Don Davis, Carl Brasseaux, Judge Edwards

CARL BRASSEAUX: OK, Judge Edwards. We're here this morning in the office of the Vermilion Corporation and we're – Don Davis and Carl Brasseaux are here to interview Judge Edwards, and Judge Edwards before we get started we would simply like for you to state your full name, your relationship with the corporation, and please give us your authorization to record this information. It's going to be placed in archival repositories at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and at LSU in Baton Rouge for the purpose of – for research purposes by researchers who are gonna be coming – not only ourselves but researchers who are gonna be coming down the road after us.

JUDGE WILLIAM P. EDWARDS III: Mm-hmm.

BRASSEAUX: So we would simply like to begin by getting your authorization to record this material.

EDWARDS: OK. I am Judge Edwards, William P. Edwards III. I'm the president of Vermilion Corporation – sign everything W. P. Edwards III. It is OK for us to make this recording for posterity and for future generations to understand what we were about, what we are about, and what – what other information—

BRASSEAUX: All right. Well, thank you and if at any time you're – you grow tired and would like to pause or whenever you wish for us to stop please just indicate that and we'll be happy to oblige.

DON DAVIS: Well push the button.

AAAAAA: OK.

DAVIS: Judge, you know, you and I have not been close friends but we certainly have a working relationship, and I was thinking when I first came across the Vermilion Corporation was in 1970. Prior to recorders, I interviewed one of your predecessors in the building that is not this building.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Would you give us your understanding of the historical development of the company, some of the management decisions, and any other pertinent information that may come to mind? We're interested in trying to get a very good understanding of how this company has evolved. And I'm going to leave it up to you just to talk off the cuff.

EDWARDS: OK. I would have to begin… by saying that sometimes I'm not sure when he conceived this idea, but this is something that you'll want to scan, too. E. A. McIlhenny had a vision and a dream that he called "The Louisiana Gulf Coast Club." Did

you ever here of it? You did? OK, good. We have a brochure here. You ever see the brochure?

DAVIS: No, I have not.

EDWARDS: I hope I can find it. Anyway, this vision was gonna encompass hundreds of thousands of acres of south-central and southwest Louisiana. My understanding was it was gonna – Avery Island, Marshall Island, what is now the rainy refuge, probably state wildlife refuge, what is all of Vermilion Corporation, possibly as much as Rockefeller refuge – were all part of this grandiose vision that he had to setup a great hunting and fishing and recreational facility that would have big game hunting, deep sea fishing, waterfowl hunting, golf, sailing, bathing on the beach, a place for northerners to come down and sort of snowbird. And he took this idea and he went up and down the east coast, up and down the Mississippi River trying to sell it to the industrial magnets of the day. And he either wasn't as good a salesman as he has hoped or the concept didn't go over quite as well as Cape Cod, Florida and a few other places (laughter). But, he didn't sell enough shares of stock to buy all of the property that he wanted to. The result was he bought approximately 150 thousand acres which today is Vermilion Corporation and the E. A. McIlhenny property in Vermilion Parish. And they called that property – they had to change their vision somewhat – they call that property Louisiana Furs. And – and our book, The History of Vermilion Corporation, details the history of Louisiana Furs as a corporate entity, and I say that because the company changed names several times because it went through several metamorphoses – several bankruptcies basically I think because they bought as much property as they possibly could, didn't reserve enough in capital, and of course at the time this was the great wet prairie of southwest Louisiana, and there was not the access that you had typically in southeast Louisiana. So the only way to get to – to get around the property was to walk and no man could walk miles and miles and miles across the marsh. So the result was that the company bought a steam shovel, or and early dragline, and a barge, and a crew of men and they began digging some small company canals so that trappers could get around the property. But in 1924, Louisiana Fur was formed and in 1924 our field headquarters at Belle Isle, not the salt mine in St. Mary parish, but Belle Isle here in Vermilion parish on – half mile off of Belle Isle Bayou was constructed. And all of our operations were based out of there. The corporate headquarters at the time was in Chicago. So the early days of the property were spent digging these small canals, the West Cheniere Au Tigre Canal, the McIlhenny Canal, the Pecan Island or the Louisiana Fur Ditch, and the Mulberry Canal and that was it. There were two canals that traverse the property east and west. The southern being the Mulberry Canal, and the northern being either the Pecan Island Canal or the Louisiana Fur Canal. It was called by lessees and trappers by a different name. And then the east-west canal – I mean the north-south canal, excuse me, was one that went from the clubhouse at Belle Isle, south pretty much all the way to Cheniere Au Tigre, which was the West Cheniere Au Tigre Canal.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: And I suppose they built the McIlhenny Canal all the way on the eastern end of the property. That property now belongs to E. A. McIlhenny, but at the time I'm pretty sure it was all Louisiana Fur. In this – somewhere in that time period McIlhenny and the shareholders of Louisiana Fur became at odds and McIlhenny said, "Well look, I'll just take my portion in acreage," and I believe he broke off and formed the Jean Laffite Corporation. Again, I'm not exactly certain about that. But that became the E. A. McIlhenny property of today. In the 1950s, after World War II, Unocal, or Union Oil of California, and Humble Oil both began to – well, during the war, they discovered oil and gas on the property. Right after the war the first pipeline was layed on the property by Humble. And it was built out of blockbust – blockbuster ball casings left over from the war.

DAVIS: Wow.

