

## FIELD NOTES – BARBARA WOOTEN

Interviewee: Barbara Wooten

Interviewer: Priscilla Martinez

Interview date: June 2, 2011

Location: Houston County Historical Commission Conference Room  
Crockett, Houston County, Texas

Length:

THE INTERVIEWEE. Barbara Wooten both grew up on a farm and manages a ranch in Houston County. Wooten's family has historically owned land in Houston County for over a hundred years. Wooten, from the start, Kay Goldstein was both a student activist and summer employee of the Campus Y during her time at UNC-Chapel Hill from 1967-1971. Goldstein was especially active in the Cafeteria Worker's Strike of 1969 and the Women's Rights struggle. She was in one of the earliest classes of women admitted to the university for all four years of undergraduate education. She became especially close to Anne Queen, the renowned director of the Y. She also met her husband, Buck Goldstein, through her involvement with the Campus Y. Her careers have included practicing psychotherapy, founding and directing a food business in Atlanta, GA, and teaching spiritual meditation in the triangle area of North Carolina.

THE INTERVIEWER. Priscilla Martinez is an American Studies graduate student at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. This interview is part of the project, *Breaking New Ground: A History of African-American Farmers Since the Civil War*, of which Priscilla was one of twelve students chosen to conduct interviews in the South. Priscilla conducted interviews exclusively in Texas, and her main concentration for this project was in Central and Southeast Texas.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview was conducted at the Houston County Historical Commission conference room in the courthouse annex in Crockett, Texas. The conference room in actuality was more of a staff lounge, which proved a problem as the interviews dragged on into the lunch hour. Doors could be heard opening and closing throughout the interview. Barbara Wooten was interested in the interviewing process and came very well prepared with handouts concerning her ranch. Wooten was very knowledgeable on farming and ranching operations in and around Houston County. The

interview in content flew freely with no awkward pauses. It was a great interview and very informative concerning this particular research topic.

## **TAPE LOG – BARBARA WOOTEN**

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Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

### TAPE INDEX

Time            Topic

[Digital Recording, Starts at Beginning]

#### Track 1

0:01	Introduction
1:20	Background information
3:00	Legacy of land ownership
4:31	Maternal land ownership in Pleasant Hill and Smith Grove purchased after slavery.
5:30	Grandfather had acquired land in Fodice, Texas and then moved to the Thankful community and purchased land from his father-in-law, whom had purchased land in 1878 from a white man.
6:10	Fifty acres of the land have been in continuous agricultural use since 1887

- 6:40 Wooten begins to discuss the types of crops and other types of products grown on the land.
- 7:45 The Wooten family now owns 300 plus acres. Wooten clarifies further on how her families' land ownership has evolved since 1887.
- 9:37 Wooten discusses the house she was raised in and reflects on her childhood.
- 10:19 Wooten's family employed black sharecroppers and also lived in a sharecropper's house.
- 11:36 Wooten's family was the first in the community to contract contractors to build their second home.
- 13:25 Wooten and her family currently lives on the land inherited from her parents who purchased the land from her maternal grandparents.
- 13:49 Wooten begins to discuss her surrounding community, Thankful community, growing up, which centered around the school and the church.
- 15:11 Wooten discusses in more detail the segregated school she attended.
- 15:58 Wooten describes the different churches in her community.
- 16:58 Wooten describes the segregated school she attended as well as the segregated 4-H club and FFA. Wooten discusses the rate of integration in the Lovelady school district.
- 19:00 Wooten discusses her community's and her family's economic situation. Wooten describes her family as either "teachers, farmers, or preachers".
- 20:00 The children worked the farm, and then when they came of school age, others were hired to pick the cotton in their stead.
- 20:47 "Cotton was king then the cattle came later."
- 22:22 Grandfather had sharecroppers on his property. Wooten then continues to speak of her parents and their relationship to those who worked their land.
- 24:33 Wooten's great uncle hired migrant workers from Mexico to work his 1,000 acres.
- 26:00 Why did your parents continue to farm versus going to the city?
- 26:30 "...they aren't making anymore and you don't sell your land."
- 26:56 "I didn't go to school to run away from the farm, I went to school to make money so that I could come back to the farm."

