

Cokie Rathborne and Greg Lier Interview

Interviewers: Carl Brasseaux, Don Davis, Roy Kron

Don Davis: Perfect.

Carl Brasseaux: Yeah.

D: Couldn't be- just perfect.

B: Well gentlemen, as we said earlier, we're here to capture the history of the wetlands for future generations. We don't have any kind of political agenda. We're just here to make sure that this information is passed on to one generation to the next. And Roy, whenever you're ready? Because he's gonna give us the green light. Um, what I thought we'd do is begin to focus on a couple of areas. One of them is the history of the um, family business - from its origins to your involvement, but perhaps before we get involved with that, one of the things I would like you to talk about is the company's reforestation efforts. And I think it was the late 40s, early 50s?

Cokie Rathborne: It was soon after my father came here – back to Louisiana after the war in 1945, and I would guess that the uh, the, what's that – I'm trying to remember the name of the, of the gentlemen, the professor at uh, at LSU uh, Mr. Bouche.

B: Mr. Bouche was at Lafayette. At SLI. And he's still alive...

R: Okay. Then that was Mr. Bouche I remember meeting. And uh, it first started out that uh, there'd been no effort to reforest cypress as far as we know. We knew that we'd cut out years – we were cutting out the final second growth of our stuff in Choctaw. And so uh, my father decided to see if it was where we'd reforest cypress. And we certainly had plenty of land that was of very little value except for minerals because of that. And uh, so they worked with LSU - were uh, extremely supportive, I think is the best way to put it. And there are some pictures out there in the hall that you've seen where we're growing the seedlings, and they were all grown on dry land. Uh, and then the idea was then to transplant them...

B: Right.

R: And uh, I remember one vacation when I came back from school, my job was to go out and plant cypress in the swamp. And uh, you know, you do that – I did that for about ten days. And it's literally bending over, digging a hole into the swamp. In other words, we gotta kind of get the dirt out or some mud out, the mud would fall into the holes. It was very frustrating. But we got them in, and uh then some started to do some economics about what it would cost and how long it would take to uh, to harvest the trees. And as I remember, it was 85 years before you would get a piling – or a telephone pole. I don't know which of the two of those were larger. The larger of the two. And it was 115 years to get an 18 inch saw log. That's a tree that would be 18 inches in diameter at waist height. Which is about

where you'd cut. And uh, the economics of a thousand dollars an acre was what it cost in 19... lets say 50 dollars. There was just no way that was gonna work over 115 years. Just count that back, and I said that earlier today, even at advanced price, the (bow?) is probably pretty similar.

L: It didn't make any economic sense. And the critters uh, really kind of made it impossible because the same problem you're dealing with now up in Lake Maurepas with that uh, turtle point or turtle pond area, they'd eat the uh, the seedlings long before they could grow to the size to be immune from being consumed by the critters – so the combination of the two made it just uneconomically unviable and they found a lot that natural regeneration from the stumps basically work just as well. And that's what we do today.

R: And that's once every 26 years, and I remember my father told me that the water conditions - not coming out of stumps but actual seedlings to take place and grow so it would get up high enough so the water wouldn't drown them – it was every twenty six years that cypress naturally forested itself. I assume when we talk about the critters – I assume we talking about nutria. Uh, we got a letter here someplace. Maybe you saw it in the files. Uh, to uh, my father and Mrs. (McElhein?) down in Avery Island – wanted to buy some nutria. And this must make the ?? very happy because the female nutria was worth about four times what the male nutria was worth. So one of those critters – but the McElheins brought them over here and they just spread like wildfire. And he figured there was a nutria problem with the cypress in the fifties, and they didn't bring them over till I think either just before or just after the war.

B: What was the - what was the loss - the ratio - do you have any idea? You talk about loss to critters. Are we talking about half the trees?

L: I don't, I really don't know. But it was substantial because it's such a slow growing tree that just the elements and the environment just didn't allow it to uh, to grow fast enough to be, you know, to be destroyed, you know naturally, and so you start to talk about putting in, you know, a thousand dollars into an acre and maybe what, 50% survived, and that makes it next to near impossible to reforest it. And then you throw into account the change in hydrology, uh, that took place in the 20th century, and that's certainly affected growth rates too. So it's become, you know pretty difficult, you know, from an economic point of view, to reforest cypress.

B: Okay, well could you talk a little more about the changes in hydrology and its impact?

L: Well, I mean I think the biggest thing of course would be the leveeing of the Mississippi River. Uh, you know started to affect uh, the, you know, the flooding of the river system and all its tributaries, and that of course, you know, because cypress is supposed to have, you know, essentially six months dry, six months wet. And no longer – that pattern was disrupted by the levee and the river, by the construction of other levees, by the construction of the canal systems and those kinds of things, and all of that changed the natural hydrology to where you could have areas of the swamp which were never dry anymore. And it just slowed the growth rate down tremendously. So uh, you know, reforestation project today I think is next to near impossible unless it would be some type of government funded project like a diversion project or something were you kind of have unlimited funds to make it happen because it

was something you wanted to do. But from an economic logging point of view, it makes no economic sense at all.

B: I have a quick question for you. Um, when the cypress – we talked about the age, um the age of the trees that you expect to harvest in the 21st century. When – how old does a tree have to be before it starts to take on those desirable properties – you know that make it resistant to dampness and moisture, um, and rotting?

R: I have no clue. But I just gotta assume that most of those characteristics were there from the very beginning. But you know just like, I would assume that when it gets older, it gets tougher because it survived. I don't know, what do you think, Greg?

L: I don't know, I would tend to agree with you. I would think it's to the point I think it's to the point where really it can't be destroyed by outside elements, and that's mostly gonna be you know the animals of the swamp – to where it gets to a decent size, and I think that just gonna – it's just gonna grow and grow and continue to grow, you know, until it becomes, you know, uh, merchantable timber. Uh, and you see that in the swamp. You'll see small trees, and once they're kind of, you know, our height, then they're gonna continue to grow unless something happens – they're struck by lightning, or a tree falls on them, or you know, at that point the critters can't get to them. So I probably without – not having a scientific answer, I would say from day one.

R: One interesting thing about, the - thinking about when you guys started coming here. Was out there they had about five cypress trees that my father planted. Right at the base of the levee. And those are certainly merchantable size, right now. Those trees have only been there for fifty years. So there's a real question in my mind as to whether the swamp was the real best place – wet all the time, wet – whether they could really grow that way or they were better off at least half dry land, what it used to be, than half wet. Uh, but we've got a lot of cypress – a number of cypress trees around these parts that I remember planting, and they're certainly a merchantable size, now.

B: After 50 years, more or less.

R: Huh?

B: After 50 years, more or less.

R: After about 60 or 70, but I mean they're certainly more than just a piling size, but they weren't - they're, you know, the, they've spread out more as far as the foliage goes because they haven't been in a you know, a dense group to grow up just like the regular forest and everything else – it just keeps growing up. There's no uh, sun coming in. They've gotta go up for it. You know.

B: Well what got your family involved in the cypress industry to begin with?

R: Well this is all from folklore, but uh, my great grandfather came over here from – came over in the United States from Ireland in the 1860s. And then uh, went to Chicago – went to work for a box company. And uh, eventually ended up owning the box company. And of course boxes come from

wood, so he decided to go into the lumber business in the Midwest. Back in Paul Bunyan days. And uh, he uh, eventually they cut out. And uh, there was a number of them there – Weihauser was one of them, uh, there were three or four other families that either – that either came South, or went West – there was a cutout of timber in the Midwest.

B: Well, when you're talking about the logging, uh, industry at that time, I know many of the companies that came here were involved in logging in Michigan – was your family...

R: Michigan – it was all over that area. I mean he was headquartered in Chicago, and in Michigan, and whatever. A number of those families came here, but a great number of them went out to the west coast – that's how they got out there. There were you know, after the trees. And uh, um, so he ended up came down here, and from what I understand he had some partners, and the first attempt went broke. And then he came down on his own in 1889 and started our company.

R: And uh, the, the mill was – was about 300 yards from here on the uh, what's now called the Harvey Canal or what is now the Harvey Canal. And the canal was dug – was originally used as a drainage ditch. And the, the – it was deepened and widened, uh, by Captain Harvey, who was married to Elise Destrahan, is the Destrehan Plantation. Um, and the canal was paid for by ties on our logs. And so it became a, you know, there's pictures in 1880s and 90s, when you know, it was a legitimate canal. It was not just a drainage – it wasn't just a drainage ditch. Um, and from here we were cutting Lafourche parish, uh, St. Charles, St. James, uh, where else.