EDWARDS: It was layed on top of the marsh.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: And today it's anywhere from 6 inches to a foot, 2 at the most, but a foot below the surface of the marsh. It's just sunk with its weight and still flows 3000lbs of pressure, carries gas from the field at Pecan Island, Pecan Island gas field, north. But, in '58 both Union Oil of California and Humble were pressing the board of Louisiana Fur to sell the property to them. The story goes that a director of the company promised a friend with the Humble board that they would sell to them, and another director assured the Union Oil people that they would sell to them. And supposedly at a board meeting in Chicago they went to fists and cuffs over this promise. And I'm not sure if the winner of the fight won—

(Laughter)

EDWARDS: —or if there was just some good reason prevailed, I'm not sure which, but they decided to sell to Humble Oil. And these guys were pretty shrewd – you hear about Philadelphia lawyers – don't discount the Chicago folk. The question's asked, "How do you have your cake and eat it too?" Well, this is how. They looked at their proposition and they got into this deal to make money with muskrat fur and to have a great place to go goose hunting in the winter time. So they said, "How can we do this and insure that our grandchildren can do this going forward and still sell the property?" So what they did, they formed Vermilion Corporation, and they let all their shareholders know that if they wanted they could purchase shares in Vermilion Corporation, because they were going to be leasing the surface of the property to Vermilion Corporation for 99 years. And Vermilion Corporation would take over the operations of Louisiana Fur. Louisiana Fur was gonna sell to Humble. And so they executed this 99 year lease with Vermilion Corporation and sold to Humble Oil subject to the Vermilion Corporation lease.

DAVIS: Hm.

EDWARDS: So, we now have a 99 year lease, and Exxon-Mobile is now our landlord. But it was a lease written in 1958 which is fairly favorable to us. If we don't make money we don't pay much rent, but if we make money we share those proceeds. I've been told by some Exxon executives that Exxon would never enter into that agreement today. From a business perspective it may not be the greatest for them. Although, we do take a lot of headaches off of their hands.

DAVIS: So you're basically the surface managers.

EDWARDS: We are the surface lessees. We are the tenant farmers of the coastal land owners.

DAVIS: Well put, well put. If we can backup before you start going from the post-1958 period. Let's go pre-1958. When McIlhenny and others were building Mulberry Canal, or the canals he can gain access to the Audubon property there were a lot of trappers. Trappers were a fundamental part of the land use in that period, approximately 1910 right up to World War II.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

Can you comment, whether you know directly or heard stories, how were the trappers making their living? I'm particularly concern is in some cases they setup little transient communities. That is, it was like Steinberg Fur had some boats so they all got together, and that was their little camp and then they would leave and come back. Well that's, Judge, part of this story most people don't understand. They figured that trappers lived in Baton Rouge or someplace, commuted...

(Laughter)

DAVIS: You know what I mean. There is this misconception cause they didn't live there. If you could kind of put some of those misconceptions to rest I'd appreciate it.

EDWARDS: OK. That would be fun to talk about. There were people at the time that lived at Cheniere Au Tigre. There were people that lived at Mulberry Island. There were people that lived at Pecan Island.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: And there were people that lived at Mud Island, Forked Island, in that area.

DAVIS: OK, let me interrupt for just a moment. I have read that there was actually a school at Marsh Island. Have you heard that story?

EDWARDS: I have never heard that story.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: I have never heard of any community in Marsh Island.

DAVIS: Alright. Thank you.

EDWARDS: There was a school at Cheniere Au Tigre. I don't – there was no school at Mulberry. There was just one or two families that lived there. If the kids went to school they probably rode the horse down the beach to – to Cheniere Au Tigre.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Of course there was a school at Pecan Island. And one up at – I don't know that Forded Island ever had a school, but those kids went to school at Cow Island.

DAVIS: OK, good. Thank you.

EDWARDS: But those folks lived in those areas, and then there were trappers' camps where for the trapping season, for the winter essentially. Trappers would bring their families. You need to talk to Pete Lege and to Lonnie Lege. You know Lonnie, huh?

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: Because Lonnie grew up in the marsh. His daddy was a trapper. And his daddy and Chop, Lonnie's youngest brother's my age, he's 55, and Chop every year in the wintertime would leave school and would go help the family trap. They trapped on the McIlhenny – the Lege family trapped on the McIlhenny. They had a camp on Belle Isle Bayou that was there up until hurricane Rita. And Rita washed it into the Bayou and that was – that was the end of it. But there was a definite little camp there. There was, of course, the Vermilion Corporation camp, or the Louisiana Fur camp as it was well known. And they had trappers that came out and spent the winter there. And there were some satellite camps out from there – Titier's camp, there was a hunting area we refer to today as Campbell, and I believe there was a Campbell family that used to have a little shack up there and they would trap there. Down toward the coast, or course, there was the community of Mulberry. Dewitt Morgan lived at Pecan Island and the company dug the Dewitt Canal which went pretty much from Pecan Island – it was another north-south canal that went from Pecan Island to within about a quarter mile of the Gulf. It stopped at the Hahn Marsh there. And Dewitt Morgan had a trappers' camp at the end of the Dewitt Canal. And there may have been, temporarily, little camps that were setup and blown away.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: You know…

DAVIS: So, OK – you get a lease from the Vermilion – or… or

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: And I have my lease and I'm either working on shares or – there is an arrangement. Alright, how did the fur go from the camp to the market? Now, the trapper's not leaving, cause if he's leaving he ain't making money.

EDWARDS: That's right.

DAVIS: He wouldn't even leave for Christmas.

EDWARDS: That's right.

DAVIS: So how did the fur get from the camps to the market?

EDWARDS: That's a good question, but I think I know.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: OK. You may find out otherwise from somebody else. And Mr. Red Sellers, who worked for the company for 40 years if not 50 years and was here when I came on, could probably tell you that story.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: But let's go back to the trapping leases.

DAVIS: Sure.

EDWARDS: It was – it was all the land manager could do, and there'd been very few general managers of this company and its predecessors. There were the Louisiana Fur companies and that was Louisiana Fur, Louisiana Fur, Inc., Louisiana Fur Corporation, Louisiana Fur Company. Like I say, every time they sold the property of McIlhenny they went belly-up – they changed their name, I think. But, that management and those people were always the same folk. And so there were very few general managers of the company from – lets start from me going backwards – today I'm the general manager. Prior to me, Mr. John Donahue was the general manger. Prior to Mr. Donahue, Mr. Mark Hebert was the General Manager. And Prior to Mr. Mark, I think there was a guy by the name of Dr. Young, from Youngsville, that was general manager. But the board found him doing something that wasn't right and they got rid of him. And I'm not – I don't know that there was anybody before Dr. Young.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: So that's four—

DAVIS: Four.

