and sandwich potential when folks come to the museum.

AB: Could you briefly describe your duties as directors of this museum?

LR: Oh, we've made a list. We have a list of things to do and what we do as director I pretty much oversee the tours, when the calls come in to keep all of that information in line with the tours. Also, our gift shop… and Jerry and I both we work as a team on a lot of the things that we do but building, telephone, correspondence, thank you's, letting people be aware of what's going on. Right now, we are…in October but we are already

in the throws of making preparations for our fall barn dance gala and of course the festival, mostly that is in April but we start six months in advance. I mean there are some things we've already started so what we want to do is get beyond from fundraiser to fundraiser. There's so many duties. Like archival collections, staff development. You met Kim she is part time staff and we want to grow her and teach and help her learn other duties here at the museum to give us some breathing room to grow in areas. And Jerry's super business…

JM: Well I don't know about that. I run the finances. I keep track of the budget, pay the bills, go to grant meetings, that's the financial side of it. On the curatorial side of it I do the records, the executive records, the collections _____ (28.6) type of things. I'm also kind of… well we both work on doing the new exhibits.

LR: Yeah that's the exciting side the creative element of creating new exhibits and ideas.

JM: Which is what I like to do best.

AB: How do you gage public reaction to your facility and certain exhibits that you have?

LR: That's a good question. For us it is evidenced by our guests, their comments during and after our tour. "Wow we never knew you were here, this is so exciting I'm so glad that we stopped!" We have many guests that will send us a thank you after we have had a tour and of course putting that dollar in the donation box or that $5 or that $20 or another way that our guests show appreciation for what they have seen and are keeping history alive here at the museum, they have an opportunity to of course give a donation but we have some programs here… one is our buy a bale and they get a commemorative

cotton gin bale with the number that they chose that's, the number's 1 through 100 if it is still available and they get their name on it and it is on the board and so it's kind of a neat thing and the $100 of course goes to the Burton Cotton Gin Museum. Another newer program is our legacy brick program. This is where guests for $100 can get a brick that they can commemorate a birthday, anniversary, in memory of a loved one and they have four lines on a brick to say what they want to say and our goal is to take these bricks and put them in the pathway that's going to walk our guest to the gin and to the other sites on the festival, the museum grounds. I was going to say we have to be watch care because the festival is spread out on the 9 acres so where we put these pathways has to be in a balance with what goes on at the festival.

AB: Can you tell me about the cane tradition? I was reading that on your website and I just found that so fascinating.

LR: Well you bet!

JM: Well you remember Mr. Whitener…

LR: Actually this is one of the "Wow moments!" Aaron Whitener was the first president of the Burton… on the Board of Directors of The Burtons Farmers' Association, one of his sons was Oliver Whitener and he just passed in 2005 but something that Oliver Whitener did, we called him "The Cane Maker" and the canes that he made, we call it the ball in the cage and there is a round ball of wood encompassed, encased in this little cage that is carved into this one piece of wood and we have one here and that's the case. He donated… he never sold a cane. He gave them to his friends, it had the year; it had their initials. He made over 500 canes in his lifetime but every year he gave a cane to the Burton Cotton Gin Museum for the festival. He gave a cane to all

the community service organizations, Burton Lions, the fire department. So at their annual event, auction, Oliver Whitener came, "ball in the cage," the big boom, boom. He raised over $100,000 in his lifetime from the auctions from these canes. Well while we say the "cane tradition," when he passed in 2005, it was in May of 2005 we had just had the Cotton Gin Festival, the cane… he passed and in 2006 we're getting ready for the Burton Cotton Gin Festival, "Oh how sad we won't…you know…we love Mr. Whitener he was a dear, dear man… we won't get a cane this year." Well in the mail comes this long card board box that we had no idea what was in it but the address on it said: 123 Cotton Field Way, Houston, Texas; addressed to us. So we open it and as I'm pulling out this encased in an old pillow case I thought someone had donated an Oliver Whitener cane that he had given to them. "I'll give this to you to auction." Unbelievable and it's the mystery person. We still to this day do not know who this person is but there was a letter enclosed with this cane. Very much like Oliver Whitener but very I'll use the word fu fu. It was very detailed and ornate and different types of wood put together with… oh goodness sake connections.

JM: Yeah a joint I don't know what it is called.

LR: Oh they call it the impossible joint, dovetail. Impossible dovetail joint. Two separate woods but the bottom line was the letter said, "In honor of Oliver Whitener's tradition I would like to continue this" and whoever it is it could be male, female...

JM: We don't know.

LR: We still don't know but they the cane for the festival of 2006, barn dance of 2006, festival of 2007, barn dance 2007, festival 2008… five mystery canes and they had raised over $10,000 those five canes. It's… I'm sure it's over that… well over that.

JM: Well over that.

LR: For auction.

JM: But each cane is unique.

LR: Different woods.

