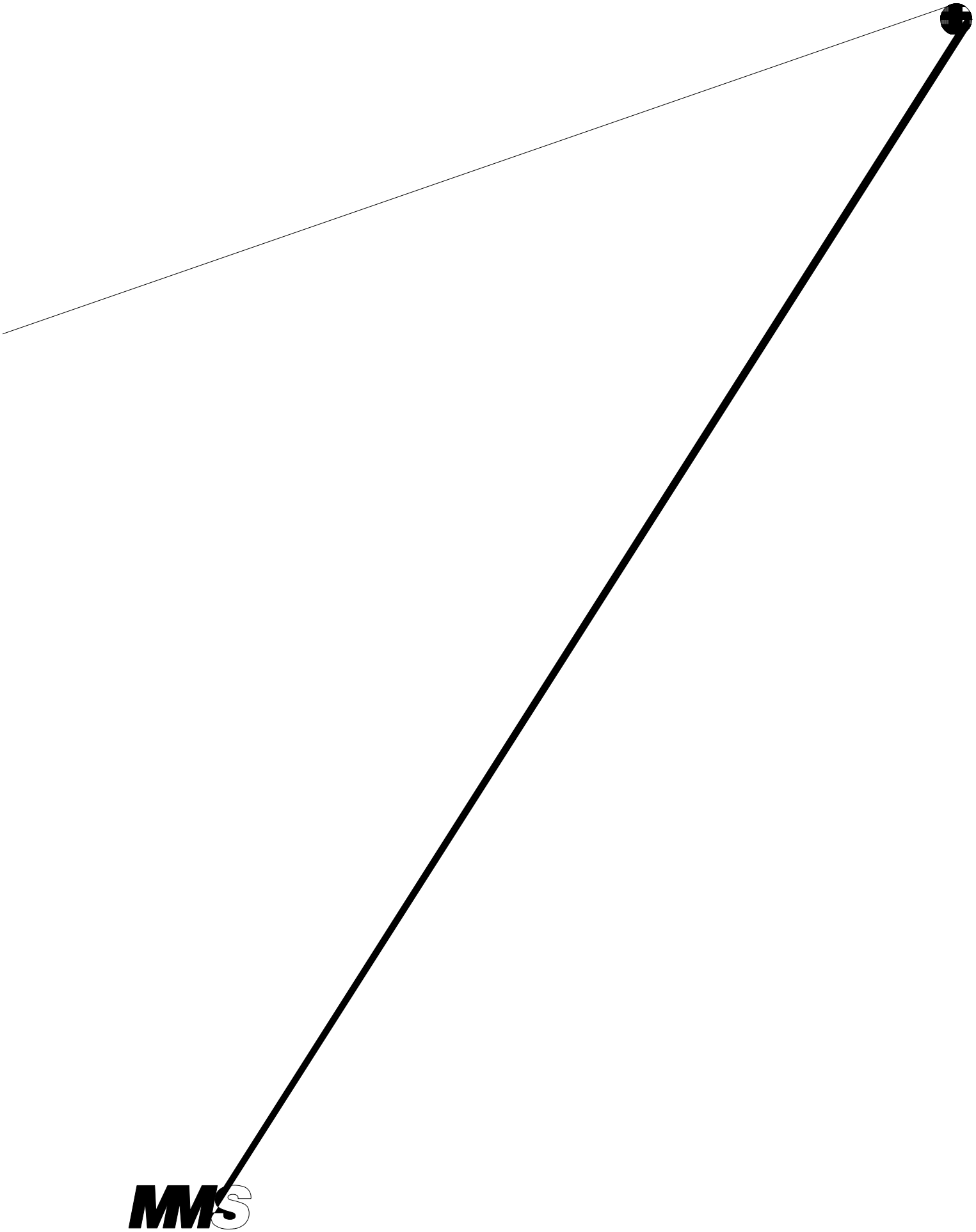

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History of the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry in Southern Louisiana

Interim Report

Volume II: Bayou Lafourche – An Oral History of the Development of the Oil and Gas Industry

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1. Introduction: The Early Years along Bayou Lafourche

1.1. Chester Cheramie (March 4, 2002; Golden Meadow, LA)

Born in Golden Meadow in 1923, Chester Cheramie was one of seven siblings in a trapping and fishing family. He graduated from high school, spent three and a half years in the Navy, then returned to Golden Meadow and worked as a roustabout for several years. His father-in-law gave him a barroom, which Chester operated for fifteen years before going to work for Cheramie Brothers' boat company. He then worked in the office, doing mainly personnel, purchasing, and promotional work, for Nolte Theriot's boat company. After 26 years at that job, he retired at age 74. One of his sons has a Ph.D. and directs the CODOFIL program (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana) out of Lafayette. CODOFIL was created by the Louisiana State Legislature in 1968 at the behest of several Lafayette-based cultural activists, and has worked to preserve and revive Cajun traditions and reintroduce French teaching in the public schools of south Louisiana. Chester and many other residents of south Lafourche carry painful memories of their school days where they were punished for speaking French. The state's Board of Education banned the use of that language in public classrooms in 1916, and the Constitution of 1921 ratified the prohibition.

I met Chester at the Fête de cochon in Cut Off in March, 2002. This boucherie (hog slaughtering) is held annually, reproducing a pattern whereby, prior to refrigeration, families would periodically butcher a pig and prepare the meat and internal organs for consumption by extended families and neighbors. At this fête, an Americorps student from up the bayou had the honor of dispatching the pig. The occasion is hosted and prepared by a group of men from south Lafourche, each allowed to invite their families and two guests. When I returned to the fête in March of 2003, Chester Cheramie had passed away. His widow was given a plaque commemorating Chester's activities with the group.

My name is Chester Cheramie from Golden Meadow, Louisiana. I was born in 1923, and finished school in Golden Meadow High School. After school I joined the navy and spent three and half years in the Navy. I returned to my home in 1945. First job I had was working in the oil field, roughnecking, and did that for about two years there I went into the barroom business that my father-in-law gave me and I stayed there about fifteen years. From there I went to work for the Cheramie Brothers in the boat business and my job was mostly work in the office but my

So you've been working…participating in this boucherie for a long time?

Around 27 years we've been having this thing. And it first started…there was 15 of us. Fifteen guys got together and just chipped in a couple of bucks then. We'd have one pig and kill it and do everything. We would just bring our families. And then it got to growing. It went from fifteen to twenty. From twenty it went up another five. As of right now we've got 50 members. And that costs us, you know, 50 dollars a year. If you want to join we've got a waiting list. We cut it to 50 because I mean we could have 100 guys but the more trouble. So every member can invite two guests. And we've got enough people to do all the work. Saturday morning you saw all the work was done. A lot of help. I didn't do nothing, me. Not much. So. That's the way it goes, you know? I am the only original left that's still active. They were just a bunch of guys that used to play golf together and they got an idea.. They said, "what are we goin' to do in the winter time?" So that's how the whole thing started. So you know, just a bunch of friends and their wives and kids. That's it. And there word got around and everybody wanted to get in. For a long time we stayed at fifteen till all of a sudden some of the original guys dropped out, you know. Then we got some new people come in then they'd drop out all down the line that's where it used to be. This past year that one guy that dropped out and we got a list a mile long so we picked up another guy. So that's the way we go. We pick the first on the list. You don't vote or nothing. Most of these guys are young fellas and want to work. So an old guy like me steps back and lets them do the work. That's about the story about that thing.

In the old days, every family, now I am talking years ago, in those days you did not have any refrigeration and things like that. And the meat was scarce. You did not have the money to buy. So what people would do…they'd make a hog pen. And then they/d feed the little bitty hog with all the trash throughout the year. Fatten him up you know, one or two of them. And then all in the neighborhood they'd come and kill the pig. Cut it all up. And what they do… as you probably saw yesterday. All that grease. When you put all that grease and lard in there it is just like cooking oil. So they put the meat in it. Cut the thing in slabs and put it in a big tin can. Put the meat in there. To keep it preserved. So during the year, you needed some meat you'd go and take one piece. Cooking it up and then you'd take the lard, make a fire, and the grease would fall in the pan and you'd save it and cook with that. So like that you would not lose nothing. So that's how they all started. Everybody on the bayou used to do that. That's how they would preserve the meat and have something to eat beside during the year. Besides having shrimp, crab, and fish and everything else. Now down in this part of the country, everybody got all the fish and shrimp and oysters they wanted but that was the only meat they had.

All the fisherman…you know everybody had a relative. Everybody is related down here anyhow. During the shrimp season and all they'd bring in sacks stuffed with shrimp and crab they'd give them a sack or two of potatoes and they'd give them some onion. Because they all had farms over there. So then they would exchange. They'd give them shrimp, crab, fish whatever and they'd give them all the vegetables, potatoes, and onions, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes all that stuff, you know? No body had money to…nobody had no money. I remember my daddy…when he would go trawling… They had one mother boat. They called it the mother boat. All the other boats catch all day long. They all bring their catch to the mother boat, when he had a load, he would come back to Golden Meadow to the shrimp shed and deliver those shrimp. Then they'd get so much a barrel, you know of shrimp. Every mother boat had a

company. And all of these companies had a grocery store. So you had to go yourself to the grocery store and everything was no money. There was no money exchanged. Everything was put on the books. And then two seasons. They had the May season. And they had the August season. Shrimp season. And after that then you go trappin' and all that. After the season, that's when they split the money. That's when you'd pay the grocery bill. Not only groceries, the grocer had clothes, hardware. Just like a supermarket today. So you had to go to that store and my daddy, the company worked for… so we couldn't go to the other store. There must have had 10-12 stores in Golden Meadow. You had to go to the store. You don't have a choice. People had no money. They had no money.

Were these company stores pretty honest with the people that they were working with?

Well, some of them were. Let's put it that way. Some of them were. Some were pretty honest. Like I said in the beginning, all these people like my dad and all these guys, they had no education. They never went to school. If you tell them their name they did not even know their name. They did not know how to read and write. And all those people that had those little stores and they had a little education. I mean, they knew how to read and use numbers and stuff like that but a guy like my dad and many, many others…they see their name and they did not know it was their name because they did

don't know how far back but the only thing that we had was radio. And must of the time we did not have one. If you had a radio you were lucky to have one. Now, these young kids today think that everyone was born with a television and car in their yard. And you tell them about some of these stories about how these people started in business and they don't believe you. All these people they were all fisherman. That's how they got started. And we survived. There was seven of us. There was seven kids. And my youngest sister died when she was seven years old from pneumonia. She was only seven. And my sister passed away about eight, ten years ago. She had a cancer. My brother, one brother, he passed away about eight, nine years ago from cancer. So we only have four of us left now. Mom and Daddy both passed away. So every time I look back and think how we survived all these years. And it made me wonder. Why are some of us still here and others are gone?

My brother went into the [oil] business. Well my brother started…he went into the service. Merchant Marine. And when he come out he went to work for Halliburton. He worked for Halliburton quite a few years. Like my daddy. My daddy worked in tug boats and all that. And he got interested in boats. Me, I never could get interested in boats. So after a few years with Schlumberger he decided him and one of his wife's brother, decided to go into the boat business. His partner had what was called a clipper. And that's how they got started. Like everybody else, he got started back at a bad time. Back in the '50s but they survived. And then he passed away about eight, nine years ago. Since then his son took over. Still got the company. Nine or ten boats now.

I worked in the boat industry all my life. As far as working on the boat I never did. I always worked in the office, or like I said, PR work stuff like that. Met a lot of people. After that anywhere you go you ask my name, the know me. So that's why I never got in boats I don't know, probably because I didn't know that much about it. All mechanical work. And I was in the Navy three and a half years so there was no reason I shouldn't have done it. But again as a kid I didn't like boats. My daddy wanted me to go in a boat as a kid and I hated it. Like I said, being seven kids. I am the oldest one out of seven. And the only one that went to finish high school because one of the reasons was because I didn't want to work in a boat with him so my mother insisted that I go to school. My sister and brother they went to school but they never did graduate. I am the only one that graduated. I wasn't always the sharpest one in the club but I got away with it. I enjoyed it, you know? So all these years and so far I have no regrets. Oh some of the things I have done I would not do again.

When I went to school, I didn't speak English pe

He graduated from Loyola. Somehow in other he got involved in CODOFIL program. So he went to France and studied t here for one year. At the University. And then he met his wife he and came back to LSU for a year. He went to law school for a year and then he found a girlfriend. Followed him here. They got married and she became his wife. She did not like it here at the time so they moved back to France. He stayed in France for seven years and then two of his kids was born over there. And then all of a sudden he started coming back home because…12 years ago. He came back about 12 years ago. And he got his masters. And then he got his doctorate degree two, three years ago at USL. Since then he's been in charge of CODOFIL program. He brings all these…he interview people from different countries speaking French that come over here. And they are trying to get the French back in the community. And, you know, the way he tells me in the Lafayette are they really got going for a long time. Lafourche Parish is kind of slow.

A lot of people are pushing it. I think it will take another year or two but eventually they'll get it. I think it is my generation that says that we did not talk to the kids in French. It is because we were brainwashed in going to school. So you lost a whole generation, you know, of French. I went to school starting seven years old. Six years old. When you are six years old you ain't know nothing anyhow and you are told you can't speak French you have to speak English. You get whipped or get some homework… How can you speak English if you mom and dad didn't know how to speak English? You know what I mean?

Most of [the teachers] were from outside. They all spoke English. They didn't speak French. All the teachers on my side they didn't speak French so if you did they didn't know what you were talking about. So this made it rough because if the teacher would have been speaking French, then it would not have been as bad... When you get around here someplace, someone talk in English, and then another guy starts talking French and then back to English. So it's just a habit, t sometimes you just get off track. And I guess this is why it made it so hard for us growing up. By that time, by the time we all got out of school and all that, the war broke out. And that's it. You came back home, and if everybody hadn't gone all over the country, French would have stayed. Follow me? Because myself and all the rest of the young men that went into the service, they came back and they all spoke English. So they came back home and all got married and started talking English. I think that's where we missed the boat. A lot of these guys that stayed home, they could talk French, you know what I am saying? We just missed the boat.

Were most of the kids from your generation drafted in the service?

Oh yeah. In this town here, I think it was about five guys that did not go into the service. The whole town. All got drafted or

Like when you say to a Coonass, there's a limit on the duck. Have you ever heard that expression? You know there's a limit to kill anything. You give him a rifle or a gun, that's all you can kill. One or two. There's your limit. So you'd better get rid of what you have left. It is just a saying we have that if you go hunting you got to limit the hunt. You know? The ducks. You can't kill more than four-five duck. He kills everything. That's why you see all these Coonasses going overseas, they couldn't just kill one Jap, they cleaned them all out. But it's just a saying we got down here.

1.2. Loulan Pitre (September 24, 2001; Cut Off, LA)

Loulan Pitre, Sr. lives with his wife, Emelia in a modest house along a lane on the Highway 1 side of the bayou in Cut Off. He still maintains a substantial vegetable garden down the lane and, like most of the people of the region, is an avid hunter. Now in his 80's, Loulan spent an arduous working life, first oystering with his father, then shrimping, then building and tearing down oil derricks, and finally, running crew boats for Chevron. Of the Pitre's four sons, one, Loulan, Jr., is attorney for Port Fourchon and a state legislator. Another, Glen, is a local historian and movie producer. Many of his films, including "Belizaire the Cajun" and "Huit Piastres et Demie/$8.50 a Barrel!" about the shrimp war along Bayou Lafourche in 1938, use local residents as extras. Several of the people interviewed were quite familiar with the notion of "consent forms," having signed Glen Pitre's release forms for his films.

In 1904, Loulan's father acquired a narrow tract of land, one-half arpent wide at its front along the bayou, going back 40 arpents into the marsh. The subsequent history of this tract is revealed in court documents surrounding a trespass suit Loulan brought against Tenneco Oil Company in 1976. La Terre Company had acquired the marshland adjacent to the back end of the Pitre property and began issuing trapping leases in 1927. In the late 1940's, the elder Pitre granted a right-of-way to the Lafourche Parish Police Jury for a drainage ditch at the rear of his property, 37 arpents from the front. Shortly thereafter, La Terre granted a right-of-way next to the

The Appeals Court ruled in 1980 that Pitre's act of removing the signs was sufficient to express his possession of the disputed property, and awarded him $1,500. Three different judges on the same court overturned this ruling in 1986. Loulan lost his claim to the three arpents of land in dispute but retained an abiding interest in the politics and geography of land in southern Louisiana.

I don't know if you know how the state appropriated all these marsh lands. They used to be known as overflow lands. Overflow lands, that's the keyword. When Louisiana became a state the federal government still had ownership of all the overflow lands. It covered just about half the state of Louisiana. So here, I think it's in 1947 [1849] the government of the United States donated all the overflow lands except what had been granted or not sold for taxes. A lot of people in the Civil War came in between and which left a lot of overflow land and naturally Louisiana… people were trapping on these lands. Trapping was the mainstay, there was no oil. Now trapping was big business, everybody is tra

Here comes these people in this oil company started giving six, seven, eight dollars a day. That's a fortune! They started to work, they started to work and it was hard work. They were earning that money. Putting those pipelines in the marsh all day long and no retirement plan – you couldn't do the work, you were out. And no union either, Texaco never had a union, never. But it was still just Texaco. The Gulf, the Gulf Oil Company was seismographing…in the water, in the lakes, all at once Gulf moves somewhere. They went out in the gulf -- Gulf Oil Company seismographic -- they knew oil was there. They just couldn't get to it, they didn't have the equipment. Texaco kept the lakes.

Now how did Texaco inherit all the water bottom? Nobody knew. After the war, marsh lands belonged to these racketeers. Some state representatives got some big slices of it, a big time lawyer, he got some big chunks. I says, "woah," I said "I'm going to go to Baton Rouge." No, no, let me tell you about how I found out about the marsh lands given away to these cats from Ohio or wherever. I says "let's go see." I've got enough of this down here, everybody's a trapper. They were still living then. Who'd they paid the leases to? "Oh, no we didn't pay the leases to anybody." How could I understand? I had gone through that deal, I knew they were trapping, the lease was not…they were getting short changed on their furs, overcharged for their groceries, the equipment. I says "let's go find out how Louisiana Land…." No, I went to go see my state representative. I says "just who is Louisiana Land?" I says "listen I can't go hunting."

his ear. He said "I can let you read it here but I can't let you take it out of here." I said, "no sir I want to take a copy." I says "it's public documents, I can have a copy." "Well, you can't have a copy. Sir, I got to go through channels to get a copy. Why don't you read it? You can know everything that's on it." I said, "let me read it." Better that than nothing. I read it; I start to see, Huey Long, Seymour White, Dick … all in the penitentiary, have all signed it. Given all the water bottoms to the… I have to read the agreement again, I think it said the signature was Huey Long. Huey signed it. And his buddy, they all went to prison and Huey got shot. I said, "Sir, I read it and I don't like what I see. So I need a copy." "I told you, you couldn't have a copy." "Sir, I need a copy or I'll have to subpoena you to give me a copy, public records." "Well let me go see." He disappears, a good 20 minutes, makes me wait like a doctor and I don't even know what's wrong, he makes me wait. I sat down, I was not concerned because I expected nothing. That was the same politician running the state so what could I expect. He came back he says "I'll let you have copy but just one copy." That's all I need. "Sir, I'll be r

nothing about LL&E. So I go to the levee board, and the levee boards ceded the land to Wisner and Dresser for 20 thousand dollars. But the levee board, they kept control of the improvements. In the first week they were on that they spent 20 thousand dollars to fix up Wisner and Dresser. So, it's a good start. I went to the levee board at Atchafalaya, but nobody… all these levee boards, they just organized levee boards as they went along. But at Atchafalaya, it was one of the first ones organized under the laws of the state. I went to the Atchafalaya office, boy they were mad as hornets in there. I said "I want to see the sale of the Atchafalaya Levee Board to Wisner and Dresser. I found out there that they were…" "Oh, what are you talking about?" So it's all public information, "I want to see the bill of sale from the levee board to Wisner and Dresser." "What bill of sale? It's not a bill of sale! They robbed, they robbed the levee board!" "Well, that's what I'm going to find out." There was one woman in there, "woah you're a mad man, who do you represent? I'm the executive secretary of the board and they want to fire me!" They had learned that somebody was digging in the record. That was me. I was looking for dead people who owned property. I had done some work. She says "they want to fire me!" I says, "you have a copy (I shouldn't have said that) of the bill of sale, of the levee board to Wisner and Dresser?" "Certainly do." "Can I have one?" "Certainly can!" Boy she was angry. She went and got me four sheets written by candlelight. All the legal terms didn't fit in there. The grammar was real bad. A quit claim! I get to the word quit claim, without recourse, and then the levee board agrees to pay for all legal costs! Thousands of people, you know, and you don't want to get in trouble with this lousy person whose been living 50-60 years and he's not on his land, he's on somebody else's. They gave me a copy. I could not believe what I read. I could see where they were holding the high ground because it was legal. This thing was legal so luo

Anyway Dresser cleans out all the cypress…there is nothing left for him. He sells his share. This is something he bought for 20 thousand dollars, the origin of the payment we can not locate, no receipt. He sells his share to Wisner, when we say "all," now all, when you say all in the bill of sale you better watch yourself. You can't come back and pick up your shot gun and hunt because you said all. There is no exception, all. For 12 million dollars! And this, I'm talking about 1920, 1918-1920. In 1918. I know what happened. Edward Wisner died. He died, he leaves everything to one daughter, his wife. I've got his will. I've got his succession papers so I know what he left, and all his holdings. But the taxes are not being paid and Mrs. Wisner hires a bunch of lawyers to take care of the payments, taxes. This is, this is, this is tragic. So they pay the taxes, it must've been a company – I was so angry when I was reading that, I don't remember the name…the lawyers pay the taxes. I don't know if you know the tax system in Louisiana, but you don't pay your taxes I'll go pay them for you for three years, that land is mine. I'll get title. That's the title that is hard to contest, almost impossible to contest. For three years, as long as I go pay my taxes the land is still mine. But Mrs. Wisner was having all kinds of problems, had a

a factory there that could process the shrimp and put them in cans. White shrimp. They would not trawl those brownies like we trawl. They would not trawl that at all. Did not have to. They had enough white shrimp. That's what I meant by in those days nobody would fish in bayous, small bays, duck ponds, whatever.

it would burn diesel. Most likely the boat had some 20-30-40 horsepower in those days. And like those bigger boats that would bring in the shrimp…you had something like Fairbank motors. You had 60 horsepower. That's how much horsepower they had in those days.