EDWARDS: in 75 years.

DAVIS: Alright, which is better than universities—

EDWARDS: (Laughter)

DAVIS: —or football coaches.

EDWARDS: Yeah, football coaches for sure. So there'd been some continuity – at least when – when management practices change, it doesn't happen overnight. There was – Mr. Donahue worked for Mr. Mark. I'm not sure if Mr. Mark worked for Dr. Young, but he probably did. And – and I worked for Mr. Donahue. So we've all put our mark on the next general manager.

DAVIS: Now, how long have you worked here?

EDWARDS: Since July 1, 1980.

DAVIS: So, 25, 28—

EDWARDS: So, next year's my 30th aniversity.

DAVIS: Yeah, I was gonna say. So, you started about 22, 23, somewhere in there, working for the company. Almost immediately, did you go to ULL?

EDWARDS: I went to (? 21:40)

DAVIS: Alright. Ohhh. So, almost immediately after you graduated and found home again south of the interstate, because in Shreveport (? 21:52) a bit different.

EDWARDS: (Laughter)

DAVIS: So this has been – if you had another job, this is the second or third job you may have had since high school.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: Not many people can say that Judge.

EDWARDS: Yeah. I mean, the little stuff that you do in college—

DAVIS: Oh, yeah.

EDWARDS: —and I got out of college – we're kind of diverting off our point thing, but it's worth talking about, I suppose. When I got out of college I traveled for about six months. Then, I came back and I did substitute teaching work, substitute teller work.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Family was is the banking business. I had a college degree and they needed substitutes. And they didn't need full-time teller – wasn't sure I wanted to do that. I was looking for a job. I had a sales job. I'm not a salesman. (Laughter). I played around for a while. But I took off for a while after that and I went to Africa on a Knowles(? 22:56) course. I ended up staying six months. And when I came back I started doing more of the same substitute, part-time sort of work. Probably was getting ready to get into the bank and settle in there when my dad said, "I understand John Donahue's looking for an assistant." When I came to visit with Mr. Donahue – I had applied, when I was getting out of college, with the National Park Service. They called me up and wanted me to go right then. I say right then, they wanted me to be there in, say like May 15. I said, "Well, graduation is June 2. I'll be there June 2. As soon as – my parents want to see me graduate. I said, "As soon as they see me graduate I'll be there." "Well, you can't be here for Memorial Day then, huh?" "Nah, I can't make it." Well I thought another park was gonna call me. That's it, the Memorial Day weekend is the biggest weekend for the National Park Service. So, they never called me back. When I came here to visit Mr. Donahue, he came in and we looked at this map on the wall and he said that we manage 125,000 acres of marsh land. Our income comes from trapping, hunting, some fishing, crabbing, crawfishing, rice shares, cattle grazing, all the traditional uses of the property. I looked at the map and what went through my mind is, "This should be like having my own national park right here in my back yard."

DAVIS: Yeah, true enough.

EDWARDS: It doesn't get much better than this.

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: So, I signed on and my first job I found myself scraping the bottom of the boats out in the marsh. But I've kind of come up through the ranks, more or less. I mean, I had my place but there wasn't much I didn't do.

DAVIS: Well that's part of the learning curve and that's good.

EDWARDS: That's right, yeah.

DAVIS: The other thing, we digress for a moment, but you were talking about trapping and shares and how that worked.

EDWARDS: Right. And so we get back – we do have some old trapping leases. That might be something you want to scan, I don't know, but they were basic and simple and

we were talking about all the land manager could do to get his hands around the 125,000 acres when all you had was these little canals to putts around the property with and you probably all you had was a three or five horsepower motor to get you there. You can imagine it took a long time to get around that property. And so the trappers got their leases and the land managers in the field and the trappers would let the land manager know if there was any unauthorized activity that he saw on the property. There was plenty of that in that day, but most of it was on the fringes, you know, near the borders where there may be some poaching or some—

DAVIS: Outlaws!

EDWARDS: —outlaws. But where access was limited and you could get into the property and somebody had a camp, you pretty well controlled everything from that point. So the trappers would trap and trap and trap, and the fur buyers – and they would trap and they would stretch their skins and they would dry their skins and they had drying sheds at their camp.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: And probably about once a month, or once every two weeks at the most, a fur buyer would make his rounds. And he'd come with a boat and generally they would go around to the various trappers' camps. Now, in the days of Louisiana Fur it was all muskrat. The nutria hadn't been introduced at that point in time. And I think what they did is they had the trappers bring their furs – we had a garage Intracoastal City. And they either brought their furs to the club, or they brought their furs to Intracoastal City. And all of our skins, all the muskrat skins, were stamped "LFI," Louisiana Fur Inc. And they were bundled and shipped to New York and traded – I think they were traded – I've heard they were traded on the New York Stock Exchange. I'm not sure that they were traded on the Stock Exchange, but they were, you know, they were trying to develop a brand name – Louisiana Fur muskrat. "This is what you want, this is the finest," you know. So that was the marketing scheme. And in those days they were getting $2.50 for a muskrat. Same price or more than you get, today.

DAVIS: It's a lot of money.

EDWARDS: It's a lot of money.

DAVIS: It's a lot of money.

EDWARDS: That's right. And back when—

DAVIS: When minimum wage was probably 40 cents—

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: —or less.

EDWARDS: And you thousands and thousands of muskrat.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: So the trappers lived a hard life, but they made their money in, you know, at that time of year.

DAVIS: OK, you mention they used small boats.

EDWARDS: Yes.

DAVIS: Now, sometimes you hear the word "putt-putt machine," which is just a putt-putt on a – in a pirogue. I've been told that for a little bigger boat they would take Model A or Model T motors.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Right after the sailing period, and sailing was much more important that people realize up until about the 1925, '28, '29 period, and, just by footnote, if you look at Olympic athletes the sailing athletes nearly every Olympics there's a Louisianian. We have maintained the sailing tradition, but on Lake Pontchartrain.

