

Jay B Starkey, Jr.

28 June 2007

Interviewer: Edward Woodward

Jay B Starkey, Jr. was born October 19, 1935 in St. Petersburg. He recalled his earliest memories growing up on the Ulmerton Ranch, which his father co-owned with Dave Cunningham (Tracks 1 and 6). His family lived in a one-room frame house (Track 1). An outhouse was their bathroom. Starkey recalled his father bathing in a wash tub on the porch "just singing and having more fun, he was just happy as he could be being out there." Before this time Starkey's father had quit a postal service job to pursue farming.

As soon as Starkey could sit up, his dad put him on a horse (Track 2). He learned to ride on a stubborn pony that once kicked him. "I just dreaded riding that thing," said Starkey. Other rides came on the fender of his father's car. "In those days cars had fenders with headlights sitting on them and I would sit on the fender straddling the headlight and the time my sister was home she would go too, and that was some of the most beautiful memories riding in the cool of the evening," Starkey said. "We didn't have air conditioning then ... in the summertime that was the best way to cool off to ride across the pasture and look at the cows and listen to the outdoors."

Quail were abundant on the ranch. As were rattle snakes, which Starkey's mother warned him to be aware of. "That part of Pinellas County was notorious for the amount of rattle snakes and other kind of snakes, too," Starkey recalled. During the fifth or sixth grade, Starkey and some friends found his dog snake bitten. They fashioned a stretcher from part of a grove ladder and one of their shirts to transport the dog, which died later that night (Tracks 2 and 3).

Growing up, Starkey worked on the ranch (Track 3). On weekends he helped drive hogs from their pins to scales where they were weighed and sorted. A truck would arrive on Monday morning to haul the hogs away to market and to be slaughtered. Starkey described how they fed the hogs (Track 4). Their trucks collected food from hotels and restaurants in St. Petersburg and Clearwater. The food was transported back to the ranch in cans, then dumped in a feeding area with concrete floors where the hogs fed. The area would be hosed down the next day, then the process repeated. Starkey estimated they fed about 10,000 hogs a year, at one point.

There were five tenement houses on the ranch. Starkey recalled one family in particular, the Cannons (**sp?**) from Cairo, Georgia, whose children were his playmates (Track 5). In 1950, the ranch converted from hogs to cattle for several reasons, Starkey explained: the state required garbage feeding operations to cook the garbage for health reasons, and growth in Florida and competitive salaries made keeping labor difficult. Starkey's duties changed to rounding up cattle and working in cow pens.

After high school, Starkey attended the University of Florida to learn more about cattle ranching and agriculture (Track 6). While Starkey was in college, his father and Dave Cunningham sold the Ulmerton Ranch (Track 7). After college, Starkey returned to work

on the Pasco County Ranch that his dad had bought with Dave, Ernest (sp?) and Howard Cunningham in the 1930s (Tracks 6 and 8). Starkey's father would eventually have sole ownership of the ranch (Track 7).

When Starkey's father and partners bought the ranch, there were no improvements, Starkey said (Track 8). Working with others, Starkey cleared land for pasture, put in an irrigation system, bought cattle in South Florida to increase their herd, built fencing and treated pastures and cattle for pests. "One thing I always liked about the cattle operation is it was not repetitious," Starkey said. They mixed feed, checked on cows birthing in the winter, weaned calves in the fall, and made and put out hay (Tracks 8 and 9). Being outdoors, Starkey noticed the subtle seasonal changes: by fall, the light of the sun moving south; watching cold fronts arrive in the winter; thunderstorms building in the summer; tree growth and leaf color. "You don't have dramatic change here," Starkey said. "But there's enough difference if you're observant you can feel it (Track 9)." A train passing late morning meant it was twenty minutes till noon (Track 10). Planting plots for wild turkey a couple of miles deep in the woods, Starkey and another worker knew it was time to head back to the house for lunch.

When Starkey married his wife Marsha, they lived on the Pasco ranch in the frame house of his childhood (Track 17). Four children followed (Track 10). They were active in a New Port Richey church, had chores, maintained a vegetable garden, and explored the ranch by motor bike, among other activities (Track 11).

Throughout the years, Starkey has had other agricultural ventures to supplement cattle ranching (Tracks 11, 12, 13 and 16). He designed, made and sold a bail dumper and herbicide applicator (Track 11 and 12). In the 1960s he and his father had about 60 acres of citrus groves on the west boundary of the ranch (Track 13). They planted Hamlin and Valencia oranges, Starkey recalled. They hired a crew to pick the oranges and sold them to a citrus co-op in Elfers. The grove survived a few freezes, but not one in 1970, recalled Starkey. They cleared the land, converting it to improved pasture. In the early 1990s Starkey planted a 20 to 30 acre tree farm that included oak, ligustrum, cypress, pine, and magnolia trees, among others (Track 16 and 17). However, several problems doomed the venture, among them a slow down in the construction industry and deer eating the trees, Starkey said.

Starkey also created a now defunct eco-tour of the ranch known as Flatwoods Adventure (Track 18). The tour attracted a variety of tourists and locals: Europeans, South Americans, Midwest farmers, and groups of students, one a middle school class studying the novel *A Land Remembered* (Tracks 18 and 19). Starkey has other interests as well. He's a welder and woodworker, transforming heart pine and heart cypress - what he calls vintage wood - into pieces such as tables or lamps that showcase the wood's beauty (Track 18). He's a lifelong musician who plays the saxophone and sang in a gospel quartet (Tracks 19 and 20). Since 1989, Starkey has been a member of the Master Chorale, which sings with the Florida Orchestra (Track 20).