That boat there [along the street in Golden Meadow]… the *Petite Corporal* they called it. It was a boat like what you saw there. I know how to build little boats. I got two of them that I built… that I carved. And then my dad... when I was seven, eight years old, carved a little boat. I got it there. It is 60 somewhat years old. I still have it.

I heard you carve ducks too.

Oh yeah. I carve them. Now, something awful happened to me. You see…I took the feather. That's the real feather. I took the other one. I painted it. Somehow my uncle was on the porch right there and it was raining. I took the feather. Brought it there. Somewhere down the line look at what happened on to it right here. This was all together. Now, it's all messed up. I don't know what… because they've got a contest, you know?

So that's a carving?

Yeah, that's a carving.

That's fantastic.

But I sure wish… maybe if I put a little bit of something… like shoe-shine. Maybe I could get those feathers back together because it was really together. Just like this one. It was together. I've got a little bit too much white, you know? I was going to re-paint on it. Try to get…

So how does the contest work? You bring them all in and someone judges them?

Yeah, they've got judges. Judges. They have got judges for like this feather here… if I was to win I would get 50 dollars. And then you have to give it away to the auction. Make money for the club, you know? I'm a board member. And then you give it. And then whatever it sells for… we have fun. But we have one show in Westwego over there and then we are going to have in August, August 11th and 12th. In Westwego over there… then we are going to have Cajun Heritage right there in Larose. The next month. And September. And then October we are having another show in Houma. And this year well, I usually have from five to 10 pieces. But this year, I have trouble with my hand. I've got a tremor. I went to see two doctors and there is no cure for that. Whatever the name is it's not that bad trembling thing. It's another kind of…there's no cure. You can take pills. But that don't help. It wants to put me to sleep. It don't affect my carving. It effects my painting. I painted on that feather today. Practically all day long. But God, though, I am all discouraged what happened. I don't know why.

So the judge, I mean, you'd have to show the original?

Yeah. Yeah. The two feather got be put on a block, on a base, you know? It's not quite the color but I tell you what, it's only God that do that. I tried my best but it is very hard to paint.

To match that color. If you turn it you are going to have more dark or more light. If you turn it some more it shines. Look. It is going to have some silver in there. You've got to put silver, gray, raw umber, burnt umber and you've got a bunch of color in tubes, you know? You mix it with water. But I'm telling you all day I painted. But I'm discouraged to see my feather like that. It was a perfect feather. See, I am going to get a perfect feather. I am going to do that. I had some other feathers, you know? I pick up feathers

2. Oil Comes to Golden Meadow and Leeville

2.1. Pershing and Ophelia Lefort (March 5, 2002; Larose, LA)

Born in Golden Meadow in 1924, Pershing J. Lefort was a life-long Texas Company man, working in production at several of the company's fields run by the Harvey and Houma districts. He serves in the Army in the Pacific during World War II, took advantage of the GI Bill to get a degree from Lafayette, then after additional service in the Air Force and several years working on drilling rigs, got on with Texaco. His last job was to develop an experimental tertiary recovery process using CO_2 at the Paradis field. His wife Ophelia is an accomplished artist, painting local scenes on materials such as oyster shells and muskrat-drying boards.

Although Pershing did not begin his career with Texaco until 1952, he has quite vivid memories of the arrival of the company in the 1930's. As a child, he would play on the land rigs, try to avoid the quicksand of the open mud pits, and, with his father, trap and fish amidst the exploratory dynamite holes in the marsh. Pershing's father had to move house and family up the bayou to Galliano after a Texaco well blew out in the late 1930's. Pershing recalls the mess, and the abrupt cessation of family vegetable gardens in the ruined soil. But he and Ophelia agree that the industry had positive impacts on the communities of lower Lafourche. Folks began to see some money, and the burden on children to supplement meager family earnings was reduced. For Pershing and others, this enabled them to remain in school.

Okay, my name is Pershing J. Lefort. I was born in 1924 and so I was five years old when stock market dropped overnight and then the Depression years beginning from that point… In 1934, I was ten years old. And oil researchers had developed, had discovered shallow oil deposits in the Golden Meadow area and therefore many small companies brought land drilling equipment and started to develop the field in the early thirties. By the time I was ten years old they had a few wells drilled and I took a lot of interest in the type of work these men were doing and of course these men were mostly men that came from west Texas with some knowledge of drilling and road building and stuff of that nature. And so I took a lot of interest in the type of work they were doing. And as I grew up more developed like they did. I was completely surrounded by little drilling rigs. They was small rigs and the wells they were drilling were shallow. All free flowing wells. And these men being working people away from home having kids probably my age, some. They were good boys. They'd bring us on the rigs and then some time my mother would make a pot of coffee and I'd bring it down and put a pot of coffee on the rig. I'd even sit with the driller and put my hand on the brakes just for the fun. In those days there was no safety practice done and you know anything went. So I got to feel the rig and watch those drillers when I was quite young. My parents leased their property to a company named Brown and Root and they drilled an oil well right off the house in the back and another one later right in front of the house which was the biggest mess. I remember it being a big mess but I had fun being on these rigs with these men. It was the biggest mess because in those days there was no regulation for drilling mud control or venting on gas, you just brought the oil in, put it in the small storage tank, five hundred or less barrels and no pipeline. The well would only be open a few hours before he'd fill the tank then had to wait for a barge. The only way of transporting oil out of east Golden Meadow and west Golden Meadow as well was by barging, using Bayou Lafourche. That's what we had to use Bayou Lafourche to cross to go to school. We didn't have no school,

no stores; we didn't have nothing. We lived in the marsh. So it was quite an exciting life when I look back. I had a real ball. Then it got so bad; Texaco had a well that blew out on the west side of Golden Meadow. The dome over this large salt dome that our field is on has salt and sulfur. Therefore that gas is very toxic but it didn't matter. They just vented it through pipes and ventilated and it burned. There was no way to handle gas and the companies had no interest in gas. It was the heavy crude they wanted to be able to sell to refineries.

That's the way it was in the growing stage of it all. Texaco was established mostly far as I know all west at that time of Bayou Lafourche and Texaco developed quite a field there in the Golden Meadow area and also in Leeville, both sides of the bayou. Going back, Texaco's blew out from under control. It sprayed all salt water, it was mostly salt water after the oil was flushed out there was salt water behind it and sulfur. In those days all the roofs were like tin roofs, galvanized tin roofs. The sulfur would eat through the roof and the salt would make the biggest mess. No vegetation could possibly survive. It was like living in a desert or something. Everything was dead, everything … lucky we even survived. But my daddy could not see his family there anymore. He saw where it would be best to move up the bayou and away from all this and he had [income] for using oil on his property. And so he was not rich but could afford to buy property and did. And this was a big house. It took two boys to put that on a barge and move to Galliano and it took a week, just that short distance. And the porch all around had to be removed for the barge or it would break off. The house had to be moved without the added addition. Okay, so we moved to Galliano. By then I was fourteen years old and I was looking at just going to school and getting a job on the rig. This is all I knew in the way of work.

It was slow going in Golden Meadow. Now I can tell you this about the early wells in Golden

in there you know; perch and everything you wanted, and muskrats and minks. And we learned that very young. So I know the exploration started way before my time. But when the drilling started I was like six.

Ophelia: Now when they did that they were looking for oil, when they used dynamite?

working. If it's nothing more than chopping wood and hauling that stuff I mean you didn't have no equipment to work, no nothing like that and you had to have fuel. You had to have enough to cook on the wood stove and we had a lid on it no bigger than this, a little tiny stove made out of tin can. It was called a…it was a kerosene stove. And it'd cook and it would drip with a control valve. It would control everything, but two burners. And it would try to feed us, there was eleven of us at the table, six kids and three adults. Everybody did very, very good.

When I graduated the war broke out. World War II broke out when the Japanese attacked. I was in the tenth grade and the draft is then twenty-one. In 1943, we were in all out war with both European and Pacific theaters and us boys as seniors were reaching eighteen and therefore the government saw where you could get a lot of young manpower by dropping the age. They needed the personnel because of planning invasions and so forth. So here I am graduating out of high school and right into World War II. I was drafted into the Army and spent three years in the Pacific including the occupation of Japan after the war. I came home still interested in the oil field. However, since I had four years of college education coming to me from the GI Bill I chose to go to school and I did that for four years. I liked oil field and I liked the military too so meanwhile I decided after the new Air Force was just forming in 1947, in 1948 I was, during my sophomore year, I decided to join the R.O.T.C. They accepted me in the advanced program because of my previous military experience and I went through the two full years and got commissioned as second lieutenant in the United States Air Force in 1950. Here I am caught in the Korean War. But I didn't have to go to Korea but I was always ready reserves, standby reserve, nobody wants to give me a job here, you know, being subject to call anytime. You know, I'm a reserve, I've got a commission. But fortunately, they had enough graduates to…I missed the call. Oh no they didn't forget about me they kept putting me stand by reserve, ready reserve and this and that but I stayed in the reserved 'til I was 38 years old. By then I was a first lieutenant. I had to do something, go in or find enough time to be a captain which I didn't have

I'm sorry Moses, did our drilling, Moses started production for Offshore Drilling because they had part interest in the company. We were assigned to a barge and I find out that barge, that drilling barge, was working in this area here and I wanted to settle down in Bayou Lafourche again, I decided I was going to work on that rig -- Number Seven, I'll never forget it. Rig Number Seven belonged to Southern Production and Texaco owned the barge and therefore that barge did not drill for anyone but Texaco. I spent three years working for Southern Production in those two fields, Golden Meadow and Leeville, Texaco fields. I got pretty familiar with the foremens and everything, the superintendents and everything that would come on the rig, Texaco people. I got pretty familiar and friendly wis0oaco

Another thing happened during my time with Texaco. Of course we older people make the company, it was the Texas Company. It was not Texaco then. And I didn't like the idea of changing to Texaco Incorporated because I liked the Texas Company. I knew the Texas Company since I was a little boy. Men talked about the Texas Company. I like the sound of it or something. So anyhow this took place of course. They changed their name to Texaco, Inc. But that didn't change much. I was working out of the Houma District. My last…my second to last assignment with Texaco was the Valentine Field which was gas, mostly gas wells. I stayed in the Valentine Field a year or so, a couple of years, three years, I don't remember. Meanwhile, while I was at Valentine, still in the Houma District, they had transferred me to do the administration work, they took Valentine out of the Houma District and put it into the Harvey District.

Then the Valentine field was played out, Texaco was changing things around so fast and whatever. I was sent to Paradis, which is in the Harvey District. There's a lot of interesting work in Paradis because they was going into a new process of tertiary recovery, injecting CO_2 instead of the water. You know salt water… wells pumped gas instead of water. Tertiary recovery was a new project being tested right there in Paradis. And I retired on that job…

Was that a successful process? Did it test out okay…the injecting CO_2?

Pershing: Oh, yeah. First of all, all the injections wells had to be drilled, a separate well, you didn't go through the same well. So that was one operation. They laid the pipeline from the gas plant in Boutte to furnish the CO_2 that had to be piped to Paradis. In Paradis they had a little plant which added nitrogen taken out of the atmosphere. This is injected into the well. We had several compressors and we injected CO_2 for a period of time and then engineers would come and test this and do this and do that before they could produce any well. Wells that type, they weren't producing anywhere anymore, you know. You have to give the CO_2 time to push the oil through the formation to the producing wells by going in and out of these materials or going in and out of these wells. There came a time when they were ready to start flowing some. They'd experimentally open one and everything went beautiful like it was planned and then more and more and when I retired it was still in the growing stage when I retired, you know.

This tertiary recovery is on wells that had been producing this for awhile and then they are trying to rework them?

Pershing: Yes, right. Well, yeah we couldn't use them anymore. The oil wouldn't get to the well enough to make it a profitable operation anymore. I mean they had exhausted the oil. So they planned a way to do it and this was done in other places, tested before and down here we was testing it, it was experimental stuff. How long will it work? How long will it last? I've been retired fifteen years. I think it's still producing some and I'm not sure. But anyhow I did see oil being produced out of the ground in tertiary recover before I retired.

Then I got too old to go on, I wish I could have put in another thirty years. I didn't want to retire really you know. I had raised my family and Texaco had never failed to put food on my table and the least I could do was give 'em a good day's work for good pay. Unlike some companies I

all of them came -- they were all related, they all came from the area there, in the same area, close. They lived there. And they worked well and Texaco could trust them and they didn't have to be…nobody had to be looking behind them all the time, you know. You get something to be assigned to them and you hardly needed anybody to check because you knew it was going to get done. And it was a good dependable crew. Well that was the end of my career with Texaco. However I've experience a lot of stuff. [I retired in] 1984. I was fifty-nine and a half.

2.2. Pep and Bertha Williams (September 21, 2001; Galliano, LA)

Mr. Andrew "Pep" Williams is

Bertha: And it was right in our neighbors', in our backyard. Oh, our house. Our clothes, we didn't have no dryer those days. You had to hang your clothes or you couldn't, you had to have clothes lying over your house.

Pep: But you know, we didn't have what you have today, but we didn't miss it. 'Cause we didn't know better. We didn't know they had what they got now, air conditioning and what not. We had kerosene lamp, we didn't have no electricity when we first got married. Finally we got electricity. But all we had was one light bulb, for the lights. And we didn't have no other, a refrigerator, we had a refrigerator and light, that's about all we had. We had an iceman who would give us a block of ice and we'd put it in

and they was coming down, and they was bringing their own workers. The whole crews and all. The only way you could get a position to work if they couldn't have nothing to rent, they had to leave. And they couldn't bring their family, 'cause there was no place for them to stay.

Pep: When we started working on the rig for Texaco, we had three crews. We had one crew working days, would work 12 days and off 4. And we had one relief crew, would relieve when we would go off, their crew would go off, well the relief crew would take over. So they would move from one place to the other. That's how it would work. And then after that we started working 6 and 6. And then when I went pushing, we go to 7 and 7. That's how it would wind up. Up to still today, that's the way they're working. When they go offshore, well, they work 14 and 14. That makes it less flying. That's the reason they do that. But on the land job they still work 7 and 7.

What kind of changes in technology did you see during the course of your career, in terms of drilling and production?

Pep: They had a lot of improvements in technology, the equipment, the tools, they have better tools to work with. And it was more convenient and you could get more work out of it, really. We had slips you'd go around the rotary. You run that pipe, you had to handle it. And then later on, they came out with them air slip. You wouldn't touch it, only the operator when the operator went to set the slip, went to release. When you was running the pipe in the hole, or pulling it out of the hole, you can use an air slip. It was a real help for the roughneck. You didn't have to raise a slip. It was heavy to raise, to pull up and set, to grab the pipe when they had to make a connection, you know. When they came out with the air slip and also they had air tongs that came out. Before you had to break the pipe by hand, to change it. Then when they came with the air tongs, all they got to do is put in on the pipe and press the button. It would make up the pipe, come out of the hole. It would do the reverse it and break the pipe. Just press the button and it would break up the pipe. You didn't have to do it by hand. That started, let me see, I worked in '45. I'd say that came out in about '55, when they start having the air slips and the air tongs. That was a real relief for the roughnecks, yeah. It was a big relief.

Did you see a real progression or a need to change the technology when it went [into the marshes]? Or was it just kind of an evolution of development of the technology?

Pep: No, it really stayed the same. It didn't have much improvement to the way they was doing it. When they first started doing it, like the same technology and doing the same thing. They'd go in the marsh, they could log the location, if it was in a marsh. But then they'd cut a canal, to float that rig to the location. We would center the rig, rig the well in, set the Christmas tree on, and then we'd move off. And then another crew would come and build construction around the rig for protection. But that's another crew that would take care of that. We would stay with the rig. We wouldn't work on that construction there. When the well is coming in, they got pumpers, what they call 'em. Guagers that goes around and see that everything is all right. Sometimes they got to change the choke, to allow the oil… different choke. If it make sand, well they had to cut it down, something like that. And get the reading. Every morning they would report how much that well make. They, during that 24 hours, they would take a guage, what you call it, and see how much it would take in 24 hours. The pumper would take care of that. He

works by himself. He goes around from one rig to the other, one well to the other. He had to go in a boat.

Were the wells all tied in to a pipeline?

Pep: They're all tied in to a pipeline, yeah. Now at Caillou Island, they had walks. They could go walk on the walks. They had a walk built around, and then the pumpers could walk on that walkway and check their wells.

Did Texaco at that time have a central refinery or a collection point for all their wells?

Pep: Yeah, they had refinery in Texas. When they first started in Caillou Island, they had a ship. They would load that ship and barges and bring that oil to the refinery. But nowadays, it all goes by pipeline. You don't have that, the barges like they used to have to move their oil. It's all moved on the pipeline now.

Did Texaco get involved in the offshore?

Pep: Not right away. Texaco was in the bays. They was kind of watching, they was kind of tight on their money. Maybe that's the reason they was afraid to invest too much. But lately, like I said, after the engineers started going on, well that was a little different. Maybe that's when they started, when they start having engineers lookin' after their work. Then that's when they started expanding, really. And spending more money. Well, they was used to what they was doing, yeah. Stayin' in the bay, the inland waters. They was satisfied with that.

Bertha: Like many other things, they didn't have the experienced men. They had all to learn. And when the experienced men came in, well, there they was, well, they know what they doing.

Pep: Everybody make mistakes.

Was there a lot of uncertainty like you have now? You know, you have booms, slow downs.

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Pep: But in them days, 25 dollars was good money. You could get something for a dollar. Nowadays you can't get much for a dollar.

Bertha: We had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bath.

Pep: A porch.

Bertha: We had the water and the lights and paint all over. We didn't have the water, we had the cistern, a tank to put the water in.

Pep: No, we didn't have no running water in them days.

Bertha: No, not in those days. So he was glad to get it. Like I said, we rented that house. One lady say, "Miss Bertha how did you rent some block?" And I'll explain her. Oh, she said, "Now I know." 'Cause you know that man want that house bad. And it was right in the middle of Golden Meadows. And it was right where his work was. And he was an inspector of the shrimp company.

Pep: In them days, they had to inspect the shrimp. When the boat would come up to the shrimp shed, they had to have an inspector to inspect the shrimp to be sure she was, she was in good shape, she wasn't rotten or what not. They had to have an inspection.

Bertha: It was right in the middle, he could walk all over something. There was one, two, three factories. Shrimp factories. Ice factories.

When did Golden Meadow become a town, a corporation?

Bertha: It just celebrate 50 years, they just celebrate 50 years. We had three woman going house to house and see if you was gonna vote to have, be a town of Golden Meadow. They got it done.

Was there any reason? Golden Meadow is one of the few corporations. Was there any reason Golden Meadow decided to become a corporation?

Bertha: Well, I really think, the way she said, they was talking to us, the ladies. It was for us, if we incorporate we could get more from the law, and from the governor. To try to improve our town, improve our road, our schools. That's why they was working for it, to have a corporation, that we could work, and whoever was going to be elected to be the mayor, he could work with the governor and they could get more to the school. It was mostly the school that was working. To bring more teachers and bigger classroom and things like that. That's

Bertha: No, I don't believe. Just when the oil came in, well, that's when those ladies said, "Now we have to do something." People are coming in and we're not prepared for 'em. The school is not prepared for it. And if we could have it corporated, then we could get help from the governor to help us out, build the school and build the roads, and like you say, open the door. That's how it all started. And the church, we got a bigger church. And everything improved.

Were you involved in any big hurricanes or storms down in Golden Meadow? Was that a problem for you?

Bertha: Every time they say storm you have to pack and leave. The worst part of the storm was, we all had good houses that could stand the storm. But you didn't know if somebody was gonna get hurt, and you would be stuck on this side of the Intercoastal. So you always tried to go past that Intercoastal, so you'd be on the other side in case something happen. But all our houses could stand the storm. We had people that leave their home and went to Cut Off. And they had a tornado, they got killed. And that house stayed. But it was just something that had to happen. Yeah, we went through a lot of storm, but we didn't stay at our house. We moved out. And that's the reason why. And we still do it. 'Cause of the Intracoastal that you have to cross. After you on the other side, well, you don't have to worry 'bout coming on this side. But it's this side, if you have to go for help that you can't go.