L: Jefferson, just south of here.

R: And it was all the, from what I understand, and you tell me if I'm wrong – from the time they decided to cut a tract of land, it was a year before they ever got the logs, uh, to the mill, because what they have to do was they had to girdle the log so the sap would come out because cypress – especially the lower parts of the tree were so heavy, they would sink. So they had to let some of the sap drain out. And uh, uh, so they go in the swamp, girdle the log, and then you gotta remember, in the swamp, in the summer, between the hornets and the mosquitoes and all of the other things, it was just a very, very uh, um, unpleasant – you couldn't work in the summer, as a matter of fact.

L: Yeah, basically you girdle them in the winter, come back the following winter, you cut them, and float them out. Because working in the summer – well for me – you guys have been in the swamp. To be working here in the summer – if you see some of the pictures on those walls with those old rubberized waders and how they had to work – you wonder how they did it.

R: And then you see, if you take a look at this map, on Lake Des Allemands, where all the stuff in Lafourche parish could be cut here and then it uh, basically a lot of it was done by (dragging?) wasn't it?

L: Hmmhmm

R: Uh, dragged to Lake Des Allemands, and then we had the boats. Waders out, Bayou Des Allemands to Lake Salvador, and then from Lake Salvador to the Harvey Canal over to Lake Barataria. And then come up here ..up here is the canal and then come up.

B: Now these were tugboats? Pull boats?

R: They were uh, um, they...

L: They – since logs were now floating, they would chain them together, I actually got some old pieces of lumber that have the borehole in it from when they'd take them together and they'd just float them. They'd pull them. Um...

D: Were these large, like steam boats? Or were they smaller, sometimes they're called gas boats.

L: I think they were both. I think getting them in and out of the swamp, they were smaller boats, and then they became larger boats as they started maneuvering

B: We have some pictures of some of the boats.

L: and you actually we've got one of the certificates for one of the larger boats hanging on the wall over there...and if you look at the wall over here, I think you got a couple of pictures of some of the smaller boats that actually working in the canals. So I think it was a combination of both the smaller boats to get them out of the swamp into the larger bodies of water, and then larger boats to push them up into the Harvey Canal.

B: We've seen pictures of individuals standing with pikes on the rafts to help maneuver them. Do you know - ever anything like that? To got the last logs around bends...

R: I mean it was a - it was quite a sight when to go down – we had a mill in Choctaw, which I used to uh, go to and we used to shoot snakes. Because you're on these floats the logs. And so it was my little .22 – and we'd we had a good time. And uh, I mean you can get logs as what you see in those pictures, close to 100 yards long. And uh, they would be – when they decided to cut an area, they put a levee around it with huge pumps that would then put water into the, into the (inaudible) area. Logs would be cut – trees would be cut, cut into logs, and manhandled over to the levee at the side of – pulled over the levee into the canal, then it would be these metal boats we had. We'd then bring them to the mill.

D: You had two mills. One at Choctaw, and then your main mill was here in, what's called in Harvey.

L: Right.

D: Okay.

L: And then we had a joint mill in Ponchatoula with Williams.

D: Alright. So let me get to...

R: Was it a joint mill?

L: I thought we had a joint mill.

R: I don't think so, um...

L: They had their mill, we had ours?

R: They had their mill, we had our mill. I'm almost positive that's the case.

D: So...

R: And, the mill here uh, ceased to operate when we cut out in the southern – shall we say, to the south of the river.

B: Okay. About what time – about what time frame are we talking about here when the mill shut down?

R: 1915 – something like that...

B: Okay.

R: ...1910. And went up uh – to uh, Livingston, Tangipahoa parishes. And with the mill in Ponchatoula.

B: Now that mill was drawing lumber primarily from the Machac area? Or was it closer to Ponchatoula on the streams out there?

L: Well both. If you could look at the map, and we don't have one here but I - somewhere we have another map, you go basically from I-55, you know, all the way across and encompass both the Tickfaw and the Natalbany River, you go all the way from the lake all the way to basically dry ground.

R: 22. Highway 22.

L: Basically Highway 22. So you know on the - I guess the northeastern edge would be Ponchatoula, and that would be the northeastern edge of uh, of our property. When you get off the interstate, uh at the Ponchatoula, the first Ponchatoula exit off I-55, that's kind of the northern boundary there of our property with I-55 being the eastern boundary. So 14,000 acres, more or less.

R: Now Williams, you see that – what we did was we had – we have a layer of, let's say three or four sections going across from east to west – and then Williams would have the next layer, section D – and we'd have a layer. And uh...

L: You could call it a checkerboard. And you know, we worked it together.

D: Well we've been talking to the Williams people through the Historic New Orleans Collection, which was started by the Williams. We don't – we have a pretty good understanding of the mill in Patterson, but I am intrigued by something that you pointed out. Um, you're harvesting timber essentially, for just aiding discussion, west of Lake Des Allemands. And you're moving it by water. That's a long ways to pull timber. And I think that's critical to the story. As we sometimes think, you cut timber, and there's the mill.

R: Yeah.

D: You don't realize that you may be moving it, I would guess if I looked at that, maybe a hundred miles to a mill site which is for those of you growing up in the industry, that's the way it's done. But remember, we're gonna be looking at people who may be children now, that have to understand that was a long ways to pull timber. So you know that's a fascinating part of this story because there's all kinds of critical issues when we move on water.

B: Now, so don't assume any knowledge when you're telling these stories, okay?

R: It was a, you know, it was a long haul – I'd forgotten it was way over a over a year from when we first started working on a log until we got it to the mill, and I don't know how long it took. From let's say, time the log was cut, until it even got to Lake Salvador. Or Lake Des Allemans.

B: How many...

It's not – it seems like a long way, but you're prob – as the crow flies, you're probably only talking thirty to forty miles. Okay. Alright. Be out there in a minute.

B: Right, but nothing in this area, where especially when you're going by water, not as the crow flies.

L: Correct, correct.

D: And you're using technology that's not even close to what we see today.

L: No. That's absolutely right.

D: And it's just – it's...

L: Yeah, but I always like to think – you know, think about how did the pyramids get built and those kinds of things, so these guys, just I mean, they just made it happen, you know. I think in a lot of respects they were stronger, more determined than we are today.

(laughter)

B: I thought – do you have any idea – just as a general rule of thumb, how many board feet you could expect to get from a material log?

R: Hmm. I have no clue. You know, a mature log, I would think it would be something – those logs would be four feet in diameter.

L: Yeah.

R: Um...

L: We kept extensive records um, with each quarter section, uh, and you know, what was pulled out of it, and the estimated board feet, and uh, um, I mean just extensive, extensive records. You know in old binders. Unfortunately, we had them, um, in a uh, Cokie you'd think you lost your mind, but we had a

subterranean vault downtown, and they were flooded. Had them restored, but I'm not sure that they're in nearly the quality that they were in prior to the flood.

B: I want to encourage you guys to either have a microfilm...

L: We did. It's all been photographed, but unfortunately it's in the recovery stage as opposed to the original stage.

R: Greg, what are those old – stuff that I microfilmed?

L: Microfilmed?

R: Yeah, twenty years ago.

L: Yeah. That wasn't those little books I don't believe. Those were old maps and records...

R: Titles.

L: Titles. Mostly title stuff.

Don calls me a Historian and – my real interest was seeing what the landscape looked like originally. You know, and so that's a goldmine of information.

R: As bad as those records have been restored, as poorly as they have been restored, it was all done by that freeze drying method, and we had it done um, up in Rochester, New York I think. Cost 80,000 dollars.

B: Well that's state of the art. Best technique available.

R: Yeah so I mean ya'll can look at those if y'all wanted.

B: Well thank you.

D: Before you - I know you have another meeting.

L: And I'm coming back in here I just...

D: I want to ask – Carl and I are intrigued by something – do you – did your company ever build, purposely, the sides of boxes? I mean you got – I'm gonna give you a real example. The Texas Company comes to you and says we want you in your mill to create for us the sides of boxes. Can you ever remember the Rathborne family being involved in producing the sides of – I'm going somewhere – you'll see in a moment. The sides of boxes.

L: You'd have to address that to him. That was before my time.

D: Do you ever remember that happening.

R: No.

D: Alright.

B: They used to create boxes that held two, five gallon tins?

D: Two five gallon tins of kerosene. These were shipped all over the world. One mill alone in southeast Texas, employed about 1000 employees.

R: Just doing that.

B: Just doing that.