EDWARDS: Uh-huh.

DAVIS: So they were master sailors. Now they have to put a motor in a boat. Are you familiar whether they used Model A, Model T – it's the same motor, different horsepower. One's 20, one's 40 horsepower. Do you remember any stories, because that was quite an accomplishment?

EDWARDS: No, but I'm gonna tell you who you need to go talk to. Mr. Ivy Richard.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: He lives down in Intracoastal

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: Ivy must be in his 80s, but his father, Alphe Richard, worked for the company.

DAVIS: OK. Alright. So now we that there's trapping. Trapping was a good enterprise.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: We'll leave that alone for a moment. Was there any commercial duck hunting?

EDWARDS: No.

DAVIS: OK. Because the property that is now Lacassine—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —that was bought at a tax sale from a fellow by the name of Dewey and he had camp Dewey and he was a major player in the commercial duck industry. Now, in the water bottoms between – well lets say Vermilion Bay.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Did you have any oyster leases?

EDWARDS: The Dupuy's family – Dupuy's restaurant—

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: —here in town had their own lease. Wasn't in Vermilion Bay. To my understanding it was right outside of Southwest Pass.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: I think.

DAVIS: OK. Alright.

EDWARDS: But you could probably go – I think the people that run the restaurant today are related to the family, and they can probably give you that history.

DAVIS: Cause, Judge, it's a part of the oyster industry that's been lost. Is that – is that oyster harvesting that basically is east-west Cote Blanch Bay, Vermilion Bay bounded by Marsh Island from Point Affair.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: I've never seen a photograph. I have some lease information, but it would be wonderful if we could hookup with somebody that can kind of fill that—

EDWARDS: I never – I never heard of anybody catching oysters in – I mean, you know, harvesting oysters – in Vermilion Bay. Now, I'm told that there's some sea ground information.

DAVIS: Yes, there is.

EDWARDS: Over near Marsh Island somewhere. The boxcar, something like that?

DAVIS: Yeah. There are – there are several areas of which we had major oyster reefs. Point Affair all the way across to Marsh Island was almost a contiguous oyster reef. On the Gulf side of Marsh Island there was a large stretch that went all the way to South Pass. Then, from South Pass there was a small stretch, and Judge I don't know exactly where it hooked up with the land, but there was a long reef come right out into Vermilion and then it hooked west. I've actually found a late 1800s map that shows that, but—

EDWARDS: Yeah, we'd like to see that. Can you send me that.

DAVIS: I – let me get it digital.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: Let me get it digital, and I think I can do that for you.

EDWARDS: Alright.

DAVIS: It was just – I'm just – I spend a lot of time in libraries trying to figure out this.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: But here is – we know places like Blacks, Dupuy's, and Shuck's have made a name for themselves in oysters.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Abbeville is not the lower Mississippi—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —it's not Houma.

EDWARDS: That's right.

DAVIS: Yet – or – Amite where they actually—

EDWARDS: My understanding is Blacks always touted Grand Isle sold the oysters.

DAVIS: Alright, that's good to know.

EDWARDS: I think Black always got his oysters from Grand Isle.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: But, Dupuy's – and there was a Mushmack's.

DAVIS:Mushmack. OK.

EDWARDS: Now, I'm not sure if there wasn't Mushmack Dupuy's.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: And Mushmack was maybe too hard to – I don't know why they changed it or – if that's even the same one, but I can remember my momma. She wanted to get some oysters from Mushmack's to make a gumbo or something like that.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm!

EDWARDS: Or if Mushmack sold to Black and, you know, and Black changed the name.

DAVIS: I gotcha.

EDWARDS: Brian Bourque could tell you that in all likelihood.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: But I know Dupuy's had a lease and a local lease—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —and they had their own boat and they got their own oysters.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: Shuck's – Shuck's is a offshoot of Dupuy's, because Shuck's – Jack Ferris ran Dupuy's for many, many years. And what happened was one of the members of the Dupuy family wanted back into the restaurant business. And Jack Ferris' lease was up and so they said – and he was in their building. So, they said, "Well, we want the building. We're gonna open up a restaurant." "Oh – well – OK, so then I'm just gonna move." "Wait a minute now. You're not taking the name with you. Dupuy's is our name. You were just in our building. And they had a lawsuit over that and Jack Ferris lost. So, a play on words – you appreciate our shucks.

DAVIS: Got it. I got it. But it's really interesting when you think about Abbeville's location and that you have an oyster restaurant or it was called "Saloon" at one time.

EDWARDS: Uh-huh.

DAVIS: It goes back to the 1860s. There are few stories like that in Louisiana. That you actually have—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —a company name, whether it's the same building or not is immaterial.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: That is, pushing a hundred and fifty years. That's just almost unheard of in a community that's a long ways from an oyster bed. And if you go back into the 1860s you're right after the Civil War—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: It was tough getting from here to the oyster leases.

EDWARDS: Well, 1860s. Now, think about what was the ecology of the bay like in 1860s? Cypremort Point – I mean, how long have people been around here? Not more that 200 years, right?

DAVIS: Oh, no. You're right, right.

EDWARDS: So, "Cypremort" means "dead cypress."

DAVIS: Right.

EDWARDS: For somebody to see a dead cypress, the cypress had to grow and die. They didn't just name it Cypremort Point because the point itself from the air looks like a cypress tree. They didn't know that in the 1800s, you know. So, there must have been some dead cypress there. And I'm guessing they were standing, still.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: Which meant it had been fresh and at some point the water in the Atchafalaya diminished or maybe they cutoff the Vermilion, I don't know when, but water in the bay got markedly saltier and killed off the, I think – this is my theory—

DAVIS: Sure.

EDWARDS: —and you know more – I mean you—

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: —like you say, you spend a lot of times in libraries looking at this kind of stuff, so I'm just giving you some food for thought. And my uncle, who used to love to

sail and was a boat builder, a lawyer by – to pay the bills but he should have been a boat builder or a carpenter cause he wasn't a happy lawyer.