When you retired from Texaco, did you get a pe

In a published account, Robert Guidry augments his brother's narrative of their parent's enterprises. John Leonce Guidry and Lillian Lefort Guidry opened a general merchandise store on the east side of the bayou in 1925. Over several decades, the couple became involved in an appliance and furniture store, a theater, a boarding house, 14 rental houses, additional rental cabins, an ice cream parlor and a saloon. John Guidry was also involved in the fur business, taking his floating merchandise boat on rounds to trappers' camps from Morgan City to Plaquemines Parish, receiving pelts in exchange for goods. For a short time, as well, he owned three houseboats. As Robert Guidry writes,

> *Any three fur trappers who agreed to sell his pelts exclusively to Mr. Guidry could borrow one of these floating houses for the duration of the trapping season. Mr. Guidry would tow the vessel himself to the area of the trapper's lease (Guidry 1996, page 151).*

It was written, I forget. I don't think T. Harry Williams wrote that one. Bob Masteri was Conservation Commission and everybody who voted for him, he gave them a piece of lake bottom… Terrebonne Bay or Lake Raccourci or…he gave to Harvey Peltier all the water bottoms of Leeville, after oil had been discovered and all, and he had a free ride with the water bottoms of the bayou. I guess wherever there's money, you'll find thieves.

So, how long did your dad operate the camp?

Oh…see…from 1922, he was in business 'til he built the boarding house in 1936. In 1922 he built the grocery store and bar and everything…he had a little community itself, he had a little theater, and that operated until he died in '58… I'm sorry, '52, and then we stayed in business until, what? [to wife] When did we close the store? We had all gone our separate ways…about 18 years ago we closed everything down. We sold all the houses and all, because the transient people started to intermarry. So they built their own homes so there was less demand. Today people want something real nice and real nice is real expensive. And real expensive can't be afforded. It's that simple. Salaries have not kept up with the cost of living. But in the early days, a dollar was…I remember when Texaco first came. Big pay was the oyster industry. And a big salary working as an oyster man was about 40 dollars a month. And the trapping industry. A trapper would make 20-30,000 a year. That was in 1929. The big money was oystering. You get 40 dollars. But you had to stay out on the lakes for 40 to 60 days without coming home. You earned every penny of that. That was hard work. Then when Texaco came down and started to pay 25 cents an hour, that was unbelievable. And they'd let them do 12, 14 hours a day. Then with overtime, heck they were getting 60 and 80 dollars a month. I mean that was three or four times what the average salary was. When I started my drilling business, I worked over for Texaco, worked on a lot of old wells… roughnecks were getting a dollar twenty five an hour. That was the going rate. And by the time I gave up the rigs it was eight to ten dollars an hour, something like that.

They named the stadium [at Nicholls State University] after my dad. He had a professional baseball team in 1922 over here. He had a stadium that held 4,000 people, and he was a member of the Sugarbelt League. They played in Houston, they played Dallas, they played Baton Rouge, they played Shreveport, played Monroe. The Su

How'd your dad get into baseball?

It was actually my mother. My dad didn't care if the sun came up or the sun went down, but my mother was a dynamo. When she…she had the nickname of the "Big Bell." When she rang, the whole neighborhood shuddered. When there was violence in a family, she would go take care of it. There was no law in this area. If a husband beat his wife, well he could wait for a good shellacking from my mother. And when the war came, she delivered the telegrams from the Red Cross, missing in action, killed in action. That took a toll on her life. And they started to, they had a store. They had an ice cream parlor. They had a barroom. They had a movie theater. And whenever there was ballgames, when radios first came out, all the men in the neighborhood would come to her living room. So, finally she put a stop to that. She put four pilings on the bayouside and ran wires all the way with the big bullhorns, and then every Sunday, you should have seen that, maybe 500 to 1000 men listening to the ballgame, and nobody knew what anyone was saying because nobody spoke English. Andpoke ETJ20.0745 0 TD0.0001 Tc049853 Tw Wl Due(It wao

Cajun, and he spoke strictly Parisian French. And there's so little difference. The French is the same as… I've traveled all over France many, many years, and the French in the province are exactly what we speak. Same as Quebec. But if you go to Paris, it's a different world. It's Parisian. People in the province, say from Brittany, they can't understand Parisian. And the Parisians have more of a spoiled French than the province do, because of open borders of Europe over the last century. I mean there's so much spoilage by German influence on French, or Hispanic, or what have you. It's, I find that the Parisian French is…I took it up at school, and it's not what they speak, I promise you. The only reason I took it up in school is that it's the only

Leeville, when I hired out, was a big Mason. And he turned down a lot of people. At one time the drillers was all Masonic men. Rough… the common hands was alright. But the guy that moves up was Masons. You don't have that anymore now. But, in those days they did. It wasn't fair. Didn't make him better qualified, it's just that he had the right ring. That was the sad part about it. If he'd been better qualified, I could understand it.

Did they build their own houses down here when they came?

Oh yeah. See, people in Golden Meadow came from Leeville and the people in Leeville came from Grand Isle and Cheneire. They moved up with the storms. A lot of 'em stopped here. But a lot of 'em continued on to Galliano and Cut Off. Just moved up. And then Golden Meadow, I'd say the last 30 years, there's not too many people that buildsildsilds1r.1.15 TD0.0001 Tc0.1142 Tw[(the

3. After the War

3.1. Loulan Pitre (September 24, 2001; Cut Off, LA)

After the war, Loulan Pitre built derricks, and took them down to be moved to other drilling sites. Some of his jobs were land and marsh jobs, in the still-producing fields on either side of Bayou Lafourche. Some were offshore. One of them was for Jerry McDermott – a platform out in open water, 10 miles or so from land, on Ship Shoal Block 32. Kerr-McGee Oil Industries out of Tulsa was the field's operator. Kermac 16 began producing oil on October 4, 1947, the first successful well out of sight of land. Pitre realized at the time that his career as a derrick builder was limited. "Jack knifes," as he calls them, movable drilling barges, were being developed. John Hayward designed and built Breton Rig 20 in 1949, a "platform supported by piles on top of a submerged hull" (Lankford 1971, page 1,394). It could be refloated and moved to the next drilling location. Kerr-McGee contracted Ocean Drilling and Exploration Company to build a virtually identical barge in 1954, Mr. Charlie. Moored on the bank of the Atchafalaya River off Morgan City, the rig is now a museum and training facility.

the Marine Corps. It's a good opportunity. I didn't know the danger I was in though. Real danger. At that time, I'm in the Marine Corps, taking basic. I went to train. Marines, land on Guadalcanal. Uh-oh, we're in trouble here. Read all those stories about the ships getting sunk and all that. Said we're getting more news than probably the public. In the service you get everything that comes out. You know more than the average. And I went through, I went through all those operations. Never got hit, never got hurt. I came back home, I'm glad I took it. And two and a half years after I left here, on a Monday morning, to getting a call, they gave me a leave. Brought us back to the state for rest and recreation.

We were getting ready to invade Japan when we dropped those nuclear weapons on the Japanese…that Okinawa campaign, that was a mean son of a gun. There were some people there. But if you don't get hit, you don't drop dead, you… I came back. They used to give 50 dollars a week for the veterans, 52-20. 20 dollars a week, for 52 weeks. And I went over there to check in for my 20 bucks a week, to me that was a fortune, 'cause we had no salaries, not like today in the service. I was a staff sergeant getting 80 to 90 dollars a month. By the time they took the insurance out, you didn't get much left. And these poor privates, they didn't get anything. I went to this place to check in for my 20-52 they used to call them, that girl says, "What are you qualified to do?" I says, "What?" I was bitter. "What are you asking me that for?" She says, "Well, you've got to tell me what you're qualified to do." Lining me up for a job. Says, "All I'm qualified to do right now is kill people." Which I was, that was all I was qualified to do. Kill people. I says, "I'm only qualified to kill people." Well, she was insulted, she called the man in…I said, "Sir, the blood's still dripping on my hands from Japan…you want me to tell you what I'm qualified to do? I told the girl…" "Oh," he says, "you just got out of the service last week." "Came home, last week." "Oh, well, we don't know if we can put you on the…what work do you want to do?" "Right now I want to take a month off." Which wasn't long. I said, "I don't want to do any work." He said, "Well, we can't put you on the 50…" So I never got a nickel. All the other guys had lied that way, they were getting their 20 bucks a week, which was nice. They would sit down at their home and buy beer with their 20 bucks, and the guy would feed you. He was a hero, you know. That was a mess. But I realized then why they take young people to fight wars. Older people would start considering that stuff, they wouldn't go. They'd refuse.

Never got a penny. My wife was going to have a baby. A year after we got married, she was going to have a baby. And I had gotten wind that the government was… if we had gotten married before I was out of the service, which I had, and I was an uncommissioned officer, they was going to pay us for the hospitalization. Well, I didn't have much money. All the money I had saved from the service…about five or six dollars a month. I went to see the head nurse. We always had a head nurse, they'd been there before Jesus Christ, I guess. She says, "It's not worth the trouble." She was my cousin. She says, "I wouldn't fool with that. It's not worth the trouble." Had my wife go in the hospital, and the doctor would do it…the government pay the bill. I said, "I think it's worth the trouble. Maybe it's not worth the trouble but it's worth the money." And we went, and they paid everything. And she, that just kind of discouraged me rth thead Tc0.077c He was a tro hospitd

jumbled, but it's all helping. Of course those episodes that are hilarious to me might not be hilarious to other people. But, uh, life hadn't been bad.

Oh, long time. We built a bunch of rigs, we stayed, we'd stay weeks on end out there. Once we put up a derrick all the way to the top and during the night the weather got bad. There must've been a storm because we had that big barge, that big crane, it tore up all of the anchors. And we wound up on the beach at Grand Isle and barely, barely could get away from there. Went back the next day, it was calm, clear, and the rig had fallen over. We left. [The derrick] slipped off the structure, fallen. We should've bolted it down, but who would've dreamed something like that would've happened? 'Cause sometimes we had to skid. It had to be exactly square. You had to move it to fit it. We hadn't bolted it. We should've. *Oh God*, it had slipped and fallen off. I wasn't in management, so I just sat back down and looked at it. It was a disaster.

You started as soon as you got back from the war, starting with Jerry [McDermott]? When did you start with Jerry?

New Years Day, 1947. I remember 'cause everything was frozen here and all the icicles were hanging down the walls right here in Cut Off. Cold, and we took off. Guess where? Key West, Florida. To build a rig, and we went to Key West, took us two and a half days. We took our time. We were in the union, big rig building, we were in the union, AFL-CIO. So we would drive eight hours, eight hours a day. I like the union and your pay was the same. I'd rather get paid for eight hours instead of driving 12 and still getting paid eight. Wouldn't you? And if we've driven we get double time, so we take our time getting there, and that big old derrick. They did a little exploration off of Florida, this derrick was about 200 yards off the beach inside Ft. Myers, something like that, I think. The moment of truth had arrived. Get up in the derrick, I had to go up. I climbed up there and I tell you the truth, I'm not going to go in details, I had to tear that whole derrick down. It's really hard. To loosen all the bolts before, and when you tear it down you have to get down fast, you don't take them, them out, just loosen them. There are four bolts and a brace and a flange. You take three out and leave one. Move! You did all of this, it didn't

down a derrick?" Oh…I says,

3.2. Martial Babin (July 18, 2001; Galliano, LA)

Martial Babin is an 80-year old Chevron retiree who lives in a relatively new subdivision on the east side of the bayou. He grew up in St. Charles, between Raceland and Thibodaux, and retired from Chevron about 20 years ago, a few years short of company retirement age of 62, because his second wife wanted to enjoy what they had. She had recently died. Martial pointed to a huge mounted fish on the wall and talked about how she, not he, would always catch the big ones.

Martial rose through Chevron's ranks, starting on their drilling rig in the Barataria field. When the rig was sold, he was moved into transportation at the Leeville base, responsible for supplies

I went to work on that rig. I worked on Saturday, got off at noon from the rig that I was working over there, and I moved on the Sunday and Monday and went to work here on Tuesday in Louisiana on a rig. I had an old car and I used to pack all of my belongings and pile it all up because originally when I went up for the physical I sold all the furniture we had. The next time when I went back after I didn't make the service, I rented a furnished apartment. We didn't have a whole lot of things to carry, but I had an old Chevrolet and we lived like the Clampetts. I had that thing tied all around on top and everything. It took us about 12 hours to make that route back. But I had a home already. I had bought me a home before I left and I was renting it. When it got vacant, I moved into it. I worked there and I had a short stay with Joe W. Brown drilling in back of Valentine. Then, I worked with Mobil in Leeville on the east canal. Then, I worked for people in back of Golden Meadow. On August 8, 1947, I went to work for Chevron. I put in eight years on one of their drilling rigs. I barely had a high school education and I was not an engineer, but I learned the trade through practice and later on I was doing engineer work because we had a lot of rigs running and not enough engineers to go around. So, they made a drilling foreman out of me and I was doing everything an engineer would do to a well. Later, as these engineers came out of school my job got lighter and lighter. But still, they had to at least put in three weeks or longer with someone that had practical experience. I broke in many of them. Three years later, I was working for them. They were my bosses. Anyway, I had a real good life with Chevron Oil Company.

Bay Marchand was started in 1948. They had a lease dispute between the state and the federals. It would shut down for a little over a year and started drilling again in late 1949. I was, at that time, still on the drilling rig in Barataria. I would go out there when our rig didn't have any wells to work over. We would go offshore and we would work on these rigs, help them and do roustabout jobs. In 1954, that little rig we were on in Barataria was sold by the company and I was brought to Leeville and given a transportation job. I didn't know anything about boats, but I learned quickly. I took care of all the boat traffic. I knew all the equipment for the rigs that had to be sent and whatever you needed on the drilling rig—fresh water and whatever. All I had to do there was learn more about the boat business, and that I did. In late 1954 to late 1957, I was the transportation foreman at Leeville. Then, our operation was growing faster and faster all the time.

Let me back up a little bit and talk about the helicopter. Before the time of the helicopter, we had to do all of these crew changes and we were getting to where we had 80 to 85 people to a crew. We were working 7 and 7 —two crews. It was rough going, having to change crews in rough seas. We would work from Wednesday to Wednesday. Then in 1955, the helicopter came out and we were able to change our crews out using the helicopter. We didn't have to have that long boat ride. Back then, they didn't have all these modern supply boats. The first supply boat came out in 1956 or early 1957. The company built two of their own—the *Tayte* and *Borre*. Then, going back now to the drilling, in late 1957 we were working 3 and 4 and spent one day on the rig for a crew change on the day you got off. I went for seven days without even taking my shoes off. I would cat nap in the lounge chair after I would eat. I would never go to bed because there was four of us taking care of nine rigs. By the time we got through with one completion, we were called on another rig to fix problems. I completed some of the first triples in the first dual. That is three strings in one—different heights. I did all the preparations myself. Of course, they give you the orders but I had to follow them. That is where my experience on the

rig came in so good for me because I knew all the work even though I wasn't an engineer. Then, in January of 1960, we went to work seven and seven. We were able to get more people coming out of school and more engineers. They gave us each a raise and a seven and seven schedule. By then, I was taking it easy. I was big and fat, eating and sleeping too much in between jobs. On May 30, 1960, they put me in production. They made me an assistant foreman for the production group. I worked with a man named Charley Sanders, a great big guy with a big head. He was rough but he made you learn the trade faster. I got to be almost just like him. I learned from hard work. Then he left in 1974 and I got his job. I was the foreman. I was supervising 80

That is when we built the camp. We had a fishing camp. We spent 12 years there. Finally, when I got older and she got sick, I sold the camp and just last year got rid of my boat. I got a big carport out there that I used to keep my bo

through the alphabet with the structures. We start going doubles, AA, BB, CC, and all of those. So that tells you how many structures we had out there. These were large structures and we had individual bunk houses that would house four, five, or six men. They would do their own cooking. They would bring their groceries on Wednesday or Thursday, whenever their crew change was. Sometimes that was hard to do because of the rough seas. We had to battle the rough seas all the time. Of course, later when we got better boats the seas weren't a problem because the boats were much larger. To begin, I would haul groceries out there, when I was in the transportation job, on barges and we would cover them with a tarp. We had six LSTs out there, big ships that we would store a lot of stuff on them, we would anchor them to the platform. When you got on the east side of the seas, they weren't rough so you were able to unload them. We bought these old Army ships and converted them and made them into living quarters. I can go on for days talking about all this.

They had all these service people. Of course they had contract service people and at one time they had all kinds of contract people to keep from having too many people on our payroll. This way they wouldn't have to lay off anybody. I worked for 33 and a quarter years and we had not laid anybody off for lack of work until recently, since my retirement. What we used to do was place them on the production boats or somewhere else. They all had jobs. Some didn't w 27000ise old Army s5

No, it was some winos out of New Orleans. One had money for beer, the other had money for gas, and the other had the boat so they went fishing. I had been watching them all day long. They were going from structure to structure. They got off the boat one time and didn't tie the boat up good and it got away from them. They didn't even know each other. One did lose his life. One guy jumped in to catch it, but it was too fast and he couldn't

ago, I was making sixty thousand per year because I had gotten all these raises along the way. I started making five hundred a month. When I went into transportation, the guy that brought me over there said that if I did good for 30 days that I would get a raise. And I did get that raise. I had a pretty good record of doing my job well. One of my bosses used to tell me I was like a football player. He would tell me to take the ball and go through the line and I would go. That is how he used to refer to me as.

What was the main reason you switched over to transportation?

They moved me around where they needed me. I went to transportation because they sold the rig that I was working on. Then they had to make room for me. They were satisfied with my performance. I didn't care if I got to be superintendent. I just wanted to have a job to raise my family. My worst nightmare right now is that I don't have a job. Then, I wake up and say you damn fool you been retired for 21 years. Another thing, I go offshore and I call the helicopter and it doesn't answer. That wakes me up and I get sweaty. That is how much I used to like my work. It is in my blood.

3.3. Hurby Plaisance (July 23, 2001; Golden Meadow, LA)

After high school, Hurby Plaisance started working on Rowan inland barges in Timbalier Bay in 1948, then became a Texaco employee on steam rigs on lake fields around Houma, Leeville, Golden Meadow, and elsewhere. By the time he retired from Texaco in 1987, he had risen to senior drilling supervisor, responsible for the company's offshore fields out of Morgan City. He passed away in 2003.

As a young boy going to school, I was working in oil fields around the house on weekends and on holidays. I graduated in 1946 and went to work on a drilling rig that was in the neighborhood drilling shallow wells. It was a land job and we were drilling 2600 feet wells. We had two derricks on one rig. When we were finished we would move over and tear that derrick down and

with the spacing, where you had to have so many acres per well. That is why we had so many wells over here. We had derricks one on top of the other. But, everyone had their own lot and the company would come there and lease it and drill a well. Everybody wanted their own wells. It was money in those days.

When did they go with the spacing?

I would venture to guess in the late 1940's. I was just a hand working on the rigs and wasn't much involved in making decisions. It was the state that came up with that. What you had to do was lease and you would get a share of the well depending on how much of your property was involved in that spacing. Most of these leases, the landowners got 1/8 of the shares. A few that were smart enough to hold up and their property looked promising were able to get a quarter of it. What really started Texaco…I am sure you read of the Huey P. Long deal with Texaco. Huey was set on stopping Standard Oil from developing in Louisiana and he cut a deal with Texaco. Where we were drilling is on state property that Texaco had all the leases on. They also had a lot of leases with LL&E, Louisiana Land and Exploration. That is what really started Texaco.

When did LL&E get…they own a lot of property?

From what I understand, now this is something I read, they got all of the land that the state owned. It was a hundred-year lease. They ended up with the royalties of everything. That is the way I was told. They owned all of the land. The state owned all of the bay bottoms and water bottoms when the oil developed down there. The oil companies had to lease from LL&E or the state. They were the ones who owned the most property. All of the fields in Leeville and Golden Meadow, all of that back property, was all LL&E.

Getting back to when you were supervising the fields offshore, what were your main duties?

My main duty was to stay on call should they have a problem that they needed to discuss with somebody. My duties were every morning…we had up to 16 rigs drilling in the gulf…every morning I would call every rig and take the last 24-hour report. I would copy the report down and after doing this we would talk about what they would do during the day. We would go to the conference room with the engineers and the manager and different heads of different departments. Each one of us would give a

Did Texaco pretty much pull out of Morgan City?

Yes, they still have the warehouse. They brought everything to New Orleans. As I understand, they are bringing everything to Houston now. Texaco was a major employer over here in this area. A lot of people worked with them. They were here a long time before the offshore business started. If I remember correctly, I believe it was in ’38 or ’39 that they changed to Leeville. In the late ‘20’s or early ‘30’s they started in the bays.

They always mark 1947 when Kerr-McGee was drilling off of Morgan City as the beginning of offshore. Did people really perceive it as that?

Yes, it was because they hadn’t done anything before then. They might have had a couple of platforms with pilings in 10-15 feet of water near the shoreline. *Mr. Charlie* was a posting rig and he could drill in about 20 feet of water. I am not sure what was his maximum depth. He was posting. In other words, he had a barge and it was posted on top of the barge to allow it to drill. The barge that we worked on were 10, 12 feet in depth and that is what we drilled in. That was your rig and everything was on the barge. We never drilled in anything that was more than seven or eight feet of water with these barges. When *Mr. Charlie* came out with this, they put it on a post and all of the equipment was above the barge and they could drill in deeper water. Then they came out with the ocean driller which was the first floater. My brother was the superintendent on that rig. That was my older brother. They could drill deeper. Before that they came out with the jackups where they had the rigs that could jack them up. Then they came out with the floaters. So, you had the posted rigs that go drill in 20 feet of water, the jackups could go into…the Gorilla jackups could go into 200, 250 feet, and the floaters could go 5000, 6000 feet of water. It started off where they could go where the jackups couldn’t go. Depending on how much anchor chain they had, that determined at what depth they could drill.

When did they start having living quarters on the rigs and platforms?