D: And the reason I ask, is apparently the Texas Company had what is called the shook. Shook are simply box sizes or the barrel stakes. And if you start thinking, well this is a major – well what evolved into a major company. That is a lot of cypress that ended up in China, and Japan, Middle America, Brazil....

B: But they also employed Louisiana mills, which is why we're asking. Because...

L: Did you find anything when you looked through all the old correspondence or anything? Correspondence is pretty thorough in terms of what was going on right here in Harvey.

B: Right. We didn't see anything that we wanted.

R: East Texas, you know, was a huge lumber business. That's where the money was made in Texas before oil. Was with lumber. East Texas was huge, uh, lumber, prior to that there was a lot of cypress there too.

D: Well the Start family, Diver Start and Brown was a very large cypress company in Donner. The Lutcher family married into the Start family after the –they owned some things in Maurepas so there's these connections. That I don't – it depends...

R: Lutcher More property was just all sold.

D: Yeah but didn't that go to the...

R: The state.

D: Yeah. And then...

Went to the uh, went to the Nature Conservancy, or...

R: ...and they took over.

L: ...and they sold it to the state.

D: And it was XLO Oil company – there's an oil company involved, and also...

L: I think way back when, Bickham owned it. John Bickham owned it. I think.

D: And didn't they go through the Gray family – the Gray family somewhere and...

L: I don't know.

D: I don't know how big their footprint is, but I know that of course...

L: I don't think they got this far East. I don't think.

D: But – but if you're in Texas, of course you talk about pine to cypress. In Louisiana we talk cypress to pine. But family connections – sometimes convoluted, are still there because again, East Texas was such a pine producing region. There's some superb photography of the log jams coming down uh, the Sabine. Going to mills in the Southern part of Texas and Lake Charles.

R: Yeah. Yeah that was uh, that's where the real money was made – in Houston, was from the lumber families before oil was discovered. A lot of those guys had a lot of oil on their hands!

L: Well it happened to us too in a lot of respects. Guys, I need to go meet with this gentleman...

D: Sure! Sure.

L: A minute and I'll come back in, and just keep track of the questions you want to ask me,

D: Oh, by all means.

L: ..I'll be more than happy to answer them. I'll be right back.

R: Okay he said he didn't need to come here because he didn't know much, but he knew a lot more than he thinks he did.

(laughter)

B: That's always the case. Um...

R: Well you see, he lives out there. He lives in Boutte. I mean right out in the middle of, right out in the middle of, uh, right in the middle of it.

B: How did your family business survive the depression?

R: Well we got lucky I think. We cut out in 1926. And I think my grandfather died about – my great-grandfather died about that stage in the game. So it wasn't the depression with all cash and no debt. And uh, and we paid for the property – property taxes were three ways they were. Um, trapping, um, railroad ties, when people come in, let them cut ties out of some of the, you know, the remaining trees. And the third was uh, uh, moss. Moss was used for mattresses. That was the low end mattresses were made out of moss, and the high end was made out of horse hair. So that's what uh, saved us during the depression, and then my father- when my aunt turned twenty one, the uh, her part of the estate became hers, and so then she and my father capitalized – recapitalized a company, and came down here in the late thirties and try to build Harvey up around the lake primarily as a center of the oil industry. And uh, then um, we went from there, we had a - my father had a mill up in uh, Roseland. A pine mill.

Roseland, Louisiana. And uh, um, and we had a, a planing mill and stuff here, but that wasn't successful. So we got out of that. And it's just primary a real estate company ever since.

D: Well the mill that was here – was it producing simply planks or shingles or I mean a whole (inaudible)

R: I think it was primarily – pictures I've seen – it was just primarily lumber.

D: Mmhmm. Now since your family was instrumental in many ways of developing industrial corridor along Harvey canal, right across on the other side of the canal is a place called Southern Seafood. Um, was your family involved ever in the seafood business or in the processing of seafood...

R: Not that I know of. I would doubt it.

B: Okay. But you did talk about your connection with trapping. Um, the trapping industry.

R: Right.

B: Could you explain a little bit about how that worked?

R: Well this is just from what my memory of it is. I used to go down - every year there'd be a uh, an auction. And all the trappers would come to one place, and then the northern buyers would come down. And they would basically buy the pelts. And we got a royalty or a percentage of the uh, with whatever the trapper trapped using our property. And I forgot what the percentage was. But it was quite a sight to see these guys and you know out in the swamps, and these were true trappers. And uh, lived out there.

B: When they went out there, did they take their families?

R: I just know that by, you know, by history. By reading about it. I never saw it. But uh, the auction was kind of a happy day because I mean, the families would come. That was the only cash they saw a year. I don't know how many auctions there were. Must've been more than one a year. But then I don't know if trapping was any good in the summer, or if the pelts were any good in the summer.

B: About how many people are you talking about that would collect from these auctions?

R: As I remember, you see over a hundred people there. It wouldn't be just our property. I mean it would be from all over. Um, but uh, you know, I went to them twice when I was a young kid but I still remember them - they were really quite a uh, a – it was really quite something to see. A nice bunch of people.

D: Well we know that on your property on the Maurepas, because you were logging by train, that often the trappers would hitch a ride on the train and go into the swamp.

R: Yeah.

D: Yeah, it's an interesting story. That it was just this two industries that worked together. You would go in and you would allow the trappers to go on the train, and you would go into the swamp, and I assume

they were trapping the day whatever would come out. And get a train ride back. And that's a very nice story.

R: You know but there's a little bit of uh, enlightened self interest there too because it kept other people out. So they were our watchmen.

D: Okay. That's fair. Sure.

Um, you know because if you know the guys that are in there, they're not gonna take advantage. But they won't let the other guys take advantage. So I mean it's sub leasing.

D: Mmhmm. Now did your family ever get involved in like, when you become a real estate company, taking some of your property and turning it into like subdivisions, or anything like that?

R: We've done a lot of that.

D: Really.

R: But not so much of our own property but property we bought. But in (inaudible) where Greg lives, um, which is um, right here, this is our property, and is called Willow Ridge. This is Willow Bay up here. Was a golf course. And this is Willow Ridge in here, and uh, Greg lives in – Greg developed that property. He was in charge of that and did it. And he lives there now.

D: Okay. Alright.

R: And uh, you know this is a – in one way, um, the snapshot of Louisiana as far as developing what was, quote, "wetlands". Um, we had a run-in with the Corps. And had a settlement where they would have this piece of property that only develop so much of it. And so we've developed a few hundred acres. And now we have the last - the 80 acres left of where we thought we wanted to develop it. Um, and we were just not going to be able to do it. And there is a tremendous pressure to allow no expansion of the levee. Um, and I don't know if it makes a whole lot of sense. I mean, there are certain areas that clearly should not be developed. And it's pretty obvious by looking at a map or looking at the property, but the uh, the Corps and the concervance groups have gotten to the point where there's no give whatsoever. And I think that hurts them in the long haul. Because there's some areas that could be to everybody's benefit through drainage and everything else, but uh, the lines have been drawn now, and there's no give. So we then just bought what was our partners on property here on the Mississippi River, and uh, we've been developing that, which is called Ashton Plantation, which is all cane land, um, so there's no environmental problems with that. Um, we're - that's the only developments we own.

D: Well we had talked – in your knowledge, this area looks like a land reclamation project. This area looks like a potential land reclamation site.

R: Well that's all marsh. You won't be able to do anything with that.

D: This looks like it might've at one time been a land reclamation project, and then there's someplace over here that we read called New Netherlands. Um, that we're not sure where it is but it looks like there's a series of areas over here – some of which that may have been owned by Carlos Marcello...

R: Well this is Marcello's tract. This levee was built by the um, um, Lafourche based levee district. And that's all Marcello's prop – or what was originally Marcello's property. Over here.

D: Okay.

R: And uh, this is now part of Avondale, but Marcello still owned – I forget how many thousand acres this is.

D: Alright.

R: But Marcello still owned a few thousand acres in there. And this is where Jemco put their um, this map is so old. 1972. But in here is where Jemco has put it's um, industrial park – office park, I guess is a better way to put it. And this forest is being developed – every time they try to do something in there, housing wise, they find it's pretty impossible, because that's an area – you dig two feet you get four feet of water. I'm saying that out of exasperation, but...

D: Now are these two tracks here reclaimed? Do they look – I mean this is the Harvey Canal. So we have on the – again we'll say the west side, a large tract between Larose Lafitte, I guess that's highway. Um, because it does have characteristics that it may be reclaimed.

R: This is uh, um, this is a big subdivision here.

D: Okay.