(Laughter)

EDWARDS: But he loved to work wood and he really loved to work wood – built several boats, always had a sailboat. And when they – when they started building the Wax Lake Outlet, or talking about building the Wax Lake Outlet, I can remember him fussing and cussing because they were gonna ruin our bay. They were gonna ruin our bay – was gonna fill it up with mud. It was the water quality was gonna go down. It's gonna be nothing. Then, I can remember sailing with him as I got a little bit older and fussing about the bay. How muddy the water was, it's not like it used to be. I can remember my dad talking about – they would go – he had – they had a little – always had a little boat. They kept it up here in the bayou. There was nothing to go down the river. Hour or two to Intracoastal, then you're at the bay. Time was nothing back then, or seemingly so.

DAVIS: Yeah, I know, it's a good point.

EDWARDS: And – and – and so they were – they were an hour away from Intracoastal, maybe two hours away. That was great. You'd bring some beer and by the time you got to Intracoastal you were ready to have a good time. You were having a good time. There wasn't no ready about it. So, they got down there and probably right in the bay area you had your brackish water and the fish abounded, and you went near Campus State Wildlife – Redfish Point. Redfish Point was where your water was almost always salty.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: And you had that intermediate – might be saline, might be brackish. I mean might be brackish, might be fresh. Close up near Intracoastal, but it was always salty when we got to Redfish Point. The water was always salty enough to support oysters. And there was a reef there. And the fish would more often than not – I remembered as a kid – now I want to call it Caldwell reef, but I'm not sure that is was. But the Caldwells were big family here and the concrete highway building business. I don't know whether they brought some stuff – have some (? 39:06) there for the oysters to set and something started or if they just liked to go up there and fish all the time. So they named the reef after Mr. Caldwell. But, yeah, there was a reef there and – and I can remember as a kid going, and my parents had a cane pole and they'd find the reef with the cane pole and that's where you'd fish, you know. Of course, you would catch fish on the reef. If you weren't on the reef you wouldn't catch fish. But those shells were there. So, yeah, I'm sure—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —Hellhole, somewhere in the bay there, there were places where guys that knew where they were going and they would tong oysters. And there was a little, at

Hellhole, there was a little pirogue trail that supposedly, as I recall the stories, Mushmack cut with a crooked shovel. That's how they dug these things.

DAVIS: Yes, yes.

EDWARDS: Mushmack cut the trail through Hellhole to the Gulf to get to the reefs there at Tybout and that's where he got his – that's where he got his oysters.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: Um.

DAVIS: Hmm. So we have – certainly there was trapping.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: There wasn't commercial hunting. We know a little bit about the oysters, but the property was setup and sold to northern investors, essentially, as a recreation potential.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Did that continue?

EDWARDS: Yeah, it certainly did continue. And when the club house, Vermilion Corporation's headquarters at Belle Isle was constructed in 1924, they apparently took a lot of their capital and they built those facilities, and they had excellent goose shooting around. But they wanted to hunt ducks, too. Now, realize access was difficult, and you didn't have the outboard motor or the Go Devil or—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —or any of those sorts of contraptions. So, in order to hunt ducks they dug with the dragline five ponds.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: Because there were no ponds. There were no ponds.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: Let me say that again: there were no ponds.

DAVIS: Wow. That was in 19 – lets say 1930.

EDWARDS: 1924.

DAVIS: 1924, OK.

EDWARDS: I'm pretty sure. Between 1924 and 1930 for sure. Because they built the club and they started using it. I mean, they didn't build a little facility. They built a big facility. Yeah, the ponds might have come a little later, but not a whole lot later.

DAVIS: No, no, no, no.

EDWARDS: You know—

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: —two or three, three or four years later at the most.

DAVIS: Because oil and gas didn't come in until the '30s. Now, they may have found oil and gas, but getting it out didn't happen until probably 1927, -8, into the—

EDWARDS: I don't think our field was discovered much before the '40s.

DAVIS: Yeah, well, when you look at the Cheniere's you can find a hackberry, for example, but that was accessible.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: The non-accessible fields were not until the '30s. Now, the Sweet Lake field is absolutely unique. And my belief is the Sweet Lake field is the second field in Louisiana that's completely over water. Caddo Lake was the first, their second, cause you could get to them by boat.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Well, when you had to go into the marsh you had to—

EDWARDS: You had to dig.

DAVIS: —create you own connectivities.

EDWARDS: Right.

DAVIS: So, whether Mushmack was (? 42:55) with a crooked shovel. That was it.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: Dragline – no, no, no, no, that took some capital.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: And to build five ponds. That was not a small undertaking.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: Ha. Fascinating, Judge.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: Keep going.

EDWARDS: OK.

DAVIS: Keep going. You're on a role!

EDWARDS: So, well wait, we – I'm trying to think if we covered – we covered the trapping. Not exhaustively, but we touched on it. It was 99% muskrat, a few mink, probably a few otter, but probably mostly – no it was probably a hundred percent muskrat, because that's, I mean, when you trap muskrat you're targeting that.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: That's what you catch. You asked the question about did the hunting tradition continue?

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: Yeah, they built the club house at Belle Isle. They hunted geese, primarily. The Lynn Bogue Hunt painting that we talked about earlier is goose hunting. It's goose hunting on the property. Nobody knows for certain where. I've heard both at Buck Point and at Mulberry.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: My guess would be Mulberry.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Lynn Bogue Hunt went down there and spent time at Belle Isle as a guest, as an artist and painted that shot – that photograph, that painting, excuse me, but that tradition continues to this day. Geese are the exception to the rule. Today, we shoot ducks. In the next 20 years we'll probably catch speckled trout and shoot a few eider and sea scoters. I hope I'm wrong, but at the rate we, you know, transition we've seen in the last five years if it continues in the next 20 we'll be shooting sea scoters and catching speckled trout. But yeah, that tradition continues to this day.