JM: Different woods and in the handle there is the coin that's…

LR: The first one was 1914 because that's the year the gin opened. The second one, 1915, every year it's the New Year so…

JM: We still don't know who it is.

LR: Whoever it is loves the Cotton Gin Museum.

End of Tape 1, side 2

AB: Can you tell me about your annual Cotton Gin Festival and what goes on during that time?

LR: The festival brings in to this little sleepy community 7,500 to 10,000 folks over a three day weekend. Our festival began in 1990, again, with the profits to raise money to restore that Bessemer engine and that tradition, we've had so much fun we just keep doing it. The volunteers, I mentioned, they just come out of the woodworks to help to make it happen. At the festival on Friday we typically have some really _____ (1.0) on Saturday we kick off with the parade down main street and churches, organizations all _____ large parade tractors and so forth. There's _____ demonstration, weaving, spinning, carving, etc. pottery, of course gin tours and of course our historic ginning and baling of that historic bale. Tractor pull, tractor engine shows.

JM: Antique cars.

LR: Yeah that's right antique cars and engines, petting zoo for the kid, the barnyard, craft, food; I mean its 9 acres. We say its 9 acres of wonderful that's what we say.

JM: Then that evening we also have some very high class entertainment. We spend a lot of money; that brings in a lot of people.

LR: Folks come for the entertainment. You know families come pretty much during the day for all of the heritage and so forth. The night come brings in a lot of folks from Houston, Austin, San Antonio because of the big names.

JM: Then Sunday is the free day. We still have entertainment but you can come in for free.

LR: Everything we had on Saturday except there is no parade and there's no baling of the cotton. We decided to… we offer an advanced ticket for the whole weekend, kind of a package deal. But again one of those things you say, "No charge on Sunday, just come and enjoy yourself."

AB: What other fundraisers do you have?

LR: Well the only other fundraiser would really be as an event would be the barn dance. Last year was Jerry's first barn dance and we survived. We had an auction.

JM: We have a live auction, a silent auction. We have a gourmet dinner that we serve. We have entertainment. Last year… the previous years they have been at _____ (3.6) Historic Hall.

LR: We've outgrown that.

JM: We've outgrown that. We've got too many people showing up for it. So now this coming year we moved to a new facility, The Big Red Barn…

LR: The Big Red Barn.

JM: Between Burton and _____ (4.0).

LR: About five and a half miles outside of the Burton near 237.

JM: But it will be still be the big blow out. It's a time when folks can come in and have a good time, have a good meal and dance…

LR: And door prizes. We say, "Texas sized door prizes." This year we are giving away trips whether cruises…it's …

JM: We're working on it.

LR: We are still in the planning stages.

JM: In the past we've given away a truck.

AB: I'm coming to this!

LR: Oh yes it will be fun. It's really a lot of fun it truly is.

JM: Well let us know we'll get you a ticket.

AB: How often is this museum visited; weekly estimate?

JM: A lot of it depends on the time of the year. Our average attendance is around 10,000.

LR: Right we are also a visitors center for Texas DOT [Department of Transportation] and so we have to keep very accurate documentation and because we get the Texas State travel guide and so forth. Yeah, average annual… plus with the festival if we pulled that out of the equation, in the past we've been keeping records now since 2005 and we average about 3,000 signed guests but we quickly learned, Jerry's kept our clicker and we have learned that not everybody signs the guest book.

JM: It's about double. So I would say we probably have a good 6,000 if not a little more every year now.

LR: But we are growing.

JM: The spring and the fall seems to be… especially the spring seems to be a heavy time. I mean that the tours that we give here… almost daily.

LR: And they are coming to see, not only the cotton museum but the bluebonnets. Kind of while we are out in about… and of course it doesn't hurt that Blue Bell Creamery is our neighbor, 12 miles down the road and we love to partner with Blue Bell, they are one of our big sponsors at our Cotton Gin Festival. So there is that camaraderie that we have. We are also a member of Walker County Chamber of Commerce and the Round Top Chamber of Commerce. So we do want to keep our feelers out where we can partner with other organizations and businesses, bed and breakfasts. You know tourism is a big economy.

AB: What do you think the future holds for this museum?

LR: I think it's bright.

JM: I think it's pretty bright.

LR: We are excited.

JM: The simple fact that we are a one of a kind museum right now. We are the only cotton gin museum in the United States so we have something very unique here. Most other cotton museums don't have. We have a cotton gin and it is a functioning cotton gin. That is something that not everybody has a chance to see. As that word gets out and more and more people understand what we are, where we are and who we are then we are going to grow and get more and more people.

LR: Staffing needs, it's going to grow…

JM: As that happens, that's one of the reasons we need to expand now. To get that big advantage, to get more staff on board because there are needs and demands out there that need to be met.

LR: Another issue and it's just one of those light bulb moments I always try and… communication. The more guests we have. Those that have needs for Spanish speaking for French, for German that we would have maybe lined up interpreters or having in motion, we mentioned the little walking cassette things: press and it tells you. Maybe we could have: press here for Spanish, press here for whatever the need would be.

