In his mid-teens or perhaps even sooner Aaron Austin Godfrey of Primera became a young man possessed. His singular pursuit became gathering and collecting any and all information connected with railroading. And this was not only with the major long lines and the often obscure short lines but also with the numerous municipal street railroads that we know more commonly as trolleys. Aaron personified what we currently term a "railfan."

His parents certainly encouraged his avocation, especially his longtime educator mother. In 1972 the old Primera Wilson School and its additions were torn down to make room for the construction of a new school complex. Aaron's mother, Elaine Aaron Godfrey, saved the cornerstones of both the 1915 building and the 1926 addition. The cornerstones are now exhibited in the new Wilson School. Miss Aaron, at age 23, had come to Primera from Alabama in 1936 to teach at the school. In 1938 she was to marry Murray Godfrey, son of local residents.

On 4/9/55 the Town of Primera was incorporated. Murray Godfrey was a leader in bringing this about. No small concern was avoiding what would be perceived as higher taxes if the community was absorbed by Harlingen. Mr. Godfrey, a farmer who pioneered the cultivation of okra in the Valley, also had served the community 12 years as tax assessor/collector for the Wilson Tract Independent School District.

Aaron was an honor student at Harlingen High School and was graduated in 1959. He then was accepted at Princeton University in New Jersey. His interests there in the early 1960s lay in history and economics.

The information he sought from many sources was about operating equipment, routes, schedules, finances, company histories and almost anything related to railroading. En route he became an accomplished typist drafting long letters with many questions addressed to railroad companies, their executives, and their affiliates. Surprisingly he almost always received detailed replies and/or direction to other available sources. The railroad companies were, in the mid-1950s, quite solicitous of potential customers, future employees, and general public relations. Whether he worked mowing lawns, some other jobs that a teenager could handle, or just had sympathetic parents is unknown, but his postage bill was considerable.

Even more costly was his purchases of books dealing with railroad subjects. Where he learned of them and how, over time, he acquired so many is lost in time. He did however amass a specialized collection that ranged over a wide field and documented many lines that would disappear over the decades due to financial factors or consolidations. These also included private lines such as existed for the timber industry and for sugarcane plantations.

In an unfortunate vehicle accident just west of Santa Rosa, Mr. Murray and his son were killed in July 1964 as their pickup pulling a trailer of okra was in a collision with another vehicle. Twenty-two year old Aaron was at home before returning to his second year studies at the Harvard University Law School. Both these Presbyterians were buried in the Combes Cemetery.
After Aaron's death his family was thoughtful enough to donate his extensive railroading collection to the Harlingen Public Library. Because of the rarity of most of the collection it is available for reading-only in the library. On the second floor is a stack dedicated solely to Aaron's books. Under the Dewey decimal number 385.0973 are to be found over 230 books plus a large number of railroad magazines and bulletins. Supplementing this one-of-a-kind collection are two file drawers in the Archive Room of the library. In them are alphabetized file folders containing information, acquired by Godfrey, on railroads from the Alaska Railways to the Western Pacific. Thirty-four of these have detailed expository letters and pamphlets, while 32 have annual reports, and 10 deal with municipal systems. To his own material have been added supplemental information on Lower Rio Grande Valley railroads and their histories. These include articles on the Arroyo Colorado railroad bridges, Sam Robertson's "Spiderweb" Railroad, and a special booklet by A.A. Champion that recounts the history of the Valley's first railroad – General Sheridan's Civil War military railroad connecting the U.S. Army's Brazos Island depot with the Rio Grande. In addition this booklet also provides details on the Rio Grande Railroad Company that built and operated a narrow gage line between Brownsville and Point Isabel. It was the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway that brought the Valley into the country's blossoming 20th Century economy. Several books, such as "Uriah Lott" and "Gringo Builders" by the prolific James Allhands, a railroad engineer with a knack for documenting railroad history, provide the most detailed information on this important enterprise. Any individual interested in railroading will find these sources a wealth of inviting information and the Harlingen Library is fortunate that it was the recipient of such a largesse.