DAVIS: Now, can I become a member of the club, or is it—

EDWARDS: That—

DAVIS: —is it linked back to the original—

EDWARDS: Well, let me—

DAVIS: —investors?

EDWARDS: Yeah, let me try to tie that into you so you understand the Bayou Club and how the Bayou Club relates back to Louisiana Fur.

DAVIS: Please.

EDWARDS: OK. In 1924, I imagine tax laws were different, but if you made a big investment you certainly had every right to go down and check on your investment. Well, this was such a unique investment you couldn't get there overnight. It took you maybe as much as a week if you came by train. To get there you had to travel for two or three days by train to probably as close as Lafayette or New Iberia, and then travel by automobile down to Intracoastal. Then, we'd pick you up with a boat at Intracoastal, and they would go out the Vermilion River, out into the bay, into Belle Isle Bayou, down Belle Isle Bayou, and eventually to the clubhouse. It was a day to get to the club from Intracoastal.

DAVIS: Sure.

EDWARDS: So, it was no small fete to get there, and once they got there, well they weren't gonna stay a day and leave, look around and say everything looks dandy. They stayed for a week – at least a week or ten days. And they shot ducks and they shot geese and they would – we had an ice plant. We made our own ice – cooler. When they laid the first pipeline on the property in the '40s we got a hot tap off of the pipeline, and we had our own natural gas. So, we were able to cook with gas, generate electricity with gas in 1940. And I'm not sure what they did before then for light. But that was our power source. It was until the advent of the REA and Slimco—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —came out there. But we're going to that – so, Louisiana Fur – those guys would go out there and they would spend a week or so, and they would shoot ducks and geese, and they would make sure their investment was, you know, they'd go look at the canals, and—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —look at – see them visit with the trappers, and then they would go back, and they had a great, great time. When we became Vermilion Corporation in 1958, I

think, though, I'm not certain, that the tax laws by then had changed somewhat. And if the tax laws hadn't changed, the stockholders of the company, the stockholders in Louisiana Fur, there were those that bought into it because they said, "Well, McIlhenny you showed me that we were gonna make so much money, and I'm here in Dallas or Pennsylvania or wherever I might be, and, you know, I'd get a little dividend check, but I'm not getting much, and it's too far for me to go, and I'm not a duck hunter. I'm not a hunter anyway. I'm not going down there to spend two weeks of my time to go down and look at some muskrat trapper. Now, makes sense to you, McIlhenny, to go down there and look at the muskrat trapper and shoot a goose or a duck and have a good time doing it, but I'm not into that. So, in '58, when they formed Vermilion Corporation, they said, "OK, boys we're gonna do this, but that's the end of you getting a big advantage over us. OK, we gotta strike up some deal where the hunters pick up their tab. We're not gonna foot the bill for these hunters anymore." Because that was part of the reason, I think, that the company didn't make any money.

(Laughter)

EDWARDS: And they would come down there and they had to feed these guys, and, you know, they took care of them while they were there, and they had guides for them, and they just had a big old time on the company's dollar.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: Mm-k. So, when they formed Vermilion Corporation they said, "We're gonna make deal here. You want to come down and hunt that's fine, but we need to know that we're gonna be able to survive. So, if you're gonna have these privileges you have to give us some – we want some, you know, little quid pro quo kind of thing. We want you to underwrite – if we have any losses we want you to underwrite those losses. So, they made a deal, and it was a brother-in-law sort of deal. They pay a lease. They lease probably the prime hunting acreage on the property and they agreed to underwrite any losses of the company. And what the writers of that didn't realize is when they formed Vermilion Corporation Mr. Donahue was the treasurer. He was working as – yeah, I guess he was working as the treasurer – at least as the accountant of the company. And, Mr. Mark was the General Manager. And they gave the books to Donahue, and they said, "You run it Donahue." Well, they didn't know they were giving them to a tight Irishman. And the company never lost any money – not to the point where the Bayou Club had to reimburse.

DAVIS: Reimburse, sure.

EDWARDS: They did – in fact, the company never lost any money under Mr. Donahue's watch.

DAVIS: Wow!

EDWARDS: I would have to say that the year Mr. Donahue died, 2000, we entered a tremendous drought. We hadn't increased our hunting leases for 15 years, if you could believe that. And because we were starting to rely on alligator income and that kept everything in balance. Well, the year of the drought, whew, we had begun to develop alligator egg income. We had no alligator eggs. We had been getting extraordinary other income up to that time. And the boat always floated, and in 2000 everything dried up, Judge is at the helm.

(Laughter)

EDWARDS: I'm not exactly – I'm not an accountant, so I can't tell how it played, but we didn't have a dividend that year when we'd had a dividend for many years. But we didn't have such a bad year that Bayou had to underwrite any losses either, but that's kind of the deal. So, what happened in '58 was the Louisiana Fur shareholders that wanted to become members of the Bayou Corporation—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —just like – they were invited to become members of the Vermilion Corporation, could purchase shares in Bayou. And since they sold to Humble Oil they realized the political thing to do was to offer, initially, Humble ten memberships.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: So, Humble took the ten memberships and divvied them up among their executives, and then they setup their club rules which basically you as a member can propose someone else as a member and the membership committee decides on it. So, it's a private club. Its membership is wide and varied. Some own shares in Vermilion, most probably don't. They come from as far away as – well we used to have a member in California and I think we still have member in New York, but, I mean, they come from all over the country. There are pockets of concentration, but they are from all over the country.

DAVIS: Not an exact number but how many members are we looking at?

EDWARDS: 64

DAVIS: OK, so—

EDWARDS: 66, I think it's 64. For years it was 64. It's less than 70, and I've got the exact number—

DAVIS: Now, how do you compare with a – like the Florence Hunting Club or the Marsh Club?

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Those are also private hunting clubs—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —whose membership is dependent on lots of ways they work in. You have then an income stream from the membership.

EDWARDS: Bayou Corporation.

DAVIS: OK, alright. Good. Going back to 1958… no.