JM: I think in a nutshell the future is real bright for us simply because of our uniqueness. So I anticipate in the next five years all sort of things happening.

LR: In six years, in the year 2014 is our 100th birthday. I am so pumped for where we are going to be at that 100th birthday. Between us, the ideas just flow and just having the time to make them all happen. Because you know I have family, Jerry has family. Other responsibilities other than the museum but I say this all the time, it just feels… it doesn't feel right to get paid for doing something you love to do so much. But it is a joy. There is never a dull moment like, "Oh what are you going to do today?" There is always, oh gosh there's never enough time to finish this and you have to get on to that.

AB: I'd like to discuss your personal backgrounds and what first sparked your interests in the museum field?

JM: Me? Okay. Well actually I have a Masters degree in museum science from Texas Tech University. I was in, graduated in 1977, I was in the first graduate class for museum studies in the United States. A lot of my friends, in fact, the director at the Star of the Republic and Houston _____ (10.0) and I were school mates. So I have been

working in museums for a very long time since 1977. I have worked for the National Heritage Center in Lubbock as a administrator of _____ (10.2) and I was curator for the Confederate Air Force Museum in Harlington. I was an exhibit designer at the _____ International Museum in Harlington, for seven years. I was a site director at the Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston County Historical Museum in Galveston. Briefly I was curator on the Battleship Texas. I was executive director to Texas Maritime Museum in Rockfort. Then I got out of the museum business for about 15 years. I worked as an inventory specialist for Baker Hughes, in Houston. Found out that being a curator and an inventory person is pretty much the same thing. You ask the same questions: what is it, where is it and how much is it worth? Now I'm here and I live right now the road in _____ and _____ is right next door.

AB: What advice can you offer students such as myself to build up experience because I know I get nervous sometimes when I look at applications or job posting and I'm like, "I am so under-qualified for these jobs!"

JM: Well one thing to remember about what I've discovered too, about these job applications: they want you to do everything for nothing and that tends to be not possible. Volunteer places. You know; be a volunteer someplace where you can get your hands on doing exhibit work or work with collection management. You will be surprised there's not a museum in existence that doesn't hunger for volunteers. That is where you are going to get experience. Don't shoot… a lot of people say, "Shoot for the moon." I don't necessarily believe that. You need to start small and work your way up. So sometimes these little heritage societies have their own museums they are dying for

someone with some professional input that can come in and help so that would be my recommendation for you.

AB: What about your background experience Ms. Russell?

LR: For myself I went three years at the University of Houston with a major in physical education and then I pursued dental hygienist work in that field and I was an orthodontist assistant for fourteen years. Then… I love to teach and I married and Tommy and I moved to Burton and we started our family. I had the opportunity to be a substitute teacher. You know first you volunteer, PTA… then they say, "You are so good how would you like to be one of our?" So, "Sure." I joined the substitute teaching team and I did that for about 11 years and then they hired me as the reading teacher and I did that for four years. In the middle of all that, back in 1990 I was approached, "We're having a festival and how would you like to be in charge of contests?" And with that this was the very first Burton Cotton Gin Festival and, never having done anything like that before, but I'll give it my best shot, two small children. We did a yard display contest, a pie eating contest and a seed pulling contest, a quilt block contest… that's where all this came from and each year I kept coming back. And the experience, like Jerry said, start by volunteering. The experience, I made signs, I love art work, that creative side of me. As the years went by with all that I had mentioned before I got off of teaching at the school for Burton ISD after those four years. My group, they all passed their Texas Primary Reading Inventory which was a new thing going on. As it turned out I opened the paper there was an ad for an administrative assistant at the Burton Cotton Gin Museum. "Oh I love the museum this would be wonderful!" So that for me, five years ago started and that progressed into museum administrator and just this past August when

the past director retired, I became the new director. I love it. I love everything about it. I love meeting the people, just that camaraderie with our guests, the challenges. I mean even though there is many challenges that we face, we come through with… we feel an accomplishment. Again, everything that we are successful, you are a step closer to the goal that we have set for the museum.

AB: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview?

JM: Come visit!

LR: That's what I would say and thank you for this opportunity to share with the folks that are privileged to this information; that right in their own backyard. You know a lot of folks feel like they have to travel across the world to go see the history and so forth. There is a lot right here in Texas, right in our own backyard.

JM: The saying I like, "History is at your doorstep." We're right here.

LR: To share with the guests that when they leave here they feel they have had a fun time learning about cotton that they have a deeper appreciation of all the people that made this happen, our ancestors, the heritage, the legacy and Jerry and I just want to keep history alive here at the Burton Cotton Gin Museum and again thank you for the opportunity.

AB: Well thank you so much and I can't wait to get home and plant my cotton seed and see what comes up! Thank you guys.

End of Interview