Offshore, that was probably around *Mr. Charlie*’s time. Now, Texaco had camps. We would go

Did they have similar offices in other places?

Yes. The Harvey District worked out of New Orleans. They had their own facility there. There was an office in Lafitte also. New Iberia District had an office. Morgan City was just the offshore. Houma was the main office for onshore. That is the area that I am familiar with, but they were in Texas and all over. I drilled some wells in Arkansas and in northern Louisiana. I worked as a company man because I was looking after contract rigs th

The company would. They were the producers who owned the well. The company doesn't have any more rigs. I remember when Gulf had their own rigs, but not anymore. They got rid of all of them. The driller is usually the drilling company. A company that owns property that produces oil will hire the drilling contractor to come drill the well. They would pay them so much a day. There is hardly any producers left that own rigs. It is all done by contractors. It got to where it was cheaper. I know for a fact that major companies where the majority of the employees are union who have all of these fringe benefits and high salaries. Whereas, the contractor doesn't have this. Some have some fringe benefits but most don't.

Is it hard getting a job with the producers?

It was. After and during the war it wasn't that hard. When it got to the time I got there, they weren't hiring much. They wanted experienced people. I had seve

Did it keep you out of work for a while after that?

Well, I stayed off one week. You could see the tendons and bone on this finger, but this one was just bleeding. They just sewed it back together. It just doesn't go all the way back. Besides that it never bothered me. Then, they let me go back on the rig just to get my check. It was three weeks before I could go back in and handle the derrick. We really didn't have benefits then. If you didn't go, you didn't get anything. We had a compensation of about 20 dollars per week.

Would the company cover hospitalization?

No. Well, on accidents yes, but not personal. They paid all of this, but I just went to the doctor twice—once to get the stitch and once to get it removed.

When you talk about kicks and controlling kicks,

Everything just sinks. There was a big rig that was 54 feet wide and 150 feet long including the barge, equipment, and derrick. It was over 2

Charles O'Niell, is he from around here?

No, he is from New Orleans. He is dead now. That is what they are doing now. All those rigs right there? It is just a lot of waste of money for them. That is just to create jobs. They make me sick just watching them. I don't think anybody knows what they are doing over there. They have been here for six months. I drilled all the wells and I worked them over so I know which is which. One day I walked over there and I asked the guy if they were having troubles. He said yes because they couldn't kill the well. I didn't see anything. I told him to give me three hours and I would kill it. They fooled around with that well for two weeks. He said every morning they came back the well made 20-30 barrels of oil. I said, "well why don't you put it in production?"

So, when you traveled around from job to job, did the same crew go with you?

Yes, most of the time. Very seldom you had to hire people from the town you went to. I always had a good crew of men. I worked with people from Mississippi and Breaux Bridge. Most of my crew was from this area. Lynn Oil Company started drilling right here. Carter was the head man and his brother, William Roddy Carter, was taking care of things down here. That was in 1946. In 1947 or 1948, they called me into New Orleans. Me and old Roddy Carter went down there. They offered me a lot of money, but they wanted to send me to Cuba. I couldn't take any crew. I had to hire the people from over there. I would work for 1500 dollars a month. I would work 30 days on and 30 days off and get paid for 50 days. I had a wife and three kids over here so I said no. I didn't care how much money they would give me, I wasn't going there. I was raising a family and I would be too far away from them.

Was it dangerous working on the rigs?

Everything was done by hand. We didn't have the things that they have today. You had to do everything by yourself. I probably wouldn't know what to do if I went on a rig today. I would take a steam rig over a power rig any day. Most of the people today don't even know what a steam rig was. It is much cleaner. It has a lot of power. I was running a steam rig one time and I had…whenever you have four bars and you keep it on 350 pounds of dry steam, you have a lot of power. Every time you go to work, your clothes is all clean and fresh coffee all the time. We would steam clean everything. You would put water under a boiler and the steam comes up. You could get wet and dry steam. The drier it is the better it is. If you get too much water in it, it will be soggy. You are losing power there. You have to keep certain levels of water in your boiler. If it is too full, it will be wet steam. If you keep it at that certain level, you will get dry steam. You can't let it run out of water because it is going to blow up. That is something that I used to do.

Do you run these 24 hours a day, two shifts?

Yes, 24 hours a day. In those days we had three crews so we had 8-hour shifts. Now, it came down to two shifts and 12-hour days. The most I ever made as a driller…when I started drilling in 1946, I started at 1.57 an hour. Then, I drilled for different companies for 18 years. The most I ever made was 3.25 an hour working for Dick Guidry.

Why did they go to power rigs instead of steam rigs?

I don't know. It was probably easier the whole way around. It is better in a way, but for old boys like me, we rather have the steam rigs. I've seen as many as 12 steam rigs running through town here. You could almost jump from one to the other.

Did the oil run out here in Golden Meadow or is there still a little bit left?

No, a man with money could come in this field right here and make a fortune. I took this over in 1972. They didn't have anybody to run it. They were down to 800 barrels a month. Three years after I took it over, I was selling 10,800 barrels a month—an increase of 10,000 barrels. I worked the wells over and put what was supposed to be in it. You see when you have…they had so many feet over there and they had gas valves in it. Then you have the wellhead pressure. For instance, if you have 500 pounds of pressure, you can't have over 500 pound valves because they will not open. That was most of the problem here. They had 480 pound valves and they never had that much pressure. What I had to do…we had two compressors. I got in touch with Rita Pump Company. They came out here and explained to me the way it worked. I had never worked them. I convinced the old man to let me fool around with the well that the compressor was in. I hooked both compressors on the line and put smaller valves in the well so that they would open. That is when I started getting production. I had Rita Pump put in this well and that was a big increase. It was a high water well. I think it was about 96 percent water. The more water you pull out of there, the more oil you are going to make. I was pumping 1500 gallons of water in 24 hours. I increased it to 2500. The pump is still in there. It went on for quite a while. The casing busted at 3000 feet. They didn't want me to fix it so we just let it go. Do you see all of these wells here? I drilled three gas wells on the west side of the bayou and five on this side. Every well you drill you have that little gas sand at 1800-2000 feet. Some places it sits higher. The last 10 years I worked here, I drilled 21 wells.

Is the Apache Company still drilling on land?

Yes, they took over Texaco. They are making good. They are doing what is supposed to be done. It has got to where it wasn't big enough for Texaco anymore so they left. I was just talking to a friend of mine from Leeville. He was with Texaco and he transferred to Apache in Leeville. Right now they have two rigs drilling. They are making 800 barrels a day. If they want to spend the money they could make some oil. They are making some good wells over there. A lot of people

Whenever they would come of age, I would put them to work. I am the oldest. He went into the service. When he came back he had been wounded in the leg. He was really bad off. He first came to work for me he couldn't stand up too long. One day he just passed out on the floor. We brought him into the tool house, laid him down, and covered him up. He was shivering. Old Man Roddy Carter was a pusher and he came by. I told him that anytime his brother felt bad, to let him lay down and rest. I know what he went through because I was there. They take good care of you, though.

Did the war change a lot of things down here?

No, but we lost a lot of young guys. I went for a physical and I was accepted into the Navy in 1941. My son had just been born. If they didn't call you in for induction within 90…after 90 days you had to have another physical. Ninety-two days after the first physical they called me again. I went to New Orleans for another physical examination and they turned me down. I will always remember. The doctor checked my heart and he said he was sending me back home because I had a heart murmur. He advised me to see a heart doctor. The next day I went to the doctor that he recommended. I never had any problems with it though. They put me on a pacemaker but I don't need it anymore. I still have it in me, but it is set low. If my heart gets bad, then it will kick in. I can work and it doesn't bother me.

3.5. Dick Guidry (October 4, 2001; Galliano, LA)

I was 16 when the war ended. When I was going to fish crabs on the beach in Grand Isle in 1942, there was a big German torpedo on the beach that had missed a ship the night before. They used to sink ships, oh at least once a week they used to sink them offshore. And I went to get my dad, went to the Coast Guard, and they came, and they guarded all the area, removed the detonator and brought it to New Orleans. Big torpedo, about 18 feet long. Swastika on the tip.

What made you decide to go start drilling?

Well, I figured anybody could do it. I mean it's just a matter of borrowing the money and doing it. And I guess the banks had enough faith. I had a few investors to help me start it. The first thing I did is I went to several

Okay, you were getting your equipment when

Okay. Now you mentioned Bass Enterprises.

Because Harvey Peltier, who I ran against in '51, his father had been bragging that he would be elected at 26, I figured if he'd be elected at 26, I could be elected at 21. And people heard me say that and took me up on it. I had 14 opponents. I was the most surprised person in the race when I won. My wife couldn't vote for me, she was 19, I was 21. Won by a landslide, 17 votes. That was good for four years. But then after that, I won the first primary for three elections.

So in that first session, is there anything memorable about your first period in the Legislature? You were a kid.

I was a kid, but the first thing that impressed me was the bonus money should have been kept, our income today had to be kept, I got legislative council, that's Hank Lauricelle, to check into it, and they said that if my bill had passed, and if they had lived by the provisions of the bill, we would have four billion of recurring revenues per year. They could've invested in Standard and Poor and picked up double the money every six years, 11 percent, that doubles your money every six years. Now you figure from 1952 to today, when you have about five or six billion in about four years that you could have rolled over. Anyway the legislative council said that the recurring revenue would be about four billion a year today. But 21, who listens to anybody. But then in '64 I was extremely, extremely vocal and that's when I built all these levees. That's where we got 50 million dollars worth of levees that are finished, while people are just talking about them today. We're ready for them. And with [Albert Otto] Rappelet we got that port going. And our biggest problem we've had, probably getting decent highways. And…like the Leeville bridge, I had that built, but we couldn't justify going higher than that because there was no port at the time, and it went to Grand Isle, there was only 15 hundred people, you couldn't economically justify…because each additional foot higher you'd go up, it needed to go 45 feet higher, that was 400 thousand more per foot, as you go up, so it would have cost several million more. We couldn't justify it.

It was obsolete the day we built it. We knew that. But we couldn't…they had a formula they went by. So many population, you couldn't…and the oil and gas business was not really in full bloom offshore. I mean it was sporadic here and there, but nothing to really…and most of them were in Leeville anyway. And they were transient people that didn't live there. They lived on high ground, so they weren't too concerned about it. But anyway that's just one of the many problems we've had.

Were people anticipating offshore oil doing what it did yet at that point?

Not really, it just happened. There was no big fanfare about it, it just…they branched out and of course some of the predictions of hurricanes were going to wipe them out all the time, which it does, but they rebuild. But what they do today is unbelievable. I'll never forget, I was fishing

is costing them eight dollars a barrel to get out of the ground. They will never, never, ever in our lifetime, make money offshore. That's why I did not accept the 37½ percent." Because we were having 100 percent up to three miles, you see, at the time. So to show you how wrong he was, do you realize the money that we would be making with 37½ percent? Truman gave him a hell of a deal. And he spoke for Louisiana on behalf of Earl Long and he was the authority. And his logic was reasonable. Of course, he lived in Plaquemines and he knew how treacherous the Gulf of Mexico could be. Never dreamed that offshore would operate at a profit when you can't operate at a profit in a bay. That was his theory. He was wrong. He was a powerful individual, that guy.

3.6. Mac Rome (September 22, 2001; Golden Meadow, LA)

I graduated in 1944, and I went in the service at 17, volunteered to go in the Navy. Of course, it was towards the end of the war. Got out at the latter part of '45 so I didn't serve much time in it, you know, very fortunate. I couldn't go to work for Texaco. I still wasn't 21. So I worked I think for Gulf Distributorship for a while. Drivin' a truck, drillin' and gas. And then at 21 I went to work Texaco and I stayed 40 years. I stayed 25 years at Leeville, and then they moved me up to Golden Meadow here and made me field production foreman here in Golden Meadow. And after, say maybe five years, they made me field superintendent of both fields. At one time, I had about 96 people workin' for us. We drilled many a well here in Golden Meadow too. Because in Golden Meadow I think they started, I wasn't here, I think around '30, like maybe '36, '37…They drilled here in Golden Meadow before Leeville, I think. But this was all considered inshore. Now when I first started for Texaco, when I was in Leeville, they brought a rig in at Grand Isle, off of Grand Isle. And they took one of our crew, one of our roustabout crew, and went to Grand Isle and we stayed at Grand Isle awhile riggin' up that rig and then layin' a gas line to it for supply. But that was the only rig, the only well they'd drilling right there then. Then they didn't make a well, we didn't make a well, we had a dry hole. And they moved outta Grand Isle for quite a number of years then. We pulled back in here. I had the Golden Meadow, the Leeville, and the Bayou Ferblanc field**,** three fields**.** Bayou Ferblanc is on the east side of the Bayou, between Golden Meadow and Leeville. I'd love to see how offshore is done, but I don't wanna go do it. I don't wanna go see it. You know what I mean? That wasn't for me. Didn't like it, you know. I stayed inshore all the time. I was very lucky. And here in Golden Meadow, I was 7 and 7. I was the boss and I'd come home every night. So there was gravy train, man.

When we first started, most of our rigs was land rigs. But we'd dig a canal to get there and they'd put these mats in this marsh and stuff to put the rig on. The pipe's all under that marsh to run gas lines to operate the rigs, and they were right behind the dredge, I mean it was this soft mud that'd sink up to here. But there they were. And if you didn't do it, there was somebody else on the bank lookin' for your job in those days, you know, there was, there were quite a demand. I was very lucky to get on in '48. And, eventually, I'd say maybe, oh, around '50 they start comin' out with the barges. The rigs on the barges were just locked in the barge. And then they'd dredge the canal and then the pile driver would come in and drive the location where the well's gonna be, and then they'd slip the barge on and sink it. And then they'd drill the well, complete the well and pump it out and move off, and then we would take over and run the flow line. Run in the tank battery and produce the oil.

We had what they called pumpers. Pumpers would handle the production of it, in other words they'd gauge the tanks, they'd gauge the wells, and they'd turn that in to Bruce Pagliughi, who would figure out how much production we needed per day, how much gas we sold. And then we'd have… say a well drops off a little bit, we

though. Whew, boy we took a lickin', I'll tell you. Of course, everybody did, you know? Everybody.

I retired in January of '87. In '86, February

You said it was kinda hard getting on with Texaco…'cause they were bringin' their own people in or…?

Well, no. The trouble is that they just had so many people lookin' for jobs. In '48, they just had people lookin' for jobs all over…and then, when I hired out they must've been a line of 50 of 'em. Waitin', lookin' for jobs, you know. So

wells. Let's say you got 15 hundred pounds on [the well] and you open it up on a one-eighth, and you're pullin' 150 barrels on a one-eighth and the pressure drops down to 13 hundred. Well, if you close it in and it goes right back to 15 hundred, you're not doin' no harm to the well. But if you pull it on a three-sixtenths and it's 15 hundred and you pull it down to 12 hundred and then you close it in and it goes back on up to 14 hundred, well, you're drawin' down greater than what the reservoir should pull. So then normally we would go back to the one-eighth. So we get the most oil out before we get water. We know we gonna get water. It's not like Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia doesn't have no water drive, period. It's all oil drive. So they can pull 'em wide open. And offshore, too, they pull 'em wide open 'cause they don't have as big a water drive. But here, if you get greedy, you gonna get water. And water gives you problems. You gotta treat water. You gotta separate the water from the oil and the gas. And you gotta treat the water. At one time, for quite a number of years, that water went overboard. And we had more oysters, more shrimp, more fish than we ever had in our life. Then the environmentalists came and said that we were polluting the water. So we had to start treating the water…which doubled the cost. You gotta put chemical in that water, you gotta treat it and everything before it goes overboard. Now you can't even go overboard with it. Now you have to put it in barges. At one time everything went overboard. I remember when we first started. You'd break the well in, you'd open the well up, and you'd start makin' water. We'd let that go overboard. When it started makin' a little oil, you'd let it go overboard, you just let it go overboard 'til it clears up. Gets to all oil, then you shut it up, you put in the line. But that oil and stuff went out in the water. But it dissipated, you know. I mean, it didn't kill nothing.

Just like the environmentalists say, you gotta pick up the oil in the marsh, you can't burn it. If you get a leak today in that marsh and you set fire to it, you will burn 99 and nine-tenths of it. And within three weeks, you got some green grass growin' back in the marsh. But if you leave it there and let it get dead and try a e 4 y o

kick in so much money to this fund, and then the federal bureau. Man, they spend some money to clean that stuff out. They spend millions all across the bayou. And they didn't go half-assed, you know. And the government pays, they got some people on the payroll. But, they clean out that whole side over there.

Well, they got a guy by the name of Abraham. Abraham, you know Abraham? Well, we blame that all on him 'cause he produced them damn wells over there. Abraham. Yeah. We kid him, we kid him that old man O'Neill thought he owned 50 wells and he pulled a Christmas tree off 50 of 'em they didn't have no pipe in 'em. Abraham had sold all the pipe out of 'em. He's a good guy, though. Good, good, good fellow. Oh, yeah. He has a lot of knowledge, had a lot of knowledge. Lots of knowledge. Because the co

4. The Boat Companies

4.1. Weber Callais (June 4, 2002; Golden Meadow, LA)

Mr. Web Callais was 88 years old in 2002. He spends many mornings at Chene's Netshop near his home in Golden Meadow, helping to make nets and get his exercise as well as to play bouré. He owned a netshop for decades, but his prim

the war, we went working in the shipyard. ‘C

from there Citizen sold. Since then we went to First Interstate. First Interstate, we went to Argent Bank. Then from Argent Bank, we went to Hibernia Bank. I'm still on the Board of Directors of Hibernia Bank.

In those days, when we had the bank and all, anybody that wanted to borrow $100,000 or $150,000, they used to call me. You know, I always use my judgment. We were 19 on the board. At the end, well, I used to say, "Well, what the people, what they said? Well, okay, well, this is my idea." I would give them what I thought. I knew everybody. I knew somebody wanted to borrow a thousand dollars and I knew he couldn't pay for it. I would tell 'em then, "I don't know. I don't think it's a good deal." 'Cause this, this, this, you know. And if it was

You see, when we were doing it inside, well, for a long time, I had my little boat, was working for 'em. We used to have a boiler, steam boiler, on the rig. And then we used to haul water. We used to, what they called it, the lake up the bayou there. That big lake that was closed. Well, we used to come down and get the fresh water. And go south. I worked for Gulf six years. I went to…I used to leave Bird Island when we first started, Bird Island, the Intracoastal was not at Larose, it was at Cut Off, uh, Lockport. I used to get my boat down there, I had some tanks in it. I had told you I sank five times. And I used to leave there at three o'clock in the morning, go to Houma, to go to Houma. I didn't have enough brain that they had some water in Lockport. Why? I don't know. But they had a water plant in Lockport. Why I had to go to Houma? But I was going to Houma. By myself, and then I used to get back here 'round eight, nine o'clock at night. And I would sleep there, and then next morning, at three o'clock, gone. And then that was six years, from here. And then we went down the river, Mississippi, at Venice. We stayed three years there. I used to live there, and go to, come to New Orleans, at Bayou St. Joan in New Orleans there, and get my water there. Supply boat. And I always did work by myself. That's what I was telling to them the other day, I said, "When I see a can of potted meat or a can of Vienna sausage, I'll turn around and drop dead." I said, "I ate so much of that." Well, you see, I couldn't cook. I was on the boat all day. But I used to have a meal when I was at the house boat, or the quarter boat, well, I need to eat there. But every time I was going on a trip, I had to have that. And I said, "I ate so much of that…"

You never want to see it again. When you were working over out of Venice, did you have, were you living over there, did you have a family over there with you?

Oh, no. No, no. We was working 11 on and 3 off. I was living right here. You see, when we were going down at Buras there, at Fort Jackson, we used to get on the levee there, the road was on the levee. And at Venice they had a little grocery store and a little hamburger place. And Texas Company had a barge in the river and they had about eight or nine wells, at Quarantine, at Garden Island. And that was the end of the world back then. Johnny Fremin. That was the name of the little store. And then, you know what we used to do, we used to leave over there in the truck, the company's truck used to take us to Gretna, Harvey. And then when we was lucky enough, they'd have one that was going in to Houma. And then we're getting' off at Raceland, flag a ride to come down. And then when you was ready to go back to work, we used to get on the road and flag a ride and go to Venice. But most of the time, the company had cars or trucks that used to pass in Houma, I mean, in Raceland. And that's the way we used to go. And then, when they change, we change from 11 to 27 days on. That's three days off. But I had my own boat, you see, I built my home and everything, on that. A lot of work. I mean, we weren't making too much money, but everything was cheap, you know. Everything was so cheap. But

They didn't have no rig, no nothing, in Venice. Cross the river and all, they didn't have no rig. They was shooting dynamite, you know. Any time we was chasing the deer. Deer, they had deer out of this world. Rabbit, snakes, oh, a big moccasin there. I mean to tell you, you know that fresh water. And it was all grass. But now, I went through there, 'bout three years ago I went through there, across the river they don't have nothing left. No more land. No more ridge, you know, those cane ridge and all. They don't have that over there no more. It was there when we was there at Pilot Town. But now they don't have nothing left. Just the levee and water. Just like when you get off of the bridge, there at Leeville. You see, we own that property from the canal, where the bridge goes down, up to the old gray house, my family does. Well, all of that, that was all marsh and that was muskrat, we used to trap. Muskrat. All of that was muskrat. Trappers all over it. And then you don't even see one muskrat here. Never. You don't see that. There's no more left.

You see a lot of discussion about the day rates on boats nowadays, you know. Two thousand dollars a day, or whatever, but it kind of fluctuates fairly quickly.