R: Now this tract right along the canal maybe goes out 1000 feet – that's still wet. That's owned by um, Marjorie (Inaudible), and uh, people along the uh, salvage company. But a lot of this is developed. But a lot of it is – a lot of the Marrero's owns a fair amount of property in here.

D: That's the Marrero land company?

R: Mmhmm. Um, now this looks – just by looking at the floor of it – that looks wet. It's marshes instead of swamp.

D: Well since your family's had such a visual presence, from Harvey all the way over here to Lac Des Allemans and what is it, Grand Bayou. Um, in your lifetime, what environmental changes have you seen, or what general changes have you seen?

B: In broad strokes.

R: We too have seen - well the oil company has been blamed for an awful lot of the problems in the marsh. Especially the marsh rather than, you know, differentiate marsh and the swamp. But it's interesting though - we have a timber crew from 1903. Of, the uh, south. Down south down here. All the tracts of timber that we wanted to buy, and the guy giving the crews says, uh, Bayou Dupont was where

it was. Said uh, don't buy it because the salt water intrusion is killing trees and is killing. Now this is way before the oil companies, way before all the Navigation canals. This is just nature.

B: 1903.

R: 1903. Remember that timber crews that...

L: Yeah.

R: Said the land – the timber's no good. They said it all died. It's dying off now but he said it's all been um, contaminated by salt water. So you could say that man has done a lot of this. Nature's doing it. And if you look at the five different maps – or four different maps of the river, starting over ...

L: 3000 b.c., Haha.

R: You know, I mean the crescent river's only from a thousand. And so these three other deltas, which is what storm hit St. Martinville. Uh, no it was...the bayou....

B: Bayou Teche..

R: Yeah bayou Teche was originally part of the river, and uh, Lafourche was the river, and then uh, to the east of us, down Maurepas and that. So this is the fourth time we've had the river, so we would lose this stuff anyway. That just means that you gotta go out and (inaudible), but this stuff is gone.

L: Well it's stopping the replenish. That's what the real problem is. Yeah.

R: Well and we're stopping replenishment with the levees on the river and everything else. I mean, there's a famous family story about uh, I think it was during the 1927 flood, that uh, there were going to be - the Corps of Engineers, or the city, or whatever – were gonna blow up the levees uh, below the city to relieve the pressure. And uh, the trappers down there said, the heck with that. You're gonna ruin us, put us out of business, there's nothing in Harvey, let's go blow it there. And uh, and they were gonna do it. So my grandpa went out and bought a case of Winchesters. And all the employees along the river, and that night she said, shoot anybody you see except for people – my daughter and I will be in a white robe to bring you coffee and food. And that went on for a week. So you know. Things were not ...

D: But there's a - you had mentioned to Carl and I casually, things that we're real interested in, is certainly the labor force. It had to be a significant labor force. And there's no indication that your family ever used tokens or script or anything like that. It was always sort of a cash business to the employees. Well this very cup over here shows that the employees have a great deal of respect for the family. Now I don't know if that's universal, but that's an important thing – if you could please comment on it...

Because I can tell you – this is not held in place in early 20th Century America.

R: Well he was well liked, but he was a good guy. Um, and he'd been through his own personal problems, but there was one time when we did have script – and I think it was when 1908 depression.

And uh, we had a cash bond, and Mr. Kleintele - store, and I remember Kleintele Store, so I remember this, but just on the other side of the canal, and he took the company script. Took my grandfather's - IOU's, basically. And it was better for everybody. but he didn't know. And you know, that didn't last for more than about a year, but I mean there's a time when times were tough and we did have script. And everybody willingly - had a choice. They could quit - they could go where - because they didn't have many places to go, but I mean they could be fed.

B: But the situation that Don is talking about is no one that stressed over debt...

D: Yes it wasn't - that was a courtesy of your employees. And that's also quite rare in early industrial history. Just - it's just a very good story.

He was - from everything I know, he was an (inaudible) from 19 uh, eighteen eighty something. And never remarried. And uh, from everything I understood he was a well liked person.

D: Okay. Clearly it carries over to the current generation because you certainly welcomed us.

L: Well and this is - this is a pretty amazing company because almost no one leaves here. I have been here twenty five years. Um, the - our secretary, (inaudible) lady has been here thirty years. Um, we've had two property managers retire - both with over twenty five years of service. Um, nobody leaves.

B: That's fantastic.

L: Yeah. Nobody leaves. Our, our president before Cokie had been here over thirty years. So that's a pretty good testament of what's going on here.

D: Yes, it is.

R: Well Joe Boudreaux and his father worked here, and between them had eighty years. So, nice guys.

D: Greg, are you a native Louisianan?

L: Yes, I was born and raised in New Orleans. Lived here all my life.

D: Where'd you get you education?

L: Uh, I went to L'ecole Classique High School in New Orleans, and then I went to Southeastern for my undergraduate, and then Loyola Law School.

D: I taught at Nicholls, so I was hoping we had a little Nicholls connection. Haha

L: Well, like I said, I was a city boy forever, uh, and so I ended up going to Southeastern up in Hammond, and didn't move out to Luling until I came to work here, and they wanted a presence because we had all these things going on in St. Charles parish, they wanted a presence in St. Charles Parish. So I moved there in I think, 1987.

D: Well...

R: And he's become quite a presence here too by the way.

D: Well before you came in, we asked Cokie, and maybe you could comment. When you think of your – I'm not gonna say landholdings, but interests. It goes from the left side of Lake Des Allemands to Grand Bayou, where there are some really nice camp clusters. And it extends essentially to Harvey canal and crossing that is the Louisiana Cypress Lumber Company Canal. You grew up in New Orleans, but you can look at this map and visualize change. Can you just comment – just – now. Change.

B: Yeah uh, Cokie just mentioned this was the 1972 and if you can just take a quick glance at the map, and tell us in broad strokes...

L: This is, you know, an amazing map. Uh, I am a map lover, so I read maps, I'm pretty good at reading maps, I love aerial photography, so this is – I can't tell you how many times I've sat in this conference room and starting pointing out things – sometimes you gotta be a local to understand it all, but if you just talk about – if you start over here in the city, it uh, I always look at this and say this part in of itself is amazing because you go to New Orleans east, and there's basically nothing there at that point in time. You know, you've got the development of New Orleans East. As you're come up to here, one of the things that jumps out at you right off the bat is in this area right here, there's no Superdome. No downtown New Orleans skyline. You got old Tulane stadium. As you get up in here, it really becomes interesting because this is all the lakefront in Metairie. There's the causeway, and you see all this land that doesn't have any houses on it. That's all built now. You look at this, this is Elmwood.

R: Yeah we ended up buying that.

L: Yeah this is Elmwood in 1972, and this is Elmwood in 1990. Same tract of land. You could see what's there now – this is even more developed because now the Coca Cola plant is right there...

R: Yeah, we sold to Coc...

L: ... and you can see all of that – plan, was right there, and this is even more developed than it shows right there.

D: Not to interrupt but three of my favorite roads in Louisiana are there.

L: Okay.

D: Hickory, Dickory, and Doc. Haha

L: Yep. Yep.

D: Somebody had a great sense of humor.

L: Yep, yep. The uh, you know if you come over to the West Bank, and if you start looking at what's been developed here, it's pretty amazing because you know, this whole area has become residential subdivisions. Uh, English Turn is down over here. Uh, just been quite a bit of development, and if you

start heading west, we're building a huge subdivision kind of right in here, and this has been developed, and all this in here was turned into Armand. The Armand subdivision. Huge subdivision. Most of this – in this area, has been developed now. None of this has been developed in here. So it's just all kind of grown up, grown up, grown up. As you go. Uh, if you had a more modern map, you'd see that a lot of this has eroded. And subsided. So the nature of this is gonna have changed quite a bit also, because of what's going on with our coast.

R: Greg, they asked me a question about the Marcello tract. This was all part of – this was – Lafourche Levee District broke this levee around here. I'm pretty sure – but I

L: May have.

R: Well part of that's developed now.

L: Yeah. So it's uh, it's you know, it's changed dramatically. In 35 years or so.

D: Just a visual reference. Where is Lapalco?

L: Lapalco basically – the green line right here. This is Lapalco.

D: Alright

L: And that comes back around and then kind of ties in, you know, up in here.

D: Okay.

L: Yeah it comes though probably right there. Follow - you know Lapalco is Louisiana Power and Light Company. That's what it stands for, and so it follows the power line. And you can see the power line, and that power line is turned, and it comes right here past the bridge circle there.

D: We'd like for you to continue, but do you know, in your knowledge – either one of you, but do you know the name Amesville? Did either one of you heard the term Amesville?