EDWARDS: Well, Bayou Corporation goes back to 1950 – 1958 to 1959.

DAVIS: So, in terms of sort of the natural history—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —we came out of World War II, we moved into the '50s, middle '50s we started getting surplus income.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: As a general rule, we started moving from an agrarian agriculture based country to an industrialized one. So, you're running right along the edge of – we got surplus income of which we could become more interested in recreational activities.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: So, did you then move towards, say, leasing a piece of land for "my camp" or – well that would be a way. You could come in and get some camp property. My guess is it wasn't before then, because most of the camp phenomenon – unless you had a trapper's camp that had been in your family like you mentioned a fellow who had it and lost it.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

DAVIS: OK, that's different. That's – I'm talking about a fellow comes down here—

EDWARDS: Yeah, just—

DAVIS: —doesn't have to be wealthy.

EDWARDS: Right.

DAVIS: He can afford it, and he builds his camp. So, can you give some idea of how that evolved on your property, cause this is good property. I mean, if you know how to get to

the right spot you could catch redfish in the morning and speckled trout at night and then maybe go shoot a duck early.

EDWARDS: Yeah. We don't have many camps – I say "many" camps. It's probably about 20 on the property itself.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Most of the camps that utilize, or most of the folks that utilize, our camp, our property have camps on Pecan Island which is privately owned, and we do have some acreage on Pecan Island but it's not waterfront acreage, and it's not, you know, it's not the prime sort of stuff. But there were property owners that own that property that then adjoined some of our stuff which initially, up until the '60s, wasn't even – I mean, so what, you're bored of Vermilion Corporation, it's marsh, you know. As it begins to open up into water the property on Pecan Island becomes more valuable if the people have access to our property.

DAVIS: Alright, we're gonna take, for example, Pecan Island for state of discussion is east-west, right?

EDWARDS: Right.

DAVIS: And if we're at the eastern end, when you come down from Intracoastal City you make that long, lazy right turn, you come onto it, and right there you got camps that all have colorful placards for names. You go down about two miles, then it's sort of – it doesn't end completely, but there's a concentration there. Those people are renting, are leasing from you?

EDWARDS: I don't know if those people are leasing from us or not, but if they're not leasing from us they're leasing from Miami Corporation—

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: —or possibly someone else. Now, there're a few other—

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: —small—

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: —smaller landowners—

DAVIS: Cause I was always curious.

EDWARDS: —or there're just fishing camps and they go out fishing in the Gulf or they in Rockefeller, or they just go to get away and they've got a little place that they can go somewhere.

DAVIS: OK, alright. Now, on Pecan Island when you go from Pecan towards Creole you cross the Miller Property, M. O. Miller.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

DAVIS: And M. O. Miller was a physician in New Orleans—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —who got involved in the cattle business. Early on you mentioned that you had cattle.

EDWARDS: Yes.

DAVIS: Alright, there is a insurance agent in Baton Rouge—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —that always has a saddle in the trunk of his car, because he'll get called by somebody from, from Grand Cheniere to Pecan that they're running cattle. They leave a horse tied up for him somewhere around Intracoastal City. He parks his car, puts his saddle on it, and he's a cowboy and he's liable to do it tomorrow. So, clearly the cattle culture is not insignificant.

EDWARDS: Oh, it's not insignificant at all.

DAVIS: And I'd like for you to just have at it because the cattle business in the marsh sounds like it shouldn't be here.

EDWARDS: (Laughter) I'm not sure. Pecan Island, you know, was settled – I'm sure you know, was settled by Texans.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: You leave Forked Island and you get to Pecan Island, it's two completely different worlds. And, we at Vermilion Corporation mingle the two together. (Laughter) Because we have employees from Forked Island and people that we associate with in Forked Island as well as Pecan Island and they end up working together. But, prior to that and prior to the road being built in 1958—

DAVIS: Four.

EDWARDS: —1954.

DAVIS: It was ’54.

EDWARDS: When it was first a dirt road I’m sure. You know, those two cultures didn’t mix much except perhaps by the mail boat, and then the people at Pecan Island probably took a hard look at the folks from Forked Island, wondered where they came from. (Laughter) But there was a Mr. Cole. You familiar with him?

DAVIS: I know the name.

EDWARDS: That I think first settled Pecan Island, and he came from the west and he brought cattle with him. So, the cattle ranged out and all those Chenieres and you go, I mean, that’s natural cattle country, that’s beautiful stuff. Then, you had if you look at the old, the old maps of the area adjacent to the Chenier, the surveyors always seem to label that impenetrable marsh.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: And if you think about the geography – geology as we know it, how those were formed those little beach ridges, you know, you had those swells and it just organic matter that builds up in there and it gets isolated and that’s probably some of the worst walking marsh, you know, the kind of stuff that just is hard to get through, it’s impenetrable. And back in the days when cut grass and saw grass were king and you, we weren’t in a cycle of hurricanes where the salt knocks all that stuff back and kills it. If you were in an area in a time when there was a lot of fresh water and you had five or ten years of saw grass and cut grass accumulation it was impenetrable, you couldn’t get through it. So, the cattle ranged the ridges. If you could find a way to get then to the beach rim, well, here in Vermilion parish we have a fairly broad beach rim that the locals call the high marsh. And it’s that high marsh where you get over wash from the Gulf, sand deposits from the Gulf, and probably for a couple hundred yards, at least, you have a wide, at least, you have a wide marshy area that’s got a real firm, good bottom—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —and you can graze cattle in there.

DAVIS: Hm.

EDWARDS: And so the folks that settled at Mulberry, whether the cattle came in from the Gulf, but that’s, that was, I mean, if you lived there you wanted a cow for milk and you got, you wanted cattle for beef, so on all the ridges people had their cows. The little families that lived in the marsh, like the Leges, didn’t have cattle. It was—

DAVIS: Hm.

EDWARDS: —you know, the area wasn't too conducive to grazing cattle, but that high marsh alone in the Gulf of Mexico is excellent. We have several thousand acres that run pretty much from Rollover Bayou all the way to Cheniere Au Tigre that is good grazing. It's good—

DAVIS: Did you graze cattle on them?