For us, it was $100 a day.

And that was pretty stable?

Oh yeah. Yeah, but they would furnish everything. Oil, rope, and you didn't loose no time. The boat would break down there for two or three days they would pay it, right, right through. And then we have only two men on the boat. And most of time they were feeding our men out there. That's why we could work for the kind of price. But when I got into the 100 footer, well, then it was $250 a day. But just two men on and like I said, my rope, oil, lube, everything was paid by the company, you see. And you weren't loosing time. Sometime they would come and put a boat on dry dock for Coast Guard approval, you know. And Coast Guard used to come in the morning and we was there, we had everything. In the evening, they were gone, we had our certificate. Today, you can't go through Coast Guard 'less you loose 15, 20 days. Him that was here, he just finished with one of his boats with Coast Guard. I bet you anything it didn't cost him less than, I would say, $50,000. You come down, you got a little kink on your boat there and they take a cut, it's got to be 18 foot square. If it's a little bump like that and sometime it's fuel tank, and when it get into fuel you got a little bump like that, then you gotta get a truck. You got to cover a man to get a truck, pump that fuel out, de-fume it, get the fume outta the tank and afterwards you can cut and weld. And if you got a little piece, let's say that long, they can come down and make you change 10 or 12 feet. And when you got the boat on dry dock, man, you got four, five, six men working on there. The men get 10, 12, 15 dollars a day. The welder is 30 dollars a day, you know what I'm saying? You can't go and dry dock a new boat, two years old, three years old, you can't go and dry dock right now with the time you loose, less than $25,000. And they're hard on you. And first thing you gotta do, you gotta send $1100 to the Coast Guard. You gotta pay the Coast Guard to come and…

So you pay the Coast Guard to loose money?

You pay the Coast Guard, yes, sir. The Coast Guard is paid by us, our tax and all. And you can't do nothing on the boat before they come. Sometime we used to put it on dry dock, clean it

up and paint it. Uh-uh. You can't do nothing. When they come, they'll tell 'em, '"Well, we'll be there." Let's say you call Monday. '"We'll be there Friday." Now you come there, now you loosing two or three thousand a day, you understand. And then, 'specially when you go, just like when you go in dry dock, we get five-inch shafts, you see. Every three years you gotta take that boat, put it up, fold them shafts out. And put it on the side there. Then they come and they look at it. "Okay, put it back in." It's twin screw. If you break a shaft, you still got your engine to get in. But they don't go like that. Pull that power shaft out of there you can save $6,000. Like I said, the people on there, 15, 20 dollars a day. And you know how it is at a shipyard, they could start at seven o'clock, at nine o'clock you gotta have a break, at 12 o'clock, at three o'clock, you know. I was talking to Mr. Edison Chouest. I'm the one that started him in business. Edison Chouest. First boat he got, I got him to go to Humble and got him to buy… I bought that boat. I got it from Bayou la Batre, Alabama. We were talking about it, me and him the other day, they got about 400 men working there. They got 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the evening. That's a half hour. You've got 400 men, that's 200 hours. They take off maybe three, four, five minutes before they go for a little snack, you know. They come back. You can say half hour, on the 15 minute break that they got, you can say a half hour. That's 200 hours. Now they pay those guys at least from 10 to $25 an hour. You put an average of $15 an hour, for those men. Know how much it cost those people to get those men them 15 minutes? Like I said, it's not 15 minutes. You can say an hour, you know. You can say an hour. Two, three minutes before they go, two, three minutes before they stop, 15 minutes on the payroll. You come there, you take everything down, and you take it with you over there. And you come, most of the time he's never coming, putting in, start working right now. Either he got to get rod, or two or three of them talk a few word together. You can say an hour. Or more. So an hour, that's $400. And you can say, $15 an hour, you know. There's some of them that pays less, but some of 'em more. It's what we were talking about. How much it cost for that little break. They say a man can't work four hours or five hours without stopping. We used to work. We used to do it. Yep.

So you got Mr. Chouest started in the boat business?

Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. He was a trawler. They were down in here and they had moved to Mississippi. His daddy went into the wood business, you know, paperwood. Pulp. And then from there, his brother-in-law was down here trawling and then he came with brother-in-law and start trawling . And he was a hard, hard, hard working man. And we always been the best of friends. They asked me, Humble asked me to build a crew boat. So I told 'em, "Yeah, I'll have that built in Raceland." And I went to him and I said, "Chouest," I said, "I got a job for a crew boat." And I said, "If you want, we're gonna go half and half." He said, "I'm making good with my boat." They was doing good. He had two shrimp boats. Like I said, he was a hard, hard worker. He said, "I'm gonna see ya later." So I said, "Okay." So about 15 days after, he called me. Said, "Look," he said, "I decided I'm gonna go." "No," I said, "I'm sorry, but I got my money." Went to the bank and I borrowed a loan. So 'bout a month later I get a call from a guy from Bayou la Batre, had a little boat that was working there. And he said, "Mr. Weber," he said, "I'm gonna sell my boat." I said, "How much you want?" He said, "I want $35,000." I said, "I'm gonna see." So I told Chouest. Said, "Can I get a job?" I said, "Wait. Let's go talk to the man over there. We went to talk. He said, "Mr. Chouest, who's gonna run that boat?' He

work." 'Cause see the job the boat is on, he figured about six month it was gonna take. It was surveying all the rigs, you know. "Well," he said, "You know what I can do?" It was a shrimp boat. They had pulled the rig. He said, "I just can put the rig back on and go shrimp." I said, "That's right." With a steel hull. All the other boats we had over here was all wooden boats. And that's how he got it. He went on the boat, him and his boy, Gary, Gary Chouest. And a few months… they was making money and they find another boat to buy. So they went, they bought

approved. And we didn't know what Coast Guard approved was. We didn't know nothing that we had to have. So I start working on that. My boat, after the crew was on, Schlumberger was

into Venice. They have a little pack they take out to that rig. It was in the gulf, you know. Three or four hours from Venice. So he took it off. He said, "Wait, wait, wait. Look, you got this you got to take outta the mouth of the Mississippi River." East, out of Mobile, there. So when he got there, he put in the box, he hadn't gotten to the box yet. You take that in. Maybe an hour after he was there, then they said, "Okay, you going back, take this to this rig." Four days and four night, he told me, "Never shut my engine down." And there were only two men on the boat at that time. He said, "I went out, told 'em I had to quit." "We couldn't lay you off, but," he said, "we tried to tell ya' that's that. We didn't need the boat anymore." Thing was, the rigs was shutting down left and right, they didn't need any boat. That's how your contract was good. They couldn't cut your contract, but they could make you quit. So, oil companies, they can do you all kinds of things, you know. When it come, come from the office. Well, send him there, send him. The men there, they hate to do it, but that's their job. You take that over there, you take over here, you take that over there. So that's why I said a contract is no good.

How did you manage to get through the times when things went bad?

that and moving it outta the boat. Well, they can't . A rig boat is the same thing. Now, he's building a boat now. Three hundred feet long. Chouest. He's building it at Larose, North American right there, that shipyard, you know. He's gonna have the biggest winch that's ever been built. They're having it built it right now. They're gonna go to work and build, when they start going on eight, four, five thousand feet, you see. That winch gonna be big enough that they're gonna be able to set the casing, which a rig can't handle that, you know. Then they will be equipped to do that. That boy's got enough brain that he sees what's coming . You know what he's got right now that the people been thinking? You know them rigs that's 100 mile, 120 mile out? It's too far, a boat that, it take eight, nine hours, 10 hours to come in, you know. With the crew, and ten hours to go back. But he took some of them big boats that was working with seismograph, that finished that job, seismograph done, start slacking down. And 220 foot, 230 foot. He got that, he made a hotel out of it. He's got two of 'em right now. One of 'em that can carry about 40 or 50 rooms in it. The other one got 80 room in it. And they got their equipment in that boat that they put into there. I don't care how rough is it, how the wind, how the current, everything. He's got that, that, uh, computer one [dynamic positioning systems]. They stay right there. So when they not called, they're right at the hotel, and when they go back to work, they're right back on the rig. He's got two of 'em now. Now he's figuring on fixing some more. They gonna put them rig out there, 'cause everyone on that platform, they can hold like 40, 50, 100 men. Some might have 100 men on there, out there. Well, they gonna room and board them, as a hotel.

Pretty clever.

That's a good boy, that Chouest.

I haven't been able to talk to Mr. Edison yet.

No? He might be at his camp, then, yeah. He's fishing all the time. All the time. He just bought himself one of them, what you call them, a catamaran? I went and look at it. It's 28 feet. He paid $88,000. I said, "Chouest, what you gonna do with that?" He's got five of 'em. And then other kinda boats, you know, fishing boats. He fishes every day, every day, every day, every day. I said, "What you gonna do with that? That's what you want, you can afford it." He can afford it. That man, that man. Poor like he was raised, you know. We was all raised poor, very, very poor, all of us. And seeing the way he is right now. He just sold his half [of] the first ice breaker that they built. When they built it, it cost 48 million. And then he just sold it, his half to his son, to Gary, 20 million. So I know he's got 20 million of cash. Now he sold all his other share. He's got share in three boats left that's working with LOOP. They had bought that boat. They had paid, I believe, around three million. They sold it. We used to go to Biloxi and tie it up there at the big hotel in Biloxi, Water Front…what is it, the Waterfront Hotel? Stay a week. But now we can't do that no more. He got his [camp] at the island, not too far from mine. We're still good friends. He don't feel too good. He can tell you how hard it was when they started.

Who were your captains, were they local boys?

Yeah, yeah, uh-huh, local boys. But right now we got lotta people from Mississippi, Alabama, up north. North Louisiana. But you gonna take on them big, big boats, like Chouest and all them, they got a lot of them young boys from down there. They finish that school, they graduated 11th grade. And then the first thing they did, they went to school to get their license. And all their family been on boats. I was talking to Lee Griffin down there. 'Cause money, money is nothing. Him and his wife, they went on that ice breaker, Chouest's, him and his wife. And he's a captain on the boat. And he's young, oh he's about, maybe 28, maybe 30, I don't know if he's 30. They were making a thousand dollars a day, him and his wife. I tell you, I said, they own the boat there, they go, he told me three, four months, five months. But I say, "How much you give Uncle Sam?" "Almost all of it." You know, 'cause, you see, what they do, they change crew over in Peru. And, uh, he says, I tell you what he told me. Well, the boat is about six years old now. I was supposed to go with Chouest, me and Edison, we were supposed to go spend a month on an icebreaker over in Alaska. We had said we was gonna go, but now things change, and we're getting old. It woulda been fun.

4.2. Chester Cheramie (March 4, 2002; Golden Meadow, LA)

I was in South America submarine patrol and then I stayed there for about a year and we came back to the States and we started hauling the equipment preparing for the invasion of North Africa and then the invasion of England, and most of the time I didn't know that. I was young, I was just a punk, 19 years old. And after we did all this we back to the States. That is when we idy11y6d7sc0.0wasp

lived right here in Golden Meadow. Him and his daddy took a lugger and converted it to a tug boat. When he past away in 1976 he had twenty-six tug boats and that was a man who could see the future. It's like Mr. Edison Chouest today, people that could see the future. And then people after that started building like they did. I remember Minor Cheramie, he was a deckhand on a shrimp boat. Him and his brother built a little crew boat and from there they went to 50, 60 big supply boats. A lot of the stories of people and how they got started here. It's amazing to me how all your people like young generations saying "man look at that guy with all that money and he never worked," and you tell them the story of how they started these people, and they don't believe you.

These guys were working in a shrimp shed or a shrimp boat or oystering. They just took a chance and they knew that in the Gulf of Mexico you didn't need no license, not like it is today. A man could be a captain of a boat 'cause all these captains was ex-fisherman and ex-trawlers and that is what they had done all their life, work in boats. They could close their eyes and take you anywhere in the Gulf of Mexico, anywhere you wanted. And today you had to have 200 ton, 300 ton license and in those days you didn't need that. If you had that, none of them could've gotten it 'cause none of us could read and write. So they only used the stars and the moon to find the location, and it was amazing how these guys knew that and how they survived.

Did your brothers get into the boat business or the oil business?

Yeah, my brother went into the business. Well my brother started…he went into the service. Merchant Marine. And when he come out he went to work for Halliburton. He worked for Halliburton quite a few years. Like my daddy. My daddy worked in tug boats and all that. And he got interested in boats. Me, I never could get interested in boats. So after a few years with Schlumberger he decided, him and one of his wife's brother, decided to go into the boat business. His partner had what was called a cli

The oil companies started asking people… 'cause nobody had any, the only thing we had was fishing boats, trawlers and they all would convert them into what you called luggers, and then from that, that's when we started to build steel-hulled… Mr. Joe Leonard built the first one and from there is where it took off. It was at the time a big monster, about a forty-footer. So that is how the thing got going in supply boats. Then they needed tug boats. After a few years they started to going offshore and they needed a tug to pull their rig on the location. So they started building tugs, supply boats and crew boats. The crew boat was taking the crews to the platforms in those days. And they were little bitty things maybe 25, 30 foot long. And well today, they are over 100 foot long because they are going further and further out. If you go to Fourchon today you can see the structures. See how close they are from the Gulf of Mexico and the thing ate so much, the Gulf of Mexico receded so much for losing so much ground… some of these rigs were onshore at one time. They were onshore when they build those thing. You can see the structure. See just the structure and everything else. Didn't need no pilings in those days. As one of the first, in south Louisiana here, that was the first one…offshore rig. They call it offshore rig but it was right in Bay Marchand. Right off the beach. But the first big offshore rig that I remember was out of Morgan City. Out of Morgan City because, you know, that was offshore. But I don't recall how offshore it was but it was not that far. I mean it was offshore anyhow.

The folks that built up the boat fleets…did they get outside financing from banks?

I think in those days Kennedy Marine… I think it was out of Mississippi and they would build a boat… If you'd use their engine they'd finance your boat. Now that's how most of these guys got started. If you go see those people say that you would like to built a boat but ain19fj16..655 0 TD0.0

I got…it goes up one minute and all of a sudden it goes down. It all depends on how the oil's selling and all that stuff. I remember back in the 50's we had…it was right after the war. We did not have that many boats, didn't have that many people in the boat business I don't think. And then all of a sudden a company needed more boats. That was back in the early 50…'54, '55 boom. Oil dropped and stopped drilling. Didn't have the equipment to go further out. Not that you couldn't but you didn't have the equipment to drill that deep... I don't know too much about the leases but the federal government wouldn't lease all that land. And then it picked up again, took quite awhile to pick up. And then back in the '70's…late '60's the thing took off again.

what I am saying? Just like the oil field. When the oil field started here, no one knew nothing about the oil field. Everyone came from Texas…. it could have been from Lafayette or from Texas. No one knew anything about the oil fields. They got started and you started working as a roustabout. That's how they got started. Drillers. Drilling superintendents. Just like anything else, you learn it. So that's what happened up in the North Sea. They kicked all these companies out…I believe Candies is the only company left now I believe… And that's about it, I guess.

I decided I was 74 years old it is time to retire. Not that I wanted too. My wife made me. I had a good job. Through the end my job with them was just like public relations work and all. And I went three days a week. And they paid me not minimum wage but not enough to mess up with my social security, you know? My wife say, "we don't need that, get away from that." For the first six months after I got out every morning I would get up and go to the office. One morning I caught myself. I said, "what in the Hell am I doing here." It finally dawned. After 26 years every morning…and I missed it at the beginning. Now, I go when I want to. It grows on you like anything else. So I enjoy what I am doing. I come over here in the morning. Shoot the breeze with these guys. Stay an hour or so then do what I got to do. So that's about the speed of my life. I enjoyed it. Can't expect more than that at my age. I have a lot of friends that are gone, much younger than me. I've survived so far. Like I always said He'll put my name in yet.

4.3. Roy Champagne (September 20, 2001; Galliano, LA)

Roy Champagne drove supply boats for L & M Botruc. Two brothers, Lefty and Minor

out of Port Sulphur. The same thing, water, pick up a water barge and bring them water, mud, drill pipe, casing. Then we started building tank batteries. Two guys on the boat.

Fifty-seven, that's when they come out with the botrucs. I worked with them even before they had the botrucs. The first one, we went to pick it up in Harvey. We were supposed to go to Rhode Island, but they brought it. We picked it up at George Engine in New Orleans. That was a big one in those days, 65 feet.

What's so special about the botrucs, as a captain…?

The big ones, I can't tell you. The only boats I worked on was the botrucs. To me, I can run circles around them. I used to pull into the slip in Leeville, and some guys, this is the truth I'm telling you, had bow thrusters, couldn't get in the slip if there was a boat tied up at the fuel dock.

And we had a toolpusher from Gulf, a transportation supervisor for Gulf. If I told him they had 10 foot seas out there…you know whose word he's gonna take? My word. Old man Tony Price. The best transportation supervisor I ever worked for. I'll tell you one instance. We was working

AB. “I don’t want my mate’s license.” That don’t do me no good. Then when that master part was approved, I went to New Orleans. Taking the test, they had one yoyo in there. I hope that one day I meet him on the road and he’s got a breakdown. And if he’d been in here, I could tell it to his face, too. They checked my papers. The guy says, “It’s getting late, four o’clock and that was it.” The guy says, “Where’s your plotting?” You got to plot, to know where you’re going. They give you a course, to leave from here to here, and they’re never going to give you a straight line. You got to pass over something, after you know the map, you could see if it was a boat sunk all the way, partly, if it’s a rock, or sand, or what it is. He asked me, “Where’s the answers?” “Right here, I gave them to you.” They couldn’t find them nowhere. The yoyo had thrown them, had tore them. He didn’t say not

on the rope to pull it tight. If the current changes… I was in the wheelhouse ‘case you needed to call me real quick.

With dynamic positioning…

Oh, they still use those buoys to tie up. But if you got a boat with a dynamic positioning system, you don’t need that buoy anymore. After he’s set

4.4. Dick Guidry (October 4, 2001; Galliano, LA)

In the 1960's Dick Guidry ventured north to drill for oil in Michigan and Kentucky. He lost his money drilling dry holes. He returned to Louisiana and expanded the drilling operations, and in the early 1970's started building tugboats. He built a fleet of about nine tugboats and two barges, and then bought the Dilsaver Company out of Morgan City, which had about 18 or 20 tugboats.

In the early '70's I started building ocean-going tugs. From 5,000 to 12,000 horsepower. And I brought those to Europe. I worked in the Bahamas docking ships. I worked hauling steel to Colombia and Venezuela, and I docked supertankers in the Bahamas and we buried pipelines in the North Sea for 18 years. We had better than 300 Cajuns between Nolte Theriot, Inc. and myself. We had about 37 tugs working there, and we had about 300 Cajuns we brought to the North Sea. It was quite a cultural shock for both the British and the Cajuns. But we got along great, famously, and did a good job over there.

We've been active in the oil and gas business until 1985, and then I was building, I had contracted for two boats, in Santander, Spain. Two boats. It was costing six million apiece, but when the first one came out, oil dropped to nine dollars a barrel. Oil contracts were cancelled and I was stuck with a tremendous debt, and I went under, like most people did in those days, and that's pretty much how the oilfield…I think we went broke five times. It's all peaks and valleys. Things get good and you cannot follow the predictions from anybody. The Carter Administration were blatant liars about the potential oil and gas futures. They predicted 80 dollar oil, per barrel, they predicted a shortage, that we'd run out in 40 years, and they knew nothing about what they were talking about. Absolutely nothing.

What made you go look at Kentucky when you had all this oil right here?

Because it's cheaper to drill 600 feet than it is to drill 10,000 feet. In Kentucky I could drill an oil well and put oil in the tanks for 5,000 dollars. And for us, say 600 to 800 barrels a day, there was 1200 to 1600 dollars a day. I mean, you get a payout in four or five days. I couldn't do that in Louisiana, because I didn't have the 150-250,000 per well. But then I did have it after a few years, and I went and blew it in Michigan. Between Battle Creek and Jackson in a little town near Albion called Concord. That's where I drilled. I was looking for the Detroit Black River [formation]. And if you hit it there, every well was worth 10 million dollars. You could sell it to Detroit investors, I mean, they were getting eight and nine dollars a thousand cubic feet for gas because they were so close to Detroit, and Detroit was just hungry for gas. I went broke again, but I've never cared much about the final results. It's the chase that I've enjoyed. I paid for 18 years. Had an office in Great Yarmouth, England, Peterhead, Scotland, Norway. And I had an office in Madrid and London. And I built those boats right on the Santander Bay right there in Biscay, in northern Spain. Nolte

and when you're a one man corporation, it's all on your back. You know, you've got employees, but there's so much you can ask of them, you know. But I've enjoyed it, I've enjoyed working all my life.

So, did you and Nolte actually hook up together?

Yeah, we had a loose joint venture going. He needed more boats, and I gave him my boats, since he was already established over there, and we operated jointly so I sent some of my people…all of my crews that I had, some of my people in the office to do invoices and stuff like that. Nolte died very young. I think he was 50 years old.

Okay, we're talking about getting the boat company going.

Well, in those days, it was very easy to get employees. Now, I understand, it's next to impossible. Well, the biggest problem today, I understand, is if you can get one to pass the drug test. Maybe out of 10, you're lucky if you get two that can make it. But in the days when I was in the business, we didn't have that problem. There was no drug problem, it was non-existent. It's a different generation. But those kids today, their dads never used that stuff. Actually the people that worked for me were deckhands that used to work on oyster or shrimp boats. And they became real good tugboat captains. They were used to the sea, and that was their life. And the money was steady. They made good money.