L: Obviously I know of an Ames Boulevard, but not Amesville.

D: That's important. You know Ames Boulevard. Well Amesville, as near as Carl and I can figure, was right up there a little bit. Up river.

L: That would make sense.

D: And it was the offloading point for Texaco.

L: Huh.

B: It was a big facility over there.

D: It's a big – it was Texaco's first major presence in Louisiana as a distribution company. And it's – if you look at the old maps, and I know you have some interests, you'll find a little town of Amesville.

L: Okay.

R: On the river.

D: On the river.

R: What facility did they have there?

L: They had tanks for storing oil because they were very active in that period...

R: Well I could tell you exactly what it was.

D: Okay.

R: Great Grandfather – we had a choice. Uh, when he came down here, he was gonna put a mill on the Harvey Canal, or one where Bayou Senette comes in. And there was a – what was it. Right in here. Uh, well this is where the - there was a plantation here called Seven Oaks or Nine Oaks or something like that. And it was owned by Texaco. And all around it were those tanks that are there now. That plantation used to be. Beautiful place. And um, I bet you that's where it was.

D: Okay.

R: So it was right where the - when the road - the river kind of comes around, the river road basically parallels to the river, and then goes - where's the bridge – yeah. It comes like this, and then when it goes like that, it goes straight across, that's where – well you can see the tanks here now, but they were all part of this, the um, bet you that's where it was.

D: On Ames Boulevard.

R: Because Texaco owned that plantation, and we'll get back to it. And my great grandfather was deciding whether to buy that to live, and to use – in fact - Bayou Senette as a means of transportation, or the Harvey Canal.

D: Yeah, that's interesting. Go ahead and continue because it's fascinating. Uh...

L: Well, it's, you know you come up into, you know, we talked about Destrahan...you really can't see it up until Laplace, but – because it goes off the map and you got that whole development of LaPlace area. Beltaire, and all the subdivisions around Beltaire that would all be up in there. And then you start getting out this way, and there's not as much development. You know, it's still kind of, you know, Edgard, you look at that map 35 years later, that hasn't changed a lot. Um, and you looking at...

R: That's where the bridge is. Right there.

L: A lot of this – well no. The bridge is actually here. In Gramercy. And you know you look at this and you still got all the developments along the thing – you know, sugarcane farms, that really hasn't changed all that much.

B: Okay. Well let's look at the article, (inaudible) – Greg, and talk about the environmental and developmental changes in the place.

L: Well uh, you know, this whole area is suffering from the same problems that we see – you've got subsidence issues, you have salt water intrusion issues, and so, uh, you've seen, you know, you're seeing a change in what is happened. Uh, you can look over here at this old map – this is, this is basically - this area here, Luling area, you can just look at some areas in here that just aren't as healthy as they once were because of what's going on with subsidence, and salt water intrusion, and those types of things.

R: And no flooding from the river.

L: And so, you know, in all that you're seeing those things, and they're still stable and they're still there, but they're, they're degrading. They're not improving. Um, you couple that with uh, water lilies and the (inaudible), and nutria, and you know, that whole area, that this whole area has those issues.

D: Now, were you involved with the donation the Salvador Wildlife Refuge?

L: No. That was before my time.

D: Okay. I, I think that one of the things we'd like for you to discuss is that maybe – maybe the three of us have studied the wetlands; we don't live it as a manager.

B: Yes, but studying it is different from really knowing it. Um, if you know what I mean. Having hands-on experience.

D: So we look at any tract of land, you're gonna see it a bit different than those of us from the outside. Exactly because you have to manage that land. So when you start thinking of management in your tenure, and then management in the next twenty five years, next fifty years. Can you just comment with how you observe things, but how do you go about – and that's a large amount of land!

L: Well, it uh, I guess you look at management from two or three different points of view, uh, the first one is trying to generate some income off the land, if nothing else than to pay for taxes, and insurance. Um, and so what we've done is we have proactively decided that we want to have all of our property leased for some type of outdoor recreation type activity, whether it's hunting, fishing, and whatever, um, and so most of our land is leased, um, a lot of it's been leased to the same hunting club for 20, 30, 40, 50 years, and there's some very good reasons for that.

R: It's very, very local. It's just to keep the...

L: Yeah. Just to keep very low prices. Very good reasons for that though because you need to have – they're possessing that land for you, so they're validating your title, but they're also keeping the poachers off, and the trespassers off, and you know, for the most part, they've got sound game management practices so that they are improving their deer herds, um, and that's about all they really hunt – I wish we had more duck land, but we don't – because I'm a duck hunter, but uh, you know so

that's kind of the first level of management in terms of making sure that we have tenants on the land protecting our interest because there's no way – we run a very small shop – there's no way we can keep an eye on 50,000 acres. It's impossible. Um, the second part of the

B: (Inaudible)

L: Yeah, the second part of management comes in with, you know how can we you know improve the land. And that, at times becomes um, difficult. Uh, any type of wetland improvement project, to use that word, is, is sometimes difficult to get approved, um, and expensive to implement. Um, we spent quite a bit of money trying to develop a project to introduce fresh water into the - our property in Lake Maurepas. And we just really ran into a substantial amount of resistance from uh, DNR, and the Corps of Engineers, you know, trying to get them to buy into this project as a project that would improve the marsh and all we wanted to do was get enough mitigation credits so that we could pay for the project. And we couldn't get past that point. Um, we've looked at, you know, other types of projects to, you know, try to kind of, you know improve things where we see issues because have a – right now you have a serious – and it would be interesting - you talked about that turtle pond...

D: Turtle cove.

L: Turtle cove project – I'm gonna be interested to see what happens because you have serious salt water intrusion issues on the North shore of Lake Maurepas. You wouldn't think that you do, but you most definitely do have serious salt water intrusion issues. There's gotta be a way to get more fresh water into that system, or that whole ecosystem is gonna change for the worse. Uh, so...

R: Well what Greg wanted to do, which I still don't understand why they stopped this, is uh, a canal that just south of Ponchatoula, that is just a - it brings it over to, in effect...

It takes all the drainage out of the Pole Ponchatoula water shed, and kind of runs it down this canal, and what I wanted to do was divert that – and run it through the swamp.

R: But the canal basically dumps it on to the canal going around I-55. Which is ours. And so they just – they wouldn't let the water go through – which, to me, was just – stupid.

D: How long ago?

L: This – we worked on this for probably uh, three years, and I'd say starting point was probably, you know, beginning, 2000, 2001, something like that, and we probably spent, we spent seventy five, a hundred thousand dollars, and you're kicking yourself in the head and it's like you know, I'm just, uh...

R: They always expect you've got an ulterior motive.

L: And like I said we base this on – we think this would work – we had a bunch of – we had Woody Gagliano working with us, uh, we had um, the Fenstermaker environmental people helping us, and we got nowhere. And all we wanted was, we're not asking you to sign off on this project and say yes this is gonna create – all these wonderful things – here's a million credits to go sell. Just give me enough to pay

for it and then if we can't demonstrate that the thing works and is improving the swamp, then, you know, nothing ventured nothing gained. Uh, couldn't get to that point. Um, a couple things though that had happened that we think is gonna be beneficial, is that we worked with Dr. Day on this wetland simulation project in uh, Luling, and that has already had beneficial results, uh, to the swamp in that area. I am told the leaf litter has increased dramatically, and some very good things are happening. So we're looking at another one of those projects, uh, actually in the Maurepas area, and another one also in St. Charles parish. So it's interesting how things turn around and change - twenty years ago the EPA hated Oxidation ponds. Now they recognize that they can be very valuable. Um, so - we'll see how those things go. So that's kind of the - you know I guess try to improve the property from that. We still have occasionally oil and gas leases that we have to manage, and we also, every now and then, have inquired timber company. And we are, because of our history, we're pretty protective of what we do with the cypress timber. We set minimum diameters on what they can cut, we don't allow any cutting for purposes of mulch. It's gotta be saw timber trees only. Uh, it's gotta be, you know, it's gotta be respectful of what's going on out there. There's not a lot of that, but occasionally every four, five years, we'll have a timbering operation. You know in a small area. It'll generate some revenue. But uh, you know, it's, it's preserving the land and...

D: So you mentioned three items.

L: Okay.

B: Um, one was leases...

L: Yes.

B: Second one is just, how you manage them...

L: Right.

B: Is the third one oil and gas?

L: Well the third one is kind of the, I guess the revenue, the revenues seeking claims, which were basically oil and gas and timber operations.

B: And trapping is out of the scene entirely...