- 27:28 How did you establish credit?
- 28:36 Wooten discusses minority land loss.
- 29:00 Wooten discusses the uniqueness of her community as a self sufficient and independent.
- Track 2
- 0:01 Wooten continues describing her community and a particular store located in Fodice owned by the Freeman family.
- 2:00 Wooten discusses selling off mineral rights.
- 4:55 How did you market your crop?
- 5:40 Wooten discusses taking her cotton to be sold and experiencing some form of discrimination.
- 7:08 You have to have a large amount of land to be profitable to participate in row crops.
- 7:44 Wooten discusses competing farms in the area.
- 8:45 Wooten discusses the infamous Merry Farm, a 'plantation' even after slavery.
- 9:39 Did being a land owner protect you from racial violence and discrimination?
- 10:37 Grandmother was killed on the highway, and the white funeral home refused to pick her up. The black funeral home had to go get her.
- 11:32 Wooten discusses racial tensions in Crockett and the surrounding areas.
- 12:00 Was there any tension between sharecroppers and land owners within the black community itself?
- 14:00 Wooten discusses the generational gap between her generation and her parents' generation in relation to the land.
- 15:45 Wooten elaborates a little on managing the farm.
- 16:30 Wooten expresses her love of the county and a respect for her familial roots.
- 17:20 What does land owning mean to your family?
- 18:50 Land is home.

- 19:10 Wooten discusses those in the community who return to the land despite differences in lifestyles.
- 20:40 What did your mother do around the farm?
- 21:27 Wooten discusses her mother as a home engineer.
- 23:50 Wooten's mother was adamant that her children go to school and receive an education.
- 25:00 Wooten discusses the educational background of her family and her community.

### Track 3

- 0:30 Wooten reflects on her years in college and being able to secure a work study job. She also reflects on her family's educational achievements.
- 2:34 Wooten reflects on her career as a mechanical engineer. She also reflects on moving from the south to the north. Wooten worked with General Electric.
- 4:30 Wooten moved back to Texas in 1975. She also reflects on the rate of integration in Lovelady and then in Beaumont. Wooten also reflects on her time in Beaumont as a mechanical engineer.
- 6:05 Wooten believes that most of the discrimination she felt in Beaumont stemmed from her being a woman rather than being black. Wooten then further reflects on her occupational experience in Beaumont as a mechanical consultant.
- 10:39 Wooten had always planned on moving back to her families land.
- 10:55 Wooten reflects on the changes in the community over time. One of the major differences is the shift from cotton to cattle and hay. Paradigm shifts in farming began in 1969.
- 13:26 What was your father's day to day during the height of his row cropping operations? These included cotton, corn, and peas.
- 15:13 Wooten transitions into her present day-to-day operations on the ranch.
- 16:15 Wooten's father worked for the extension service.
- 16:40 Wooten's family still hires day laborers for more labor intensive operations like building fences.
- 17:25 What role did your family play in the community?

- 18:55 Wooten's uncle was the first black county commissioner in Houston County.
- 19:42 The Wooten's are the largest black landowners in Houston County.
- 21:10 Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers is a county organization that encourages black farmer ownership.

#### Track 4

- 0:30 What role did your family play in the community politically?
- 4:00 Wooten discusses small town politics in Lovelady.
- 4:30 Wooten reflects further on race relations in her community growing up.
- 6:11 Were there any risks associated with being black land owners in your community?... "people respect property owners."
- 8:10 Wooten reflects on relations with poor black farmers.
- 9:10 Did you every hear about any local lynching or racial violence? Wooten reflects on childhood stories concerning the Merry Farm, presently the Seven J, which were told to her during her school years.
- 14:55 Wooten reflects on the two waves of the Great Migration in the 1940's and 1960's.
- 15:50 Wooten reflects on the boll weevil and insecticides.
- 17:30 Wooten reflects on New Deal policies.
- 18:29 Wooten discusses FHA loans in her community.
- 19:22 Wooten reflects on World War II.
- 21:30 What kind of services did your father provide as a county extension officer?
- 22:33 What do you remember about your participation in 4-H and Future Home Makers of America?
- 23:35 Was your mother involved in home demonstrations?
- 24:10 What kind of farm equipment did you have on the farm?
- 25:00 How did you and your family adjust to shifting technologies?
- 27:58 Did you make your own clothes?

28:19 How has your ranching operations changed or improved from those of your father?

29:40 What is the significance of land owning to you for future generations?

Track 5

1:00 What legacy do you want to leave to future generations regarding their land owning heritage?

1:56 What do you want future generations to know about what farming and ranching meant to you?

2:38 What words of wisdom would you give to future African-American farm owners?

## **ABSTRACT – BARBARA WOOTEN**

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Location: Houston County Historical Commission Conference Room  
Crockett, Houston County, Texas

Length:

Substantively, this interview was organized around several themes, all connected to farming and ranching in Texas: community life in Fodice, Lovelady, and Thankful communities Houston County, near Crockett, Texas; segregation and integration in the Thankful community; large-scale farming operations in Houston County; and changing paradigms in farming and ranching methods in Houston County over several decades. Topics include: historic land ownership, community life in rural Houston County, segregation in Thankful community and the rate of integration, church leadership within rural settings, minority-to-minority race relations concerning farming in Houston County, importance of education in the Thankful Community, gender relations in the late 21st Century, day-to-day farming and ranching operations, benefits of land ownership, FHA loans, and the importance of land ownership within families.