Did you have some that would do this, they would bounce back and forth between shrimping and…?

Not so much on the tugboats as on the drilling rigs. And I don't know, I think because the drilling rig is probably earlier. I think it was an earlier time. But not on the boats because they were on so many days off and so many days on, and they made a full year's income working half

get hit by a barge, or the traffic is so much confined in a small or narrow space, and then there's fog and stuff that doesn't bother you offshore like it does here. Because radar will show you 20 miles away what's around you.

So pretty much an inshore captain is an inshore captain. He doesn't want to…?

He doesn't want to mess offshore and vice versa. It's a different breed.

So, did you start off right away working in Europe with your boats, or did they start out here?

I guess I started about three years after I was in the boat business, I started in Europe. I worked the Gulf of Mexico first, and then the Bahamas, and then Caribbean, and then Europe. Nolte had a fleet of boats working already, and he needed some more support vessels, and he knew that I had a bunch of them under construction, and he had a bunch under construction, but he could use all he could get his hands on. So he and I teamed up.

And business over there? How did that go?

I went about once a month, about 10 days a month, because I was in the Legislature. I had to take care of those obligations. So I'd go between committee meetings. But I'm always bouncing back and forth. A lot of trips to Europe.

It was just like doing business in this country. Now, I wouldn't do business in Africa, like the Chouests. I talk to Eddie who lives over there. And I said, "Eddie, I would never work there." And everybody who works there tells me it's tough doing business. I've never had to pay anybody, the whole time I was in business I've never offered a bribe or had to pay…and in some of those Third World countries, it's a way of life. But that's not true in Europe. It's not true in France, Germany, it's above board, and it's very legitimate operations. It's really a pleasure doing business over there. And your federal agencies are real up front to help you.

Speaking of federal agencies and things that changed over time, what would you say were some of the biggies that affected you as a business person?

Well luckily when I was working, we weren't bothered as much as they are today. The Coast Guard is in your face all the time now, it's a pain in the butt, really. Then the labor unions are trying to break in, and they're not going to succeed. Not in this part of the country. And every time you move there's a new federal…OSHA, they're all foolish regulations. They're something that were made by dry-landers that know nothing about working offshore. Now, in the shipyards, they've created more hazards, by forcing people to wear lifejackets while they work, which makes it…the shipyard where I built my boats, they've had more accidents since OSHA has moved in than before OSHA. Because some of the regulations are just…like making them wear a lifejacket while working in the canal, about six feet of water. They fall overboard, they get electrocuted by not being able to…they can't maneuver like they should. And the owner told me, when he sold, he said, "I'm selling because I can't put up with these federal regulations. To hell with it." And he did sell the shipyard. But, they were some of the things we had to put up with. But you see now, we didn't have to go through Coast Guard inspections. My boats were

ABS [American Bureau of Standards], all of them ABS. But a supply vessel or a crew boat has to go through... in other words, it's okay if you drown the crew of a tugboat, but don't drown a passenger on a crew boat. Because if they carried passengers… I said, "how about a tug boat?" I said, "Don't get me wrong, I don't want to have to go through the inspections, but why aren't you inspecting the tug boats if you're going to inspect the supply boats? It doesn't make sense."

the trunk. I brought them home, fed them corn for about two or three weeks so I can purge them, then I ring their necks." I said, "You're

5. An Industry and Region in Transition

5.1. Ronald Callais (June 6, 2002; Golden Meadow, LA)

Ronald, nephew of Mr. Web Callais is a regular at PJ's in Golden Meadow for early morning coffee. I interviewed him in his office at the shipyard, an office well-stocked with novels (James Lee Burke, among them), with walls filled with official certificates, marking perhaps his service on Lafourche Parish's Police Jury and his memb

pushing a little barge, or he'd be supplying, it was all inshore stuff. He'd be working in the lakes, bringing crews, bringing supplies to rigs. In fact, one summer I remember, the state hired his boat… the whole wooden bulkhead that's in Bayou Lafourche down here? My father was the boat that pushed the pile driver the drove all those things in. Mom and I'd go bring him dinner every day. It was right in the bayou, so she'd go bring him, pack a lunch for him, we'd go to the boat, I'd stay a little while. I was too young. They didn't trust me on the boat. There's always, you know, the danger of falling overboard. But we always were involved in the marine industry in one way of the other. Either fishing or the boat business.

But you were involved in the shipyard and the boat business?

Well, I was in both of 'em at the same time. And it was kinda hard to hustle a man's business and hustle his job at the same time. I'm asking him to come over and do my work and I'm competing with him for his job out there. That didn't work. So I came to the realization that I'd rather be in the shipyard business than the boat business. So I sold my boats. My oldest son was working for me, taking care of the boats for me. My second son was running the shipyards. I just got rid of the boats. My oldest son, he's running the shipyards. My second son runs the Larose operation. He's kinda switched positions.

Were the brothers competing against each other when they all had their own boat companies?

Not really. I mean, you weren't tryJ-201sheir own boat cobe1 Tw-20145 TD0.0005 Tc0.07imeanu1(of)4.v0 y

boats tied up, we didn't scale back down on our style of living. But then after a month, two months, three months, then we realized this was gonna be a long haul. And it was. It was, I guess about a year, year and half it got halfway back to normal. A lot of companies went under.

slow down, but we still going str

can replace those. But a fitter, that's the guy that cuts, that fits, he's the artisan. He's the artisan of the business. So you got to take care of those guys so you got to have some sort of work going on to make sure you provide work for him, you see. Like you see Halter has always been a pure fabrication yard and I mean they've been decimated by these slowdowns. Huge one there, two or three years later halted, everything shut down. Bollinger's been successful. Why? Because they've got the fabrication and they've got the repair. Now we're strictly repair. We tried the fabrication but the personnel we have are repair personnel. I'd rather repair. It's more to my liking what we do. My field of expertise is repair. 'Cause you need the engineers. Nowadays if you gonna go into construction, you need the everything they got, the structural engineers, you need the nautical engineers, you know. You gotta have a big staff. I don't care for that. I'd rather stay in the repair business.

Your uncle was complaining about Coast Guard inspections and repairs. Is that a steady business for people like you?

Keeps us alive. I love the Coast Guard. No, you see, my late father and all of my uncles could not have survived in today's environment. Because Coast Guard inspection in the 60's and the 70's, you were ready for Coast Guard inspection, you called the office, the guy'd come down, drive up. And you'd done all your work. He'd drive up, he'd go up there, go down to the kitchen and have a cup of coffee. He'd pull out his books. "You did this?" "Sure, we did that." "Did this?" With his cup of coffee, give you the certificate, he'd leave. Now, you pull the boat up and you scrape the bottom, and you wait for the Coast Guard inspector to come. Don't you dare start doing anything 'til he gets there. Then he gets there, he gives you a scope for work for you to do. Then he comes periodically and he checks to make sure that it's being done. He pressure checks everything. It's a tougher business, that's why it is today. The business they were in was all coastal stuff, it really wasn't

shook hands or something, you didn't have to have any papers signed. You shook hands, you had the deal and the deal was the deal. A man asked you a question, you answered him, you could bank on it. My daddy said "Look, that steering works." It works. That's why a lot of times, these Coast Guardsmen would come down, and, a lot of times, they'd asked you something, you know, you gave 'em the answer, they could rely on it. Most of the stuff they'd asked you to do, it had been done. You might not agree with their order but it was done.

Let me tell you a story about my late father. My late father was operating four boats. And one particular boat, it was an old shrimp boat he'd converted into a little offshore supply boat, utility vessel. And the minute things would slow down, his boat was let go. Now, there was a little boat there that was half the boat my daddy's boat was. And, they'd let him go and they'd keep the other boat. But the other guy was better connected in the company than my father was, that's all it was. But it used to frustrate my daddy. "I'm being let go, and this son of a gun doesn't have the boat I've got. He keeps his job." So finally he got mad one day and he said "I'm selling the boat." So he made a deal with a guy to

going up that much. You take a little supply boat and you're making $3,000 a day. That's already $100,000 a month. The boat mighta cost you, when you built it, mighta cost you $300,000. Three months you gross the value…the cost of your boat, you know. So let's see, you got 50 percent, you still making $1500 a day. Multiply that by 365 days, what kinda money you talking about? So in the short span, for a few years, the boats made some money. I know

you know. So even though I'm not for unions, I think in that particular instance, I think it'da lessened the impact.

I'm as anti-union as they come. I do not care, I do not care for unions in my business over there. 'Cause I pay top dollar, I take care of my people, you know. But I don't want somebody coming in telling me what I gotta do and what I don't have to do. I know, I've talked to some of my customers that have gone union yards, and the job that I'm gonna do for a customer, say $10,000 over here, the union yard is gonna cost you $50,000. It's unbelievable. Because you get a guy come here, you got a welder, he goes there, there's a wire there. My welder's gonna go there, he's gonna cut it. At a union yard, an electrician comes, he moves the wire, then the welder-cutter comes, he cuts, the welder comes and he welds and then the electrician comes back. So you got four men doing the same job that one man does. The same amount of time, but you're being charged for four people instead of one. So, that's, that's what's bad about the union yards. They kill the goose that laid the golden egg. They go too far. You know, you gotta protect workers interests, I understand, you gotta pay 'em a decent wage. But when you get all this overhead, the burden that really shouldn't be there, it's gonna make you non-competitive… In the shipyard business, I'm a small operator. They don't mess with me. They'll go to McDermott, they'll go to Bollinger. Now, once th

just, he don't realize what I had to invest, the risk I'm taking to provide him his job. You know, they don't look at that. They're strictly looking at "Why's he making more money than me?" 'Cause, it's human nature. But you got that working against you. It's hard to get 100 percent support of your employees. But in a case like the union did, you got to have a damn good percentage of 'em to be able to fight. But these are the type of guys that'll go join the union. Even though they don't realize what they're giving up by joining the union. What they don't realize is they're giving up the freedom to go from job to job the way most of our people got here. Our people out here are very independent. Most of my employees are contract workers. They work for me today, they work for the other guy tomorrow. Unionize that, it won't be no more. They could get assigned a job, they come to roll call in the morning and be told where to go. That's union, that's how the unions work. And you can't walk off a job. You got to have a reason. They loose that freedom. That's worth something, you know.

You were saying you were doing contract welding. That always been the pattern for a yard like this?

No, at one time most yards were employee operations. But most of the yards were small. When this yard here opened up, it was two little dry docks. Four people owned it. All four worked here. You mighta had three employees besides that. So, it was a small operation. And every little down time they could carry two or three guys. But when you got 100 employees out there, and there's you, you can't afford to carry 99 people. So what we're doing is, we bring in contract workers, we pay a bit better. They have to provide their own insurance. We don't have to carry the burden of insurance. Plus I need you today, you're working. I don't need you tomorrow, I don't have to carry you. And it's understood. I've got maybe, over here, let's say I got 80 employees over here. I've got 20 of 'em [as] full time employees. My foreman, naturally all my office personnel. But my foremen are all full time employees. They earn a little bit less per hour than your contractors. But they provide hospitalization, profit sharing, the amenities. They're guaranteed 45 hours a week. They know they've got their two weeks vacation, after so many years. And additional week after that. They've got their own perks that come from full time employment. And they're not the ones in those tanks. They'll tell that guy to go to that tank. So, that's worth something there, you know. But the federal government gave us some problems a few years back. They were saying that these were full time employees, they wanted us to pay social security and the other stuff. But we'd been audited three times on that particular… but we've withstood the test of the federal government. Unless they change the rules on us, which potentially can happen anytime. But under the current rules, we're safe.

What do they look at?

First of all, they look at what you're paying 'em at, first of all, the gross amount. And then, what you're paying that guy is based on two factors. First of all, you're paying him for his labor and you're paying for his equipment. So there's a rental figure in there and a salary figure. Now, there's a difference on how you pay your workman's comp, on the fact that you pay 'em the salary but not the rentals. Some yards I know which will remain unnamed, go heavy on the rental, to break down, to reduce the amount of actual salary, you know, what is his wages and what is his rental of his equipment, because you're only pay workman's comp on the salary, not on the rental. Say you pay the guy 15 dollars an hour, really it should be five dollars rental, 10

dollars salary. I know some companies pay 10 rental, five salary. Well, the government's gonna look at that, say "Wait a sec, you playing around with this thing. This isn't really like contract work." Because they're supposed to be this division between you and that contractor. He's supposed to be an independent operator, he's supposed to purchase his own tools. If you start infringing on that, then is he really an independent contractor? You're paying that way to get away from having to match social security. That can be a substantial amount of money, that social security. What is it, five percent now, four, something like that? Your matching share. In a payroll of a million or two million dollars a year, you're looking at four, five percent of that, nice chunk of change, that you don't have to pay. It's a give or take deal. Because you pay 'em a little bit more money, but you don't have to be carrying him. The system seems to be working. Employees are happy, we're happy, the government says it's okay.

You having any trouble getting workers when you gear up for…?

language barrier. It's hard to make the guy understand what you want done if he's doing it wrong. But once they learn, they're good workers. Charge you, but good work. You can't complain. You gotta think of where these guys are coming from. They know this is their opportunity to make a few bucks, to go back home, feed their family, maybe live a little bit better. You know, they're not as spoiled as we Americans are. We figure our money's always gonna be there. These guys gotta make it when they gotta make it. So, they're good workers. I had no problems with 'em. The only thing is the language barrier, communication. A lot of cases where you've got to send a guy with you that speaks English, that he can communicate. But then a lot of time he spends his time communicating and you're paying a guy just to talk. He's not working. So you got an extra man you carry. So, it has its pros and cons. But I have no problem with using 'em if I have to. I have no qualms whatsoever. As long as they work, doesn't matter where they come from. My preference would be local, preferably Americans second, then plain workers. And they do work. I have no problem with that.

The shrimp boat repair, is that kind of constant?

Oh, yeah. You have your big influx between the Louisiana season, the Mississippi season, and Texas. They're at different times. And you get an influx right before to be ready to go for it, between those two. But generally, we have shrimp boats throughout the year. We have a reputation with the shrimpers. They have confidence in us. They like the work that we do. I'd say over here, I'd say, 50 percent of my business is shrimp boats. Maybe more. I never sat down with the figures, but I'd say at least 50 percent. And it's good, it's good work. 'Course shrimper is a different animal from an oil field man. A shrimper doesn't feel he owes you anything until he's got the money to pay you. It's a mindset. If I don't have the money to pay you, I don't owe you anything. Now, when I make money, I pay you. Don't bother me if I'm not making money. But that's the way they live. They make money, wanna buy a car. Most of 'em would buy it, most 'em buy their cars cash. When they have the money to buy a car, they buy a car. When they have the money to pay you, they pay you. But if you come here and you do a $20,000 job, it takes you a year to collect. You're gonna collect it. I'll charge a certain finance charge, charge you interest on it. Some customers pay it, some of 'em don't. Some of 'em do enough business with you, you kinda… you forgive 'em the interest, you know. It's not fair, but it's part of doing business. You gotta give 'em something somewheres. But nobody gets a free ride. No such thing as a free lunch.

There's no mechanism where you can put a lien, temporary lien on a boat or something?

You automatically have a lien on a boat. Now, you can record your lien. When a boat comes over here, automatically, I got a lien. The minute I put a man on a boat, there's a lien on it. Now what we do it is, within some many months, the bill has not been paid, I can record it. But I have a lien, whether I record it or not. Only thing is by not recording it, the vessel can be sold with me loosing my rights, you understand? The debt follows the boat. But, say I gotta $10,000 recorded lien against a boat, a guy goes to buy a boat, sell the boat. Well, naturally the boat's

follows the vessel. But I've lost my opportunity to collect. This guy could ride forever, as long as he doesn't need to… Now, when it gets to the point, if the bill is big enough that I can afford, justify seizing the boat, tying up the boat to get my money, and I've done that in some cases where the bill was big enough. But what I gotta do, cost me so much to seize a boat, that I gotta go to the federal marshal. I've got costs. It might cost me $15,000 to tie up a boat and seize it. Now, I will get… it will be sold at public auction, I will collect my money, but I gotta front all that money. It's a game you gotta play, you gotta figure is it worth seizing or not. I wouldn't care to have some seized. I've lost his business. Whereas if you just work with him, you collect your money. Each one is an individual case. It's like I found out yesterday, I own a piece of a grocery store. I own a 1/8th interest in a grocery store in Houma. I got the judgment yesterday. This guy did a job 10 years ago. We recorded our lien. We executed our lien. Yesterday the judge gave us… we own a piece of this grocery store. What the hell we gonna do with it, I don't know. But we own a piece of a grocery store. We're gonna sell it to Chouest. Chouest can use it. [Laughs] It's not dull business. Something new every day.

Did you family own oil property? You said you had some down across from…

Yeah, we owned property that over years has been in production. Most of the stuff is played out. But currently I have no royalties whatsoever. Most of 'em have played out. There's very little inland activity going on, it's mostly offshore stuff. Over the years, we did have property, we did have royalties. That particular piece in Leeville comes from my father's side of the family. And that has roughly 600 heirs involved. My great-grandmother was married, had three daughters, her husband died. She married this man who was widowed who had four or five kids from with his first wife. Then in the second marriage they had three sons. So there's like maybe 11 or 12 siblings involved. And the way it worked, the old lady, it was her property originally, the old man conned her into selling him the property and it became community property. So his children from the previous marriage came into half of the property, from his estate. It's all people who live on the West Bank, Westwego. A lot of people from here wound up there. Most of the population from the West Bank and Jefferson Parish can trace their roots back to this area. So many hurricanes over the years…eventually some of 'em just gave up and moved to what they thought was safer ground in the New Orleans area. A lot of those people, the old residents of the West Bank, not the new, the old residents, or most of 'em, are people from down here. That's why so many similar names. It's all people from down here.

So this fellow, Louis Roussel [pointing to book on Ronald's desk], is he typical, making a lot on holding property, on oil money, or is it more your case where it's diffused in the descendants?

Well, he was the actual operator. He was the one drilling and buying the leases. 'Cause he was the one making money offa us. You knew of Louis Roussel before? He was a character. He owned the fair grounds, the racetrack in New Orleans. He was in partnership with the Italian family that owns the Ronson cigarette lighters, big, big industrial company. He owned all kinds of orange grooves along the Mississippi River in Plaquemines. He owned I don't know how much in downtown New Orleans. He was very wealthy, but a wheeler and dealer. He always got a deal. He bought the old St. Charles Hotel, which was a landmark in New Orleans. And they were gonna go ahead and put up this big, big building, this big deal. They tore down that old place. It was a landmark, the old St. Charles Hotel. And I think it's a parking lot, that they

that particular time had no infrastructure existing other than just the channels, Belle Pass and Pass Fourchon that went out into the Gulf, which made a fork and that's what Fourchon means, 'the fork.' And those two channels connecting to Bayou Lafourche were some natural waterways that, historically the fishing industry, minimum recreational usage at that time, pretty dangerous channel, very few navigational aides, a depth of about 12 foot on a good day, is what existed back in the '60's. And our Senator at that time, whose name was A.O. Rappelet, had this vision of developing a port at this site. And pretty much what existed was muskrats and mosquitoes at that time and nothing else.

But his vision was to… realizing the proximity of this port to the Gulf of Mexico and that as big as Louisiana is and as much coastal area as it has, it is very limited in its access to the Gulf of Mexico. There are only basically two corridors in all of Louisiana that you can drive to the Gulf of Mexico, and one of 'em is the Lafourche corridor, which this one provides access to Port Fourchon and Grand Isle, and the other corridor is in extreme southwestern Louisiana, Holly Beach. Those are the only two places where you can access the Gulf of Mexico, and Port Fourchon has this huge geographic advantage in that it's on the peninsula sticking out into the Gulf of Mexico and it is the southernmost port in the state. Actually, Cameron, Louisiana is on the Gulf of Mexico as well as Port Fourchon, but Port Fourchon sticks 56 miles further out into the Gulf of Mexico than Cameron does, because of its peninsula-type delta that was created by the Mississippi River about 7000 years ago. But, back to Senator Rappelet and his vision. He envisioned a port that would accommodate the fishing industry of course. Oil and gas was starting to develop at that time. Some of the first offshore wells were off of this area, and because of its proximity, he envisioned the capability to take the banana trade from New Orleans, which was struggling at that time, and bring it to a port closer to the Gulf of Mexico and thus create a more efficient route for moving bananas. Unfortunately, it took a little longer than he had anticipated to get the infrastructure in, to create this port and make it a viable alternative to the port of New Orleans for bananas and fruits and vegetables, and in the interim, the trade went to Gulfport and New Orleans lost it anyway but it sits today in Gulfport. So Fourchon's opportunity there was short-lived and it didn't make that loop.

But that may have been a blessing in disguise. The Port developed over time. Through the '60's just some basic infrastructure was put in place, with some aggregate roads, some levees for hurricane protection, pretty much encircling what Senator Rappelet envisioned as the Port, which is pretty much about a 3000-acre area down at the mouth of Bayou Lafourche. And then in the early '70's, the water lines were put in, a couple of docks for docking vessels were put in, a shrimpers' marina as well as an oil and gas slip, well two slips for oil and gas were put in. But no commercial facilities existed there until pretty much the mid '70's, wherein then there were two companies operating out of the port. When I came to work for the port in 1978, we had, again, aggregate roads, only two facilities operating there. We had two more facilities being planned and in construction at that time, [one of which]

drilling in deeper waters and producing the energy, did the port really take off, because its true advantages in proximity really came out then.