L: Well, it - there's zero value for the nutria, but the state has created a, a bounty on the nutria I think it's up to 5 dollars a tail, and we do participate in that. Uh, the storms of the previous few years really knocked the nutria down actually quite a bit. Uh, they're rats at the end of the day, so they will be back. But uh, they're - that is that's a great program the state's implemented, and we do participate.

R: I ...

L: It's more of a sporting event. Now a guy goes out there with his .22 and he you know kills 20, 30 nutria, chops the tail off, leaves the carcass in the swamp for the other animals to feed. Um, the fur is worth nothing.

B: Now, if you have- I'd like to just change the direction a little bit. We mentioned oil earlier and you were talking about it. Um, I'd like to revisit the subject of the – first of all, I'd like to talk about um, Rathborne's role in making Harvey a, sort of a launching pad or a logistical center for the development of the oil industry in this part of Louisiana. Now, it's an interesting thing that an industry as important as oil has been to – in Louisiana's history – economic history. Adversely, absent completely from the history of the State's history books. Um, pages of the state's history books. So um, we'd like for you to recall what happened here that made Harvey such an important center for the oil industry.

R: Greg can help me on this, but I remember that my father's side was this we had this land here, that was no income – just some taxes. And uh, so we started developing the land along the canal, but what we had was – we had a drying yard for cypress. It took two years for the sticks to dry. And so we had a patch of land that was two blocks or three blocks wide.?

L: Um, well it depends on where you were but it was either one or two blocks wide, and the reason is that secondary road kind of stopped and just became two blocks wide with no street in between it.
Haha

R: Well it went from here to LaPalco. Three miles.

Yeah, LaPalco, interestingly enough, was the (inaudible) Line. Right there.

R: Um, so uh, he got some premise on some of the oil companies, and uh, he basically promoted this property. Now we didn't own the canal permits. The canal permits was owned by the uh, Harvey canal. Well the vast majority was - they sold things off. But uh, we started bringing people down here, and it became a kind of a launching point for oil – a lot of the stuff in this part of South Louisiana. Um...

B: Well who were some of the first companies to move into the area?

R: Well, Texaco was here, Standard (inaudible), um, and uh...

L: Exxon was here.

R: Exxon was here.

L: McDermott was here. Uh, the Hooper family had a huge, uh pipe operation here, um...

R: Which we financed to start off with. To show you that this was a local family doing something, and my father basically lent them the money to start. It was the use of our property, so if he was a success, we'd get some rental. It was a real good proposal.

L: And what – like everything else, we always talked about these big, chemical plants that we have. Why can't we attract more satellite industries around these plants, and that sometimes it just never seems to happen. But here it did. Because all of these support companies that were helping the majors with their big packages of this, or you know, supply companies and small fabricators and this or that, they all started moving into the area, and the story goes, this is before my time – the story goes that uh, there were times where it might take you an hour to get from, on Peters Road, to get from LaPalco to here.

There was that much activity in business along the Harvey Canal. And of course that's subsided some because all of these packages that were being built back in those days, have grown as we've moved farther offshore. And so the canal just isn't wide enough and deep enough to get these big packages out. So a lot of that business has moved to Houma.

B: Okay. So initially the majors here had um, refitting operations for the...

L: Basically, uh, they would have fabrication, building platforms and crew decks, and crew quarters, and those types of things. A ton of that um, that would have pipe storage, pipe inspection, pipe cleaning, those types of operations, and then just the various supplies. You know, this wrench is broken. I need somebody to rewind the motor. I mean anything and everything you could think of that had to do with heavy industry.

B: And some of the earliest drilling was (inaudible) almost directly south of here in the Barataria...

L: Correct.

B: ...area, is that correct?

L: That was 1944, '45. And that was kind of our transition – we went from lumber to really oil and gas. Um, with Harvey, Renolds is kind of, you know, kind of...

R: Well one aspect over there - which we now use for our own stuff that we don't rent out. That was a mud warehouse. That was for drilling.

L: Yeah, Baroid was in there.

Yeah, Baroid was in there.

D: Um, right across the Harvey Canal, when you cross over to make a left turn going towards um, (inaudible) alright. On the right is a little business called Tako, T-A-K-O, Marine Services. Do you know anything about that company? There's a reason we ask the question. The Yugoslavians in Louisiana have always called Tako by the Acadians. That's the only sign Carl and I have ever seen.

R: But we don't know – I didn't notice...

D: That even uses the term, and it's quite unique because apparently there were Tako evolved, the Yugoslavians have a saying, Hello, and it was (*Takosai?*). And it was Cajuns being Cajuns, it was changed to Tako. And we saw that – I, we turned around and I actually took a photograph. And I was just curious since you have business – one of the things the Harvey Canal is noted for, not only the logistics of a port for the oil and gas business, the seafood industry. And were you – I know you weren't directly involved in seafood, but were you involved in leasing land, or in the Southern Louisiana across the way, cannery, and providing them...

L: Our holdings up until 1986, were exclusively on this side of the canal. The other side of the canal was the Destrehan family, um, they divvied that up among different family members. Their company of all

the family members had quite a bit of it, and so up until the time that we bought part of that company, we did not have any holdings along Destrehan. All of our holdings were along Peters Road. So we did not deal with Southern Shellfish or any of those companies – we had no dealings with them until 1986 when we bought a number of tracts of land that had businesses along them. So...

D: Well we were intrigued by the Southern Seafood...

L: Yeah.

D: You have to careful...

(inaudible)

D: You have to be careful with hyperbole, but it's often described as the largest cannery in the world.

L: That's uh – that sounds like hyperbole to me. Haha but I started thinking of Monterey and some places like that, but...haha

D: It is interesting, though.

R: Well, they, they did try to get – at one point, that was where Boomtown Belle was gonna be. And all sorts of hell broke loose, so...

L: That just wasn't a real sound spot to put that, but anyway...

R: It was too close to the canal, you know, the actual...

L: Well, the actual road of traffic and everything else, it just...

R: But that was uh, you could tell all of Louisiana was in the middle of that one.

(laughter)

D: Yes.

R: I don't know how to say that nicely.

D: Yes. Very well done.

L: One thing I wanna point out, and we haven't talked about it at all, but I keep coming back to it because I'm looking right at that map, is when they did that Davis Pond freshwater diversion project, they did years of study on our land on the ridge system. And you could see you basically got, I think this is really cool here...

B: I mean you can really see it.

D: Well you basically got a birdfoot delta here. For all intensive purposes, and that was a big, you know, obviously a big overflow here. There was always this theory that – the Davis crevasse happened in the

early 1900s where the levee kind of broke and flooded, and I always thought that was the cause of this, which doesn't make whole heck of a lot of sense. But during the studies, they actually did some carbon dating with the soils in here, and found them to be three thousand years old. So that's how long that ridge system has been formed. So I just thought that was just a very interesting story and kind of a validation is to how all of this happened, you know, over many millenniums.

D: Now, I recognize the Lavere name. Is that D. D. Lavere out of Thibodaux? The Laverre family?

L: It's the Lavere family, I don't know if there's a D. D. Lavere or not. But, yeah.

R: But the Bob Becker that was here for forty years, thirty years, he ran the Lavere company for the last uh, till last uh, last year for twenty years but..

L: Maybe not twenty but certainly fifteen.

D: If I remember right, part of that family, um, the gentleman was a bachelor. And he's turned a fair amount of his production into a foundation in Thibodaux. I don't – I'm not saying the whole thing, but part of it is a foundation in Thibodaux that helps with education and things. SO like the Geens property, same general philosophy.

R: Well I mean it shows you how small the world is. This is Ashton, and this, originally for (Ellington?) This and this we bought from Lavere. And we're business partners with Lavere.

L: Yeah we're business partners and friendly competitors. So...

(laughter)

L: So we've had a long term relationship with that company.

D: Well how about with, um, Bouie Land Company? Because I know, again. Because I've spent some time wandering the swamps, out of Kramer...

L: And we enjoyed that.

D: And you've got one thing that says "Rapper No Trespassing" and "Bouie No Trespassing".

L: Yeah.

D: And I can also find a (inaudible) that says Rathborne and Bouie. So there's clearly, somehow a connection.

L: There's a connection, but not as close a connection I would say we have with Lavere or Williams. We know them, the gentleman who manages Bouie, who I used to work with when I worked at Chevron he used to work at Chevron, I know him well and we worked well together, but there isn't as close a I think we have with either Lavre or Williams. We never had, I guess we never had, for lack of a better word, a business relationship. And then being adjoined land owners.

D: We would like to try to do something similar with Bouie and something similar with Williams. Um, simply because in the Northern part of the basin, you have the Wilbur family and the Schwinn family. We think we can do something very similar with those two. We may ask you for some help with Bouie.

Okay.

D: I'll put out a word.

L: Well the gentleman there will end up being someone like me. He's an attorney by trade, he worked in the oil and gas – he retired from Chevron, so he's not gonna have, you know, a zillion years of history like Cokie would, but he certainly could probably lead you in the right direction.

D: Yeah, again, just like your family, Cokie has kept very good archival material that we tried to protect. They have something similar, we'd just like to...

L: I find it hard to believe they wouldn't be – you just never know.

D: Yeah, it's just like, um, do you ever deal with uh, the engineering firm in New Orleans, I lost it.

B: Um, Waldemar Nelson.

L: Yeah.

D: We've – it's interesting you've mentioned Harvey because their sulfur mine at (??) was serviced from a site on Harvey. Because it was the quickest way to move material to that site. We've been acc - provided access to their photo files, absolutely incredible.

R: Who's the – firm Waldemar Nelson?

D: Waldemar Nelson, yes. And it's...

L: Well the business they ran – you would think they have incredible records to go back on.

B: Well their archive literally fills a warehouse.

L: Yeah.

B: It's just enormous.

R: Well most important part of Waldemar Nelson is that in their building, is the headquarters of uh, Bacchus, and that's where my wife works.

(laughter)

R: And Greg's a rider.

L: Yeah, I'm a rider, yeah.

D: Well that's fun.

L: Oh yeah, yeah. Well you can tell that I'm a New Orleans boy – a Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, I'm Catholic, and I was raised on Fountainwood Drive.

B: Um, can you give us a date when you talked about this area's declining importance as oil production was moved further and further offshore. Can you point to a date approximately when um...

L: I would say, you know we had a huge boom in uh, probably the 70s and the early 80s. I mean back in the early 80s you know oil jumped up to thirty dollars a barrel, and Jimmy Carter was talking about – we got a shortage of natural gas, and we're putting on a windfall profit tax, and everything was crazy, and you couldn't build buildings fast enough for people, and then 1985, '86 comes, and the Slavi's decide they're gonna get control of the price of oil, and they drop the price of oil to I think as low as ten dollars a barrel or under, and that was kind of the beginning of the end of the majors being in this area. Um...

R: We were saying on the canal was still alive in '85, and still 11 – uh, was it chapter 11 in '07. So you know '87.

L: But McDermott moved out, they got out of all of their properties, and been systematically sold them off, and the majors started to, you know, their somewhat into consolidation into downtown and then eventually into Houston. Um, and then you also started to have that – while that's going on, you start to have the supersizing of all of these structures, and the fact that the Harvey Canal could no longer get those structures out of the canal into low water...

R: Because, primarily because of the bridges...

L: The bridges and also- but the draft. The canal's only fourteen feet deep. So you don't have very much draft there, and so you started to see the big, I mean the big, big fabricators moving into the, into Port Fourchon and Houma, you still have the smaller package fabricatorshere, and you still do. Um, gentleman I was meeting with – Chuck Morrison. He's got a fabrication yard here, he's got a fabrication yard in Houma. Um, but that was kind of the starting of the change. Kind of the really crash of the value of oil, and a multitude of these small service companies basically going bankrupt, and then the larger fabricators started to move to areas where they could get to blue water without any of the restrictions and constrictions. So this area started to change. And uh, you know, we're still um, right now we're down a little bit, but we're normally running, you know, 85 to 90% occupancy overall in this area with warehousing, but it's a lot of different...

B: Well that's what I was trying to ask you – what moved in to fill the void when the majors moved out?

L: You're – you've got a boat company that sells boats, we've got some fabricators still, in this industrial part, we've got a wide variety – we've got a steel company, we've got, you know, an environmental – an oil environmental company that basically takes used oil, collects it, recycles it. Uh, we've got um, interestingly enough, actually at a couple different times we've had wood reproduction companies, storing props and stuff like that. In here we've got a pretty large printing and embroidery company, so it's just a – it's kind of a wide variety. So we've got a lot of supply companies, but you know, it's

different. For a while we had a mulch company operation. I mean they'd take trees and make mulch there. So this is - it's still for the most part industrial, but it's just...

R: It's not oil...

L: It's not all tied into oil and gas.

D: Well you mentioned you owned the East side. And the west side was owned by the Destrehan family.

L: For the most part, yes.

R: Well both sides.

D: When did Bollinger move in? Because that's an industry that can survive very well in a 14 foot draft.

L: Yeah. Bollinger probably has been here for at least fifteen years.

D: Wow.

L: And they took over, in some respects, some of the facilities they took over were Avendale facilities. And they took over facilities from Avendale because Avendale was getting out of the small ship repair type stuff. And they took some of those facilities over.

R: But they've got that repair stuff over here right next to Fourth Street. But then down – just before the canal um, merges with the Algiers cutoff, they've got a big barge manufacturing company down there. So they've got two things on the canal.

D: Well speaking of canals, when was the Louisiana Cypress Lumber or Logging – I don't know how it's

L: Lumber Canal.

D: Lumber Canal. When was that built?

L: My guess can only be that it was built when we were harvesting this whole area.

D: Alright.

L: This whole area right here. You know we owned fifty thousand acres, but we probably harvested – who knows. A half a million acres. So we don't own every acre that we harvested.

R: His grandfather only bought what he had to buy.

L: Only when people didn't want to sell just the timber. So uh, and evidently he had uh, geological ESP to pick out all those great spots for oil and gas, right.

(laughter)

R: Yeah I mean, for example the one down here in Parodie. The Parodie field we cut all that in oil.

L: Yes, that's this geological site he wasn't working as well. Haha But I would guess it was up in here, so you got to think 1900s, somewhere in there. 1910.

D: Because one of the early maps shows, right over in here, and I think – of course none of this is here. There is a reference to the Louisiana Cypress Logging Company in here. And I don't remember you ever harvesting in here from my recollections.

L: Well, it's possible. We actually own – we own the two thousand acres down here, and we own some more acreage right here. So it's possible that we did do some harvesting in there.

D: But it's important because when I see that – I assume you owned it, and that's not what you're saying. You just got the right to cut timber.

L: They did what we call buying stumps. They bought the stumps, we bought the timber. That's the majority of...

D: Very interesting.

L: Yeah, we did not – we only own what we had owned.

D: I got you. Okay.

L: I guess in hindsight, I wish we owned it all, but that's a whole other story.

R: Well there's the other side of that one, Greg.

L: And it's called paying the taxes and surviving.

R: And surviving the depression – you know that's – and we're pretty damn lucky not to own that much property going through the depression – or we would have been bankrupt. We've been pretty rich later, but...

D: Interesting.

R: This map has been a wonderful map to have. We uh, had another one made, what 1990?

L: 19 – In the – Michael Bordelon did this. So it had to be mid – early to mid 80s. Because he was gone in what, '87?

R: Oh, '87?

L: But we rented – we had actually owned over here, but we kind of renovated this made and made this room smaller and we made our office in this, so there was really no place to put it. So we stored it in our warehouse.

D: Mmhmm.

B: Now I'd like to get – ask you guys to look forward twenty five years.

L: Well, I'm gonna not be here, Cokie may still be here. Haha. Um, that is worrisome to me. Um, I, and we all know what Katrina did, you know, we see Gustav, we see Ike, um, and it worries me that we are not doing the things we need to do as a state and as a nation to protect our coast and to renourish our coast. There was an article in the newspaper last week talking – I mean, I don't want to talk too poorly of the Corps since we're on tape here, but talking about how they're still operating under these antiquated principles that they're doing this dredging, they've gotta dispose of it as cheaply as they could possibly dispose of it instead of doing beneficial dredge projects all over the marsh. I mean it's just insanity. They just spent billions of dollars recovering from Hurricane Katrina, and they're gonna worry about pennies to not – not to distribute the soil, and it just worries me, you know. We're gonna be Holland. I just – I just – I'm concerned about where we're gonna be twenty five years from now. I think the population of New Orleans and Louisiana; we're a resilient group of people. I mean you're gonna have to kill us to get us out of here. Um, but it just worries me that environmental situations we're dealing with are not being dealt with. So...