But, back to the evolution of the port. In the late ‘70’s, in ’79 and in 1980, we did some major improvements to the channel, to the jetty system, making the channel a lot safer, dredging it down to 20 foot, which was a huge undertaking for a small commission like ours. We sold bonds to help finance that and we got some state money to help, to go into that effort. And that, I guess, put us on the map as being a solid organization and not fly-by-night and we were gonna be there. And LOOP, Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, had established Port Fourchon. Well, the offshore site was going to be18 miles off of Port Fourchon, and in 1981 they became operational. That additionally showed the logistical advantage of the port close to deep water, and now with the channel improvements, made it very attractive. Several oil companies, such as Baroid and others were starting to build facilities, had negotiated leases with the port, and were putting in improvements. But it really wasn’t ‘til the oil bust of the mid to late ‘80’s that the port really got recognized for its logistical advantage. What happened there was oil and gas pre-1980, pretty

And then we were getting close to ’95 when we’d taken off to the races, you might say. And it became very evident that 400 foot wasn’t even wide enough at that time because the new technology and the deeper and larger vessels. I mean, within a three-year period we jumped from offshore supply vessels, the workhorse in the industry was a 180 foot supply vessel and within three years it went to 240 foot supply vessel and now we’re at 270-plus foot, getting bigger and bigger all the time. So we went to 500 foot wide in the next, second leg and the third leg of the east slip. We’d anticipated the second leg and the acreage surrounding it. The total east slip development is about 400 acres, and the second leg was about 80 to 100 acres of property surrounding the waterfront. We’d anticipated that and taken this out to about the year 2010. We actually had it leased out, all of it leased out, before we could even complete it in construction, in about ’96, which took us to third and final leg, which we had figured we may never build or at least take us out to the year 2030, and we had that area all leased out before we could actually build it. So we found ourselves with a total 400-acre development, leased out, prior to 2000 and we thought it would take an additional 30 years. And it was very difficult for a port such as ours, or anybody in the oil and gas

of marsh. We are actively doing that as we speak, so we're building marsh to add further protection of the port as a mitigative effort for the impact that we have.

So, what's key about Port Fourchon that I haven't touched on yet is it has developed into the main focal point, the intermodal facility for support of the overwhelming majority of the people, the oil and gas activity in the Gulf

But the Morgan Cities and Iberias now have developed their niche in that they're further inland, more protected from the storms, closer to larger population centers, and they do the fabrication, the building of the production facilities and so forth, which are important as well. But it's a different business than the regular intermodal transfer. We move, we have over 150 large vessels a day move through our channel, doing this intermodal transfer. If we took those vessels and made 'em go up to Morgan City or to New Iberia or 30 and 40 miles inland like those places are, you'd have a huge environmental impact, number one, from

supporting this business that's generating them that revenue, and that's no energy policy in my book. And I'm getting too far into that end, but…

Is that moving forward? I know you've been working on that and a lot of other people are working on that, senators and what not.

Much of my energy and the LA-1 Coalition's energy, which is a co

5.3. Butch Renois and Emmett H. D. Renois Jr. (July 17, 2001; Galliano, LA)

These are two sons of Emmett Renois, Sr., from the Shreveport area. The father, born in 1904, died in 2000. His daughter-in-law, Joycelyn, wife of Butch and secretary to Windell Curole at the Lafourche Levee District, shot a home video of Emmett, Sr., in 1992, covering some of his recollections of working in the Leevillle oil fields right after the Depression. Butch retired from Chevron, where he was first a production operator, then with the merger of Chevron and Gulf, was transferred onshore to run the supply operation out of Leeville. Emmett, Jr., retired from Conoco, where he was a driller, on Conoco's own rigs and on Rowan rigs. Both are avid hunters, but not down here: they go up to the old family place of origin. Emmett, though retired, fills in on the Edison Chouest "drug runs." The company purchases prescription drugs and painkillers from a local drugstore and delivers them to employees at their several facilities. Martial Babin, who started drilling work in Bay Marchand, off the beach at Port Fourchon in 1946, was Butch's boss.

Emmett: This oil field has come a long way since when I started. I started when I was 16. I was on my summer vacation up in north Louisiana. There was a location right off of our place. I got in on the ground floor there. Back then they built concrete pillars to set the derricks on and I got a job helping them do that. Then, I started putting derricks up and I got a job with them. The crew came in and they jacked the car up and put a little cathead on the back wheel. They would put a rope up there and that would be their winch. They would put the derrick up. When the rig came in, I got a job as a roughneck. That was big money. I was making a dollar something an hour. Later on that year, I worked on another. We didn't have any cars back then. I got me a job up in the hills and I would have to ride my horse up there. I would make my eight hours and ride back down. It was about five miles. I fi

it was your duty to call it in. You could get fined for not calling it in as well as creating it. They had the proper authorities to call. I am sure that that is still true today. I had a guy call me one time. We used to have a little tank battery near Clovelly on East 36th Street. He called me one

one, I would. Now, I will tell you something else that I did. My boss told me this one and it made sense. He was talking about a deepwater rig one time. Let's say Chevron got stuck in Green Canyon in 2500 foot of water. Let's say you have a little workover rig here and over here you have a deepwater rig. You have one boat and both of them want that boat. Where are you going to send it to first? Where the most money is at. This guy could fiddle around and do something else. I've always heard them say I'm shut down waiting on you, but I've never seen it put on a drilling report: 'I'm shut down and waiting on transportation.' They are always shut down waiting on something. Go where your money is at and take care of this guy. Now, if this rig is on fire, stop and help this guy out. Or, if you see potential danger out there, you stop and help this guy. If you stop to help this guy over here, you see, he will probably cost you almost $30,000 a day. Whereas, this guy is probably costing you $8,000 a day. It is common sense.

Did Chevron use one particular boat company?

Butch: No. Chevron at one time had their own boats prior to my employment. Chevron got out of the boat business and the drilling business. Chevron used to have their own drilling rigs. Two that I remember off hand were *S55* and *S56*. They got out of all that.

Was that in the 80's?

Butch: They got out of the drilling before that. They had some when I went to work in '61. It was probably in the late '60, early '70's that they got out of the drilling rig and boat business. They sold their vessels and all of their rigs. Chevron figured it was cheaper to lease or rent one. When you are finish with it, you would release it. All we had to do was supply fuel, engine oil, and hydraulic oil. The rope, paint and all was for them. We supplied them with diesel and lubricants.

They would crew up themselves?

Butch: Yes, it was their responsibility to put their crews and groceries on there. We hired a vessel. We told them what the job was, the requirements, how long the job would take, and it was up to that company to supply the vessel with the proper things. Sometimes we would hire a jackup barge and it would just depend on what the job was if we would supply the groceries. Ninety-nine percent of the time it was catered anyway. Don't get me wrong, we paid for the groceries. Chevron ended up paying for everything. It was that catering company's responsibility to get the groceries to the dock, my responsibility to get it on the boat and get it out. Very seldom we bought groceries.

Where was your shore facility before Fourchon got going?

Butch: Well, our shore facility was in Leeville, right there below the bridge there. Have you been to Leeville? Did you see the Chevron heliport? That is where it starts. We were right there below the Chevron heliport in that Chevron yard for a number of years until we acquired the deal with Gulf. We then moved all of our big boat operations to Gulf because there was more room. We had one stationary crane in that Leeville yard. We had to load everything by crane. It was a relief to get situated in that Gulf yard because of the elbow room that we had. We had track

cranes in the Gulf yard. They have several acres there compared to what we had. And that heliport we have now has been upgraded. It was about as big as this table in front of me. I think they have about a 900-foot runway there now. We used to have on the north side a burning pit to burn trash – paper bags, old junk pallets. It was nothing hazardous. The environmentalists shut us down on that and now everything has to be picked up and taken to the landfill. We weren't breaking the law because it was legal to do it in those days. They redone the heliport and upgraded it.

Does the company own its own helicopters?

Butch: Chevron owns their own helicopters. Chevron, at one time, was the largest privately owned air force in the world. They may still be. Very seldom they used PHI helicopters.

Why would they keep their helicopters and get rid of their boats and rigs?

Butch: That I cannot answer. I do know that it is expensive to operate a helicopter. If something goes wrong with it, it is expensive to operate. I know after so many hours they take them down and x-ray them. Chevron, I am not saying this because I worked with them for over 35 years, is one of the most safest air forces. They have had some that went down. I remember August 1, 1962. I rode in a helicopter maybe three times. The pilot's name was Max Hanna. He was an ex-Marine. He was a Marine captain. He went down. If they found him I didn't know anything about it. What happened was one of the big rotaries came off and cut his tail off. It killed him. The passengers got out. Bill Thomas was in there. It was one of those little bubble nose helicopters where the pilot sits in the front and three passengers in the back. It wasn't no jet ranger like they have now. I don't know how many thousands of dollars Chevron spent on shrimp boats and all trying to locate them. I called St. Germaine on the telephone, it was those hand crank phones back in those days. I told him I needed a plane. He told me he couldn't do it because a plane had went down. I asked him where. He said near you. I looked down and saw all of the boats in the water and I said okay. I thought he was joking because it was April 1st. If they ever found him I never heard about it. They tried.

People talk about working on production as being kind of the top job, regular schedules. Is that true?

Butch: Well, I don't know about it being a top job. It is a good job. When I was out there, we had a little six-man bunkhouse out there on the corner of the platform. Once you stepped out of the bunkhouse you were on the job site. It was an ideal situation as far as I am concerned. The only bad thing about it is that you are away from home. But, you had your seven days at home. It was 17 miles from here to Leeville. Like I said, you have to be careful because you are sitting on a case of dynamite and you shouldn't be foolish. Stop and think and see the big picture. There were safety devices on there and if something happened we had a whistle. It would wake you up in the middle of the night; you knew someth

Butch: Well, again I have to go back to 1981. Things have changed since I was out there. Basically, it was a one-man platform. A lot of bigger platforms, *Romeo* for example, you had a day gauger, a night gauger… The platform I was on, I was only by myself in the daytime. Electricians were there at night. He went wherever he needed to in the field during the day. I was taking care of *Double Echo, Double Fox*, three satellites. I could go to *Double Fox* and the three satellites by helicopter, but the *Caisson 1024#16*, I had to go by boat. I took care of those for 10 years by myself. Occasionally I would get a Danos & Curole roustabout. When I had something that needed to get done, I would get them to come. They would come for maybe a week. But, to answer your question, on the *Yankee* platform, the *Zulu* platform, in the daytime they would have about five or six people on them. A platform like I was on, just one person.

Every day, would you make the rounds of the other satellites?

Butch: Yes, I had to. A well could shut in out there and you not know it. If the whole platform would shut in, then a light would come on. A well could log up on you. Back in those days we used to wear steel hats. Now it is all plastic. If you come into contact with 110 volts, you can't wear a steel hat. It's all safety. I would take my hard hat and put it over my ears like this. I would get along side of the well near the choke box and you could hear it. If it was making water, the choke box would be warm. Gas wells, you could hear it going through the

didn't know it. It looked like it was in its right position. When I got everything back on line and got the pump back on, it was making noise. I didn't know what was going on. The valve was closed. Ever since then I always check. I should have checked to start off with. In my mind that was one of the last valves anyone would have closed. It was a mistake on my part but I learned from it.

One of the things I found interesting in the video with your father was that after the Depression the company reassembled the crews they were work

Emmett: There was a lot of stuff that was different. Like production—they had a lot of employees. We ran a field with 12 employees making 125,000 barrels of oil a day. We had contract people. They weren't big on having contracts. They believed in having their own people, but look at what it was costing them. At one time, we had 13 rigs in this one field. As soon as we got wells completed, we would start flowing them. We had no facilities for gas at that time. We flared all of our gas until Tennessee Gas came in there and started running pipelines, furnaces, and compressors to put it in the pipelines. We were flaring underneath ells 5.8 water. Millions and millions of gas a day. We had one platform that made 50 million in a day. After we got the pipelines in, it was all separated. That cost a lot of money to keep it thawed out.

Butch: We had our own wireline operators. They had contractors. We did use contractors, but only on certain jobs. We didn't use a contract wireline operator to bail sand. That was our job. We had some special jobs, such as a fishing wire

today. My daddy had the idea of contracting the people before Danos & Curole even started it. When he came down here everybody was talking French. My daddy didn't speak French. He went to Antoine Alario, who had a big construction business going. He was making money hand over fist. My daddy went to him and said "If he put up the money, I'll get it going." He wasn't afraid to, but he just didn't want to start another business. He told me 10,000 times he wished he'd listened to daddy. My daddy had enough foresight to see that this was going to be a thing in the future. Daddy designed a rough sketch on paper of a jackup barge before the first jackup barge was ever built down here. Someone else designed it but it was the same thing. Next thing you know, here comes the jackup barge. I would have loved to have seen him with a college education. He would have been president of some company somewhere. I am not saying where.

5.4. Pershing and Ophelia Lefort (March 5, 2002; Larose, LA)

What year did you retire?

Pershing: 1984. I was fifty-nine and a half.

Did they have a pension package type of thing?

Pershing: Very good benefits. Excellent benefits. And a lot of options how you could figure it.

That was when the oil field was kind of turning down, declining a little bit. Did Texaco retire a lot of people during that period? Did a lot of your friends retire

Pershing: Uh huh. That was specifically stated.

Ophelia: I didn't know about that.

Pershing: However, you could be employed, not employed but you could work for any company as a consultant. In other words, I could have gone back to work for Texaco as a consultant. Some of them has. They was very knowledgeable, especially the gas people. Those are real experts. Texaco didn't want to lose these people but they had to be offered the same program as anybody else and therefore that's a decision from way up and whether it was a good decision or not I don't know. It didn't make any sense for me at the time that they were getting rid of experienced men who had made the company. All of us at that age… when I went with Texaco and where I lived it was big but we had to make it bigger and it took us to do it, the people in production, the people who could produce oil and they could send it to the refineries. They had that one pipeline that went to the refineries in Texas. Actually the company never had an active union, not here in south Louisiana. I'm not sure about Texas employees… not here in south Louisiana, no union involvement. You weren't satisfied with Texaco, the union couldn't make you any more satisfied. You know and if you weren't satisfied you'd just leave and go some place else. Oil field experience, once you have that and you are still in good health you won't have any trouble finding a job. There's always somebody looking for good help, you know. But Texaco chose to do that and I couldn't figure out why at the time and I still don't really… why they'd want to get rid of experienced men to hire non-experienced men they got to train. It's sort of…Texaco ended up with Chapter 11. They were constantly in lawsuits… the states, back taxes or not enough taxes or not compensating these people. I don't know. But somehow they usually settled out of court, you know. But they had some settlement to settle. Big settlement. In Texas the refinery used to have a big debt, in Louisiana too. Those taxes and stuff, you know, whatever.

I don't know what you want me to tell you about the oil field. I mean I've had a lifetime exposure to it you know and I can't relive the whole story.

Ophelia: You pretty much did.

5.5. Mac Rome (September 22, 2001; Golden Meadow, LA)

In those days they'd offer you a pension if you want it or you could have your pension in a lump sum. So I chose the lump sum. They gave me a lump sum to retire. Plus they gave me an incentive. They put 50,000 dollars in an annuity on my name. And I draw the interest every month until I die. I don't ever get the 50,000. Challenge sends me the check every month. And then more in my savings. See, in those times, when I quit, you could save up to 13 percent of your salary. And they would match the first six percent. So it accumulated to quite a bit of money. And the more money you made, the more you saved. So I got a pretty good lump sum of money. I retired [in 1987]… I would've been 60 in April and I retired January the first. So I missed it by three months for 40 years. But at 60 I couldn't get Social Security, not 'til 62. But they gave me two years of half pay. In other words, every month I'd get half of my salary for two years so I lived for two years on that with a few other things I had, and then when Social

Security kicked in, then I was able to start drawing interest off my money with Merrill Lynch. So, I've been living very comfortably.

Did you get your lawn mowed yesterday in the rain?

No. Shit, I got caught in the rain. I gotta go this morning when it dries up, I gotta go cut my grass. My boy came borrowed my lawnmower, though. See, I hire my boy to take care of my yard and I go cut my wife's yard for nothing over there. I really need to cut it this morning soon as it dry up. They give showers for this afternoon. And if you let that grass get ahead of you…

6. Legacies

6.1. Windell Curole (June 5, 2002; Galliano, LA)

Born in Cut Off in 1951, Windell is presently director of the Levee District, where he started in 1980; he was trained as a marine biologist. His father was a shrimper and roughneck. Windell's responsibilities (he is also the Emergency Management person for the parish) include making the calls on when to close the flood gate below Golden Meadow in the face of approaching storms – a decision which can get him in trouble with shrimpers and utility boat operators who may get stuck on the outside. Windell is something of a local historian and culture broker, taking every opportunity to speak out on "Cajunism." He will also make calls to the local radio talk show, hosted by "Truck," when no one else is calling in. He is an avid skier, as are many people in the parish.

I remember that basically the oil companies… the bosses, they didn't talk like us. Had Southern accents. I don't consider us having Southern accents. I remember there are times that I would try to communicate with them. Try to sound a little bit more like them. I said I would never try to sound like somebody else. As long as people can understand me. That always kind of stuck with me. I don't care whether it's a boss or what. I am going to stay who I am and be who I am. I do remember that. But again in the oil field, you had a lot of people from Texas and Oklahoma were coming out. I do remember also that in the first grade, pretty little girl, and I think she was from Texas. Smart and pretty but because she was different, *Texien*, a lot of kids picked on her. And I never understood that, you know? And it was part of, I think, that cultural clash, an us and them type of thing. I can see the unfairness of that. Of course, we all experienced it in the opposite direction. When I left and went to college, I felt some of that same…just because I spoke differently. Came from a different background. But I understood that going in and why it was not a good thing. But again, that was the oil industry causing that happening. This cultural exchange. Heard stories too when, you know, things really broke loose in oil. Back in Leeville and Golden Meadow where every weekend was like a western town with shootouts and murders. I think part of it was a cultural clash that the oil industry brought on. A lot of people might look at it from today's standards but if you go back into the '30's life was rough. There was a lot of 'us' and 'them.' There wasn't that much around that you could keep so that had a big part of what people were. You know, looking at oil there is no doubt it made a major impact on the culture of this area.

There's terrific changes in what this place would have been with and without the oil industry. And I have heard people talking in both directions. People say, and they are correct, we would have gotten by. We would have always eaten well. We would have always had a good life. But we might have not had much money. Oil did provide constant money…it did change. There is some very good people that came in from Oklahoma, Texas, and northern Louisiana. We came from Cheniere Caminada. People came from all over. Islaños, Philippinos, Chinese. And we formed a society from that and moved over here after the hurricane. Well, this is just another move and after that culture had tightened up. So now it had evolved again. I like to believe there was some hybrid vigor involved, that there were some real positive things with culture coming in. People with different ideas. I think, although there is always friction when you get two cultures together, I think it came out to be a very vibrant culture. It continues to be vibrant.

Lafourche, I think, has always been ahead when it comes to technology. Our fisherman, from day one, were always moving forward. So you had this marriage of the fishing industry and experience on the water. And oil comes. Well, the Texans and Oklahomans knew how to drill. But they did not know how to navigate a boat. Did not know how to deal with the waters. And that's where our people took off and the experience with the supply boats and later on. But again you tie that experience in the water with technology coming in and our people always being on the cutting edge of technology even though most of these guys did not have high school educations, they knew how to work things. They knew how things worked. And it really did help them do work. They taught themselves how to make it work. That's why when offshore Louisiana happened it was boats from Louisiana. And when offshore happened in the North Sea it was tugboats from Louisiana, and the Persian Gulf, it was tugboats from Louisiana. And it continued worldwide. The navigation and seamanship of the people from the bayou. That's the mixture of the two cultures.

On the negative side, you have the power. When you have something like oil I mean it is the power. Money is power. Power corrupts. You have that thing of single-mindedness in getting something done. It's all business, dangerous business. So you attract people who take risks… I don't know how you would say how it would be without the oil industry. It was a tremendous impact but again tremendous power. And again in the thirties oil was being discovered in Louisiana in a big way, big companies coming in. And you had Huey Long come in and the way of governing in general… well, I say Louisiana was a poor state but there were a lot of poor states in the thirties. And then all of a sudden you had big money coming in. And a little bit of money to a poor state, to that individual it looks like a lot. You know the free textbooks, free meals, the roads. That was a good… hell of a job. So you don't care if that guy's slapping off a few hundred thousand dollars cause you know you're better off than you were before. And that was a deal made with the devil and that's how we do it. We weren't going to bother government as long as nobody provided for us and as long as Big Oil was paying the bill. Then all of a sudden people don't have to be involved in the government or worried about government so much because the money's not coming directly out of their pocket. Even though a lot of the time you don't realize that the money that could've gone in your pocket never gets in your pocket. You don't realize it if you never had it.

And in Louisiana this is kind of the problem we've had over the past maybe twenty years is that we're still living under that political influence. I mean when you grew into a, I don't know if you call it a rut or a method of doing things or a mentality of doing things, it takes a long time to change it. When you have generations follow what was successful at that time. In government you had the elected officials, as long as you liked them you put them in. Big Oil paid the bill. When Big Oil stopped paying the bill you can't run the same way. You started seeing a change I think in our politics. We've been running the same politics since the 30's. I think when Big Oil stopped paying a lot of the bills we started having to look in other directions. All of a sudden some of the money is coming out of our pockets directly and never getting in our pockets. And so people became a little more disgruntled with government and made it more accountable and you started seeing some changes. You started electing, you know, people like Dave Treen got elected. Bill Roemer was elected. Of course I'm talking about my time and I was paying more attention to the politics of the day. But I still think even when you had the reform governors elected before that, from what I can read in history we made no real big changes as far as the real

fabric, the real main thread of how government was run. But you could start seeing a change with Roemer getting elected and Treen. We couldn't run the way we used to run. They had to be more accountable to the people, more accountable to where the money was coming from and how you was spending it.