R: Well the Corps – the (inaudible) thing is that the Corps has this, um, philosophy that it's their job to do everything as cheaply as they can. And I'll give you an example I just went through a year ago. There was an ad in the paper where the Corps wanted a couple of blocks of land. Literally blocks. Um, so I called up the Corps, and the some lady, and I said uh, are you going to you know, how are you gonna lease it? She said well I'm gonna get an appraiser. I said well we just ran into that one. You're gonna get the cheapest appraiser you can find. She said well that's my duty. To try to get the lowest price for the taxpayer. I said yeah but the lowest price sometimes – you're wrong about this one. The appraiser is just giving you the lowest price and they don't know because it's not right. She said I don't care. So there's that mentality in the Corps that uh, like Greg says, that why they're not taking all this muck that they're dredging out and putting into the – try to rebuild some of the land, I don't know. Now they're doing some of that down in uh, um...

L: Du Large. Yeah, I mean they're doing something, but they could be doing so much more. I mean that – that's from the environmental point of view, you know. You look at all the other things going on in this state and this area and I mean I think it's interesting – you maybe finally starting to crack the nut on all this corruption. And I think if we can finally get a handle on that, you know I think people will start thinking, you know I think this is a better place to come and do business. So you know, Katrina was a disaster, but heck – maybe it was also a blessing. You know, it's gonna take us years to recover. It's already taken us years, but I'm hopeful that when it's all said and done, we're gonna be a better place. One thing is for sure – 57, 25, 82, I'm probably not gonna be here. Haha

B: I don't know the longevity of your employees coming in...

L: Well, I can certainly envision myself being here another ten years at least, so. But uh, I love the Smokey Mountains, I love hiking there, I just love being there, and I want to spend more time there. So at some point I want to take the Joe Boudreaux role.

D: About?

L: Um, in the Smokey Area.

D: Dosen't make any difference.

L: I actually bought a uh, a house – a cabin on a stream in (inaudible) Valley which is between Pigeon Forge and (Tolson?). And I just came back from there for Thanksgiving.

B: I was there around last Thanksgiving. In the Fall.

L: Yeah. Well we talked a little bit about Joe Boudreaux. Joe was gonna retire, and they didn't want him to retire, so they cut a deal where uh, he stayed on, but he had eight weeks of vacation, and he only worked Tuesday Wednesday Thursday. And he did that for about two extra years I think. And he stayed on a couple more years. It's kind of a transition from him to being, and he finally did retire in North Carolina. But he - I keep joking with him – I want the Joe Boudreax spot. Haha

R: Well I get it first.

D: Well with the longevity of some of your employees, the oil companies found out that there's nothing better than the longevity of their senior employees. Now when they got rid of them in the 1980s, they suddenly realized that they have no corporate memory. You clearly have corporate memory. It's not insignificant.

B: And corporate memory is the ability – they often go hand in hand.

D: Now when you have people that have been here for so long, they just know things out there that unless you walk it you don't know.

B: Which is why we're here today to record this. Because you're able to put all of these pieces and sides together into something that makes sense not only for yourselves but for someone coming in fully from the outside. So what you've done today is...

D: Yeah, and what we're looking at – we've not formally introduced Roy. Roy, tell them your title.

K: My title

B: Besides photography. Haha

K: My title is director of outreach and communication at Louisiana Sea Grant which is at LSU.

L: That's in Baton Rouge.

B: Right.

D: What we're doing is we're collecting stories, and reels, and we want to put them into museum quality, and have kiosks. Right now we think the first kiosk will be on shrimp drying. Cokie has mentioned that the boat driver that we need to interview is...

R: (Inaudible) Sure.

D: Sure. Um, probably he can tell us more than we can find another way. We

R: He can bring it all shrimp drying places out on the gulf. He can...

D: Well you can see we're starting to get themes. And the logging business is an important theme.

B: And the oil industry, cattle industry, everything that is formed part of that...

L: I think it's great.

D: And what we'd like to do is um, we haven't finished copying all of your things we'll have to come back and maybe um, set up another interview because you get a chance to think. There may be important issues you'd like to bring up.

B: And we may have completely overlooked today that we may not have brought a lot of consistence – that's actually fundamental to what's going on.

R: You know, one thing that maybe in your studies, that uh, too often I think that the land owners, the oil companies, uh, are blamed for the uh, you know, the degradation of the land. I think that our timber crews in 1903 kind of tells you that everyone might be contributing, but mother nature is the one that's been running it for a long time, and will continue to control it. Because people don't have a clue that that's really what is happening.

L: Yeah. You know, in our minds it was gonna happen anyway. It's just some things that sped the process some. But it didn't – we didn't do it on purpose – we just didn't know.

D: Well I think that's the important story, and Carl and I both feel that way. That things happen because they happen. Um, you're – you mentioned your 1903 timber crews. Is that a paper document?

R: Yeah.

L: Yeah, it was a letter, um, it was a letter. We were involved in a massive lawsuit that I really can't discuss too much because of confidentiality and settlement issues and those types of things, but we did a – I would call almost the historic documents for things, and we found that.

B: Well if we can have a copy then that's digitized – because that kind of evidence is huge.

L: Yeah. You remember where that was and what we did with it?

R: It's in one of our scrapbooks.

B: We may have our own – we may have already...

D: Quite frankly you have so much we're sort of like robots with...

L: Yeah, just copy, we'll figure it out later.

B: We'll each have to operate two computers at a time. Um, you know, so we have four computers, four scanners running continuously. Like Don said, it's like being hit by a Tsunami. Haha

L: Well yeah, you're just copying, you'll figure it all out later.

D: But truly you know we've been at this for about two hours, and that's I think a nice time frame – I wanna thank you both for your time...and if you think of additional things, Carl and I will come back, but we do have other things we're doing, so it maybe a while, and when we come back we'll bring you a copy, and you'll be able to have it for your own file. If you can think of things, let us know.

B: Because that's what we've been doing. Um, with every trip we always given you a copy – a digital copy of everything we digitize.

R: Okay. Well I'll see if we can come up with that uh, if I get some time I'll go out and look but uh, I was flabbergasted when I read it.

L: Yeah I was like, it was very like, Gee. It's amazing. I would think about uh, you know at some point maybe talking to Alice Landry – because I think she would have a wealth of information going - because her dad was Ambrose Landry, and kind of that whole thing. I know she knows a lot of that because we talked about it before when we were sitting down over ducks eating.

D: Wait – what's the name again? Alice?

L: Alice Landry. But she's a Champagne now. She's married to our sheriff. But she was Ambrose Landry's daughter.

D: Daughter. Oh, I taught her. I taught her in Thibodaux.

L: You probably did. She went to school in Thibodaux.

D: I did. I did.

L: Yeah.

D: I did.

L: Well there you go. Were you nice to her?

D: Oh, the Landry's! Oh yes. Oh yes. Mr. Ambrose – this is on the side. Mr. Ambrose came up to me one day, and he said I wanna make you and honorary coon ass. And he has his little certificate signed. And he made my dad and mother. Now my dad and mother had to have that on their wall until they both passed, and I have it tucked away. It's one of those moments that I felt I have been accepted. Haha

L: Where are you from?

D: I'm from California.

L: Oh, okay. Well yeah.

D: I grew up in the San Francisco Bay area. My masters and PHD are from LSU, and I taught at Nicholls for seventeen years before I came back to LSU. But there – there's a – while we're just chatting, you

know, there's the community of Cousins, there's the community of Frenier...there's one more over there that was a logging community, and I've actually seen one being referred to as the Rathbourne Community. And I think it was just – it's an original name that made me – it just original identifier. Those little communities are important to the story because you had to have a crew, they had to live somewhere, usually a quarter boat, they had to work – we talked about seven and seven, it was seven and two. Because you would go out and work the swamp, that's how you make a living. Those communities are very important to the kinds of things we're trying to get to. And you have some superb photography. So if you think of that, I mean I've actually been told – I have a reference that Fats Domino was born in Frenier. Yet his own biographer doesn't say that's true, and I know I'm not making that up. But sometimes you become so connected to a city that you forget that's not where you were born. And this was a logging community. And those are the kinds of things that you can put in the back of your brain, give us until January or so, through the Christmas Holidays...

B: And guys, honestly, thank you so much for ...

R: You're more than welcome.

L: It's been fun.

B: Oh yeah.

D: For us too! Um...

L: Well like I said, I enjoy maps, I enjoy history, so this is all – this is all fun stuff for me.

R: And Greg will help you with uh, with Bouie.

But you look at mathematics here, historical maps.

D: Next time maybe we'll bring a few with us and let you look at them.

L: Okay.

D: You might find them intriguing. Yeah, I think we can arrange to find a few things that you might be...

L: Okay. Well good.

D: Because I'd be happy to do it.

L: Well good.

D: It's been a good day.

R: Same for me! This is uh, what when you look at this thing with Laverne, Bouie...