Now another thing with Big Oil was that although we used to have business -- companies –

we can get a systemic solution to our land-loss issue by getting all the Mississippi River and its' sediments back to where we need to get them. Now we can probably heal most of the scars that have been left by the oil industry so I don't put those issues on the doorstep of oil industries.

It's mostly flood control, but there is no doubt the oil industry has, I guess, exacerbated the situation and made it much worse with the navigation canals, the floatation canals, the location canals, the pipelines canals that have done all this crisscrossing. Where we have all this induced saltwater coming in here. We have a battle between the Mississippi River building land, the Gulf of Mexico taking land back. Well all the things we've done for flood control first was the major big step in giving the advantage to the… we tied one hand back and let the gulf start eating. Secondarily though we came in with the oil industry right after and tied the other hand back by helping out the Gulf of Mexico bring in more saltwater. So those two things are tied together. But if we ever get the river going back again, provided we have a political will to do what we need to do, we can go ahead and get systemic solutions and again heal most of the damage that was done by the oil industry.

So you have no emotional appeal to levees even though you're running the Levee District?

I look at things realistically. You know in this world everything cuts two ways. There is nothing that is all pure white or pure black or pure good or pure bad. The optimum situation is that you do things where you cut more on the positive side then on the negative side. And that's the issue you look at. And I did, prior to this job here, I did a degree in marine biology, working with the fishing industry. And coming over here, this is myI loo0 TD0.00]TJ20nals, th9orb05 Ta 2o.0006 Tve

job on the outside as to try and maintain those wetlands for many different reasons but also for the levee to exist, but also for our lifestyle to exist.

The Rotary sent me to France for professional exchange, and I talked about the fishing industry basically and also about some of the environmental problems that we have and concerns. And the guy that was ahead of me who talked about agriculture, he introduced me as the guy… my job is to keep the wetland wet and the dry land dry. And I thought that was a pretty good description of what we try to do even to this day -- same type of thing. It's very difficult. You know you talk about fairness and what we do right or not right. The other thing with the oil industry is that yeah, there is some environmental damage. Us living here causes environmental damage. People living in Arizona cause environmental damage. But in the big discussion that we have with oil… a lot of people paint us as the big evil… but the fact of the matter is every time you put that nozzle to your vehicle you're subsidizing that industry. Now if you're subsidizing it, you share in that evil. If you don't want to face the fact of what they are… so if you don't want oil drilling, my opinion is you have grounds to stand on if you don't drive a car, if you don't use airplanes, if you don't use cheap energy cause that's what oil does for us -- it gives us cheap energy. Now if you use that cheap energy and you say well we need to drill but we need to do it in certain ways -- let's pay the price and do it a little bit safer, a little bit cleaner -- to me that is legitimate and that gives you grounds to stand on. I'll see people get in planes and fly over and live in nice hotels and drive their car and go to a public hearing and say "I don't want any drilling." Well that seems highly hypocritical to me. Now maybe I'm cutting it too close or too sharply but there seems to be a disconnect again when you use these things and you say you're against it, that it too large a dose of hypocrisy.

Now on the other side you have the other thing that when people say well you know we care about people and if you give a community cancer and not care and people do that… if you pollute waters, if you… "Well, I'm a businessman and I'm here to make as much money as possible and I can do all of this and a few people pay the price for me, well…" So that's the other side of the spectrum, too. I believe there is responsibility on the industry side also to say "look I've come in here, I've done damage and I want to work with people to minimize the damage that I'm doing and I want to be fair." And fair… there should always be a discussion of what's fair.

I think there are some real people in the oil industry now that do understand that it's more that just making the buck, that you need to live with the people that you're around and the environment 'cause your family lives in that environment. You know you're going to suffer… that's the other thing about having the presidents of the companies living in the area -- as long as they're here and breathing the same air and drinking the same water that their company's working at … I have no arguments with any industrialists but I mean I'm talking about two extremes and neither one of them are good, I think, to society. We need to have the middle

But the other side is government -- our federal government -- the way it works. Here in south Louisiana we're running pipelines through and supplying the offshore oil. Three billion dollars is going to the federal government and if you're a business man, CAO of government USA, and I see three billion dollars coming into my treasury in my business, well you know what I'm going to make sure the road to that gold mine stays in good shape. I'm going to make sure that things that protect that infrastructure are in good shape and yet government doesn't see it that way. We're paying the environmental price and we basically accept that environmental price. But give us some of the resources back to deal with… to mitigate those losses so we can continue doing what we're doing. From that perspective the United States is taking total advantage of south Louisiana and not being at all in any fashion being fair. Now I understand how it works and I'm not blaming people 'cause I think if the roles were reversed, if Louisiana reversed roles with Florida and California with the big population and the power to be as unrealistic as you want to be, I'm not saying that wouldn't either. You know people are people, but the point is I think people need to or should try to work for fairness.

It's really hard to deal with when you hear Barbara Boxer, Californian, talk about the price of gas and how terrible it is and how … but for their representative to complain about it and in the next breath say "I don't want any drilling up in my coasts and not only that I don't want any drilling up in ANWR, I don't want any…" You know it's like I'm complaining about the price of milk but I won't allow a cow in the state. Same thing. There's a bit of hypocrisy in all that, I mean I understand what politicians are built on but it just seems… it's again just because you're powerful enough to be unrealistic it's still not right. And that's why I believe that the message would get out to the American people. I don't believe we have that problem 'cause we have caring people and if you know the facts… that goes back to Jefferson, you have to have an educated populous to get the right things done. And once the word is out I think it's going to happen but in the political system if John Doe, the senator from Montana, sends three hundred million dollars to Louisiana every year and the people of Montana don't understand 3(e)d yetit justTD0r,h(7 t

that are taking place. They aren't able to get jobs that pay the level of their education and intelligence yet the opportunity unveils itself to come back and they come back, this is a special place. Now there are a lot of special places in the United States, a lot of different places but by talking to people who are visiting from outside and a little bit of traveling out there – it is a special place.

Now why would you say that? Well I

When you grow up as a kid you didn't like something that was happening in school… my father was a good example of that. In sixth grade he got sent to the principal's office for doing something and he just didn't want to go so he went home. And he was on the shrimp boat the next day and that was it. And a lot of kids were that way. You know you worked, you earned for the family and you could do it and it was…and you can still do that today. You still have kids that can go with 5,000 dollars, buy a boat and make a living, feed their family. Now you're not going to be rich but if you're smart… as long as you can read and write. If you're smart you can become a billionaire. There are some of those running around. You know there has always been a land of opportunity, in this area it's always been there. But people have made opportunity because they've been aggressive with new technology and new ideas. There has always been that… I can't tell you that people as a group but this area allows the people who are of inventive to be that way. That's also a difference from north and south. You tend to be more of what you are down here. There's less role-playing, less trying to fit into somebody else's idea of what you should be. More freedom, I guess you would call it, closer to Jeffersonian democracy, you know small investment, you're independent, shoot your finger at whoever you want 'cause you know you can go make it somewhere else down here. I think that was Jefferson's idea of a bunch of small farms but that never did work out because farms got bigger and bigger and more people working on the farms. It went against what he thought was good. But down here because of this tremendous volume of natural resources we've been able to keep kind of that flavor of being independent and vote for who you want to.

Well, it's been an exciting ride. It's always been an exciting place. People talk about this sleepy little town on the bayou. This place goes twenty-four hours. I mean you couldn't do this… when I tell people that a little bitty town used to… our band used to start at midnight and go until four in the morning in Golden Meadow, Louisiana… yeah, maybe in New Orleans but certainly not… I mean that's how it is. You know you work twenty-four hours… we have a twenty-four hour society. When you are a fisherman you work when you need to work. You know in the oil field you work when you need to work and vice versa, you play when you need to play if it means all night long you go all night long. But you always wish things had been… that things would be better, but there is so much that would have been easier had we had more dollars but the world was poor. You never solve all the problems. When I look I just says it's been a really good ride and it's been interesting. And one of these *Texiens*, a friend of mine from high school, I went to all honors classes with her from ninth grade on, and she grew up and she was inspired to get into science because of Dr. Breaux and Dr. Guidry. You talk about the mixing of cultures, and she is the first person to splice genetic material. Now that's big. You know her major professor won the Nobel Prize in '93 that was the main deal. So yeah, it makes me feel good you know the girl sitting right next to me, a friend of mine from high school, did that, you know. So that's the mixing of the cultures.

6.2. Ronald Callais (June 6, 2002; Golden Meadow, LA)

Are there any kind of contentious issues around the Levee District?

If you've been through Golden Meadow or you came in the back road on the bayou, if you came TD0.001jor 70

enough for us to justify closing the gate. But it's high enough that with a locking chamber… you just close and open the locking chamber. You can't do it with the floodgate. Because the floodgate can take just so much pressure or it'll warp. And with a locking chamber you can always equalize pressure. You never have that pressure against that gate. Because they say, I don't understand the hydraulics of it, you got your levels like this, let's suppose the bayou is this high and inside the bayous like this. When you got a locking chamber, you take water and you raise the level inside. Well, that outside gate has no pressure, 'cause you've equalized it 'til you open it. The inside one has no pressure 'cause you have constant water. Then you get whatever you want, then you close it and you're on the level coming the opposite way. So you don't have the pressures against that gate that you would normally have with just a gate, a floodgate, versus a locking chamber. So we could open it more often. We could keep traffic flowing through Bayou Lafourche at all times. Even during a hurricane, we can keep traffic flowing through Bayou Lafourche. Like we press the Coast Guard, and the Corps of Engineers. Right now, see, a locking chamber, you're looking at is 6 million. We've got boats that got to be worth 10 and 12 million dollars apiece. You lose one boat, that's twice the value of the locking chamber. And look at the economics of it. Once the level of the bayou gets to a certain… we can't open that gate. Where does that boat go? It's too late for them to go all the way around and find another gate. He can't go out to the gulf again. So he's gotta spend the hurricane right there. Not only that, now all these boats come in for hurricanes, make it in, the hurricane passes by. It might be five or six days before the tide goes down low enough to allow us to open the gate. What do the boats do? They're caught inside the system. That's lost opportunity for those boats to go out and work. So the economic justification is there, it's just financing. We gotta come up with the money. But the beauty of it is if we can come up with the six million, and it looks like we'll get it, the Corps of Engineer has approved the system and will accept it as part of our flood system. Which means we're gonna get 70 percent reimbursement. So if we put up six million, we get $4,200,000 credit from the Corps of Engineers against any future work we got to do. So we can continue to do the whole system, and we got $4.2 million worth of credit. We don't have to come up with any money. That $4.2 million credit, a 30 percent basis matching funds, means that we can get 'bout our 4.2 plus 4.2 plus, almost $19 million worth of work from the Corps of Engineers. Don't cost us a penny. They just parlay. It's a great deal for us, but we gotta be able to come up with the money from the state. The initial money. Now the state had originally promised four and a half million, and we'd come up with a million and a half ourselves. But then, when our present governor in that menopause moment of his decided to screw the tax structure, he screwed up everything. Now our local legislators were able to cut a deal where they wew our loc rlyeuIhg15 02itnght ba0 thap[(thw,uonc)]TJ1.5(, i01 Tc0.1699 Tw[(se m)7.6 Tc0r andsTey an)5.]T

do it… Another thing we've been informed is that there is a tremendous loss of marshlands, of wetlands. The Coast Guard and the Corps of Engineers has told us that we should consider possibly putting rip-rapping at the base of our levees. Putting heavy rocks, because pretty soon the gulf will be lapping against the base of our levees. There's no way they can survive that. So that's what is so important about these marsh restorations, coastal restorations, so critically important to us. Just look at the map, look at the white property, look at the marsh area. There's just so little of it, you know. Just like fingers out there. When I was a kid, you'd go to Grand Isle, I'd go to Grand Isle on an old gravel washboard road, you know, you'd chatter your teeth. From Golden Meadow to Grand Isle used to be an hour, an hour and half. In those days, you went 20 miles an hour you were really pushing it. Going up that gravel road. But you go… see this seafood plant, the Thomassies between here and Leeville, the big blue building. Right there, coming towards Golden Meadow I 'member as a kid, trees on both sides of the road, almost touching, like going through a tunnel. Now do you see any trees there? Every now and then you might see a scraggly old tree or a dead trunk of a tree. Saltwater intrusion killed all that. The marshes were just as green. Look like you could walk across that. 'Course you wouldn't dare, you'd sink to your death. But it looked like grasslands. A lot of people would come down here, outsiders come, "look at all the prairies you got over here." It's not prairies, it's marshlands. You can't put cows, you can't build on that. But looking at it, it looked like it was good, high dry land, you know. Now, it's unbelievable. It's something we can't reverse, just maybe we can slow it down.

Who do people blame for marsh loss?

The conventional wisdom is oil companies cutting the canals. Now that contributes to it. But I found out something very recently that I wasn't aware of. I attended a presentation by Dr. Gagliano. Dr. Gagliano is with, I think he's with LSU. And he's doing a project on freshwater diversion and marsh rebuilding. And he says that we've got three definite fractures in this area. One is called, I think, the Leeville, the Golden Meadow and the Lockport. There was three. Well, actually, your rock base is actually sinking at approximately a foot a year. That explains a lot of… you know, I can see marshes washing away. But why, and I know that when you're a child, everything seems bigger. But why was it when I was a kid I was in Golden Meadow and I'd go to the bayouside and I'd have two feet of bank above the bayou. And I go right now at a mean tide the water's right there. Sinking! I mean, the oceans haven't come up two feet since I was a boy. The only other explanation is the ground is sinking. Now, did it sink that much? Is it a combination of sinking and erosion? All those things, you know. I realize he said a foot in a century, but still that accounts for some of it. You're looking at 50 years ago. So six inches mighta been there. Oceans mighta come up a few inches. You've got, you've had your natural subsidence because this used to be wet all the time. Now you put a levee, you pumped it out, like a sponge, it dries up, it shrinks. That's all part of it, you know. But it's a combination of all of those. Now, I know that those canals put all that salt water in there. Salt water comes in and these are fresh water plants, vegetation. Kills it. Actually, because of the great tides now that you never used to have before... You'd get a high tide at Fourchon, it'd take a week for it to get to Golden Meadow. Now within one day it's there. Well, as fast as the water comes in, once that tide drops off that water wants to go out. It's rushing out through these cuts and these gaps. What's this doing? It's tearing away vegetation as it goes. So it's not only killing it, it's physically ripping it out. And that just accelerates.

Plus, the thing that made it feasible for us to live down here, is what's slowly killing us. That's the channelizing of the Mississippi River. Look at this here. [Goes to map.] This is the river coming with all this silt, it gets down to the Head of the Passes. It slows down. Now you've got natural erosion, you've got natural building. Did this for centuries, millions and millions of years. What do we do? We put the levee along the river. We closed off Bayou Lafourche, so natural water doesn't go down Bayou Lafourche anymore. We open up all those shoals and all these things. What happen? The water comes up at such a speed it passes this point and goes down below the Outer Continental Shelf. It's gone. It never comes back here again. That's part of our problem. Now people don't realize that's part of our problem. We not only are losing, we've lost the ability to replace… now I'm not saying channelizing the river and the levee… it was great for us. It allowed us to live here, 'cause we couldn't live with the continual flooding. But that's what destroying our environment.

So what's the future? Just to try and slow it down?

Slow it down as much as we can. As part of the Levee District I'm on a committee on the Lafourche Basin Levee District, one of our sister districts. We share common jurisdiction. And they just had a settlement with Texaco and part of the funds have to be used for coastal restoration. We met last Wednesday and we meet once every two months, we'll meet more often. And we've a few dollars, not much money, but it's a few dollars. One of things that came out of the meeting, I said, "Guys, we got to realize. There's certain things that with all the money in the world, there's nothing you can do to stop. Let's sit down and figure what is achievable, what we can do. And concentrate on that. We're gonna lose it, no matter we're gonna lose it. Write it off. Save what you can." And one of the things, one of the engineers, he says, a lot of things are as simple as taking the channel that might be at one time… he showed us pictures, he says, as simple as a channel that mighta been, say 50 feet wide at one time, now it's 800 feet wide. He says, come here, put rock. It mighta been four feet deep, now it's 20 feet deep. Close it in. Restrict that water. Don't let that water come in as fast as it was comin' in. Now, it's not the damage coming in, it's the damage going out. He said if you restrict that smaller area, naturally you have a tremendous current at that point, but that's all rock. It's not eroding. What you're doing is you're killing the pulling affect on the inside that's ripping out the roots of these. So, just as simple as that. You see, you're not restoring anything, you're stopping the further loss. Then you can look at restoring. Once you stop the loss, then you can

People are, through no fault of their own, people are just selfish. "What's in it for me?" "How does it directly affect me?" And a guy living in Montana raising cattle don't give a shit 'bout what's happening in Louisiana. He won't give a buck as long as he's taken care of. I'm not saying it's right or it's wrong. But that's human attitude. Humans, that's the way humans are.

6.3. Pep and Bertha Williams (September 21, 2001; Galliano, LA)

Has the levee made it a lot safer from storms now?

Pep: It don't wash, it don't wash.

Bertha: Yeah, as long as those levees gonna hold. They tell you they all alright. But they tell you.

Pep: Well, they still reinforcing them, they're still working on them. You know, they go down and then they rebuild them again. Top it.

Bertha: 'Cause our worst storm is when whenever it come from the back.

Pep: When the storm is one the west side, that's when we get our water. If the storm is on the east side, well, we dry over here. But if she's on the west side, that give us some water.

Bertha: That's why they build the levee in the back.

Pep: Yeah, there's levee all around now, up to Larose, yeah.

Bertha: But I mean, it's not for the bayou that they

Bertha: It's like at Leeville Bridge, when you get down on the other side, I mean, that's water. Well, whenever he retired, there was no water there. It was all land. It was all water now. Now a lady's told me a little hardhead person gonna get stuck over there, on the other side of the river. And they gonna be wonder why. It's not that they're not notified. But they think that bridge is working, and like it did two weeks ago, it broke, some boat hit it. And they say six to seven mile on each side packed with people. There was one cop that was bringing a patient with a heart attack. They had to bring it as far as they could and get a boat to transfer that man, or that lady,

Bertha: The bayou was too small. It was just a small bayou. But now it goes and it goes. Like going to Leeville, that stretch going before you get to Leeville, it was just a bayou. Just a little bayou that only one boat could pass. And look how big it is now.

Pep: It's getting wider and wider.

Bertha: Wider. You can notice by the telephone… the light poles. Some is still underground, but some. And that's the one that washed away 'cause it was all underground.

But was it artificially widened when the oil industry started?

Pep: No, it's the current. Current.

But it wasn't dredged?

Pep: No, no.

Bertha: That's when I said, we talk. You hate think about it. You hate think 'bout it, "cause you don't know when the young generation gonna end up. They're younger and they're not prepared. They think that things was like that all time. No, it was not. It got that way. And it gonna get worse and worse. 'Cause you have more currents, you have more boat traffic. That's a lot more than we used to have. Before it was only a shrimp boat, and like my husband said, it was a small boat. But now you have those big boats. You have those big barges, those big tugs that's using that water. And the more water they're using, the more currents, the more suction it make.

Somebody was telling about a canal, the British canal. On the other side of Golden Meadow.

Pep: *Canal Briton*. That goes out to the Little Lake. On the east side, what they call the Little Lake, the Little Lake. Where that Briton Canal leads up to that Little Lake.

Bertha: They have a bridge across.

Pep: That's where LOOP is, back there, all them oil reserve tanks.

Why was the Canal Briton built?

Pep: I don't know.

Bertha: I think it was just like you all would call a *trenasse*. It was a small ditch for the trappers go. And they would have the lake in the back and then they could go fishing and things. And it got bigger and bigger. It started, like it shows the other day on TV. It was on TV the other day.

Pep: Yeah, you told me. I didn't see it, but you told me about that. They was showing that. How it was originally started there.

Bertha: There was a man in the pirogue and he had his trap in the other pirogue, in the back. And he was going to that lake. I didn't know which lake it was. And then, and he explained, now how big it is. And how big is the lake. He was showing, it was just the size of it. Like a pirogue size, that's all.

Pep: They call that a *trenasse.*

Bertha: Little canal, to pull that pirogue in. I don't know which program I was playing. Oh, I heard of that. Oh, let me see. And that's what he was explain, that man. How it had started. People was going fishing up there, they didn't have no boat to rent out and fish like they have now. People would go in those pirogues and hit the lake, well, they had a lot of water, and fish there. If you would catch… they didn't have no limits in those days, but you would come back with a tub full, a pirogue full. You wouldn't sell it. You would make sure that all your neighbors has some. You would share, you would share. And like my daddy was a trawler. Any poor people that would come in at the factory where he worked and he who need help, he would give them a dish of shrimp and a dish of fish or crab to make them a gumbo. He would say, "Here." They wouldn't sell it. But now you can't get nothing.

Pep: Nowadays, you gotta pay for it if you want it.

Bertha: Like I said, we was raised good, with lot of food. 'Cause my daddy was a fisherman. And then he would bring his fish and his shrimp to New Orleans. And he would go to the French Market. At the French Market, the one that would have vegetable that didn't sell it and if he had some shrimps and all that he didn't sell that weekend, they would trade. He would trade the shrimp for vegetable. So we always had fresh vegetable. But we was the lucky family.

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