EDWARDS: We lease it.

DAVIS: Lease it to – sure.

EDWARDS: We lease it to cattle—

DAVIS: Sure.

EDWARDS: Yeah. Now, hurricane Rita, as hurricane Audrey wiped out Dr. Miller.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: He lost virtually all of his cattle, most if not all of his cattle. Hurricane Rita, when Rita came through – and you can get these numbers from the OEP office here, and I'm sure they can tell you – but I think the number, I want to say 6000 cattle, maybe it was 10000 cattle. We lost a lot of cattle here in Vermilion parish. And the cattlemen are slow in getting back, and then, of course I—

DAVIS: Right.

EDWARDS: —I didn't help matters at all. They had just finished rebuilding all their fences where they needed fences and they hat to do that exercise again, but they didn't lose any cattle. Ike. People got their cattle out.

DAVIS: Considering when the road built, in your predecessor cattle drives went, we're going to say from Pecan Island-west somewhere back in there there may be a Grand Cheniere or Creole, I'm not sure. And they would come along and they would walk the beach face. My guess is under the (? 1:03:48) Cheniere Au Tigre and then head straight to Perry and on to Abbeville. Do you know the route they took?

EDWARDS: How did they get their cattle to market in the early days before the road.

DAVIS: Before the roads, I mean, I swear that—

EDWARDS: I'm gonna give you the name of somebody that will.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: I can only guess—

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: —that they took a few head at a time on schooners and that kind of stuff.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: And how they got the cattle on the boat, God only knows.

DAVIS: I don't either.

EDWARDS: Now, I'll tell you this, in the early days—

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: —before the road, before the Corps of Engineers and, and the oil industry got together and elevated levels in White Lake they used to plant cotton on the White Lake. And White Lake had a hard, firm, high rim. So, in all likelihood they drove their cattle from Pecan Island to White Lake, took the lake rim probably the old Intracoastal canal. You see where the old—

DAVIS: Schooner Bayou.

EDWARDS: To Schooner Bayou, yeah – the old Intracoastal Canal—

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: —and probably drove them down that levy to Little Prairie and then—

DAVIS: That makes sense.

EDWARDS: —Little Prairie to market. I would think that's how they did it.

DAVIS: That makes sense. Now, you're telling me that there was cotton grown all around White Lake?

EDWARDS: Can't tell you all around but the south shore at White Lake had cotton on it.

DAVIS: That's phenomenal.

EDWARDS: No, not, you know, I mean, how wide was it. It was tilled and planted by hand in all likelihood so, you know, it—

DAVIS: It just, it doesn't make any difference it's—

EDWARDS: A hundred feet, a hundred yards wide it was—

DAVIS: It's the idea they planted it.

EDWARDS: It was there and they planted it, and they used to plant cotton at Belle Isle where our headquarters are. There was, there was a, there was and still is an old farm house there that's well over a hundred years old.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: And the Sesac family lived there. Ms. Lily still works for us. And, so her, her in-laws live there and she would love to visit with you and tell you what she can recall.

DAVIS: Yeah. We met a fellow, he lives in Baton Rouge, and he shared some photographs. His family's from (? 1:06:16). So, we're just talking. His grandfather had a schooner that carried cotton to Galveston.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Well, you heard stories. I've got it documented now. And what, I went to Galveston. They have an excellent public library, the Rosenberg Library. Hoping that I'd get lucky, I did, but I found enormous photography, series of these cotton schooners, and then I have, just your Harpers Weekly—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —I have an 1890 woodcut of Sabine Pass full of schooners. So, Schooner Bayou is not misnamed.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Clearly there was a tremendous – and a cotton trade, Judge, this is the first time I've ever, ever heard anybody say that about White Lake. That's fascinating.

EDWARDS: Really?

DAVIS: Yeah, just absolutely fascinating. On the Chenieres, no problem I can actually show you a map cause I have them. Not at White Lake?

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Good.

EDWARDS: Well, I'll give you several names that you can go to folks and find out. You know Gerard Sellers?

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: You don't?

DAVIS: No, I do not.

EDWARDS: Gerard is Mr. Red's son, Murphy Sellers.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Mr. Red—

DAVIS: And Red is person that you talked about earlier.

EDWARDS: That I talked about earlier. Red was from Abbeville, and in the '20s or '30s during the depression he was able to get a job with the company.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: OK, and he stayed with us like I say 40, 50 years. Must have been 50 years; worked with us all his life. Gerard is Red's son. Red's other son, Paul Sellers, is a deputy in Cameron. But Gerard did some oral histories, Islands of the Marsh. You never saw those?

DAVIS: I don't think so.

EDWARDS: Gerard was ahead of his time. Twenty years ago—

DAVIS: Wow.

EDWARDS: —he did these. And he captured on tape, video, Earl Harden, some of the old trappers talking about the stories of hurricane Audrey—

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: —and this sort of stuff. My Islands of the Marsh Productions.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: So, take that information down. If you want I'll read it—

DAVIS: I will.

EDWARDS: —read it into the deal.

DAVIS: Lets do it right now. Islands of the Marsh, Gerard. That's spelled G-E-R-A-R-D Sellers, islmarsh@bellsouth.net, 8215 Birch Street, New Orleans, 70118. Telephone number is 504-861-7878. Cell phone is 504-453-2451. Let me get this right, ah. Again, that is Gerald Sellers.

EDWARDS: Gerard.

DAVIS: Gerard, Gerard! Thank you, got it.

EDWARDS: OK. And Gerard, he did, he did two that I'm aware of, Islands of the Island of the Marsh, and that was his first one, and then he did one called The Alligator Hunters.

DAVIS: Alright. We'll find him.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: That's, but you see what we've done now is we've brought ourselves up to the 1950s.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: We've been able to sort out trapping, which I know there's more to that and we'll come back and—

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: —let you have some time to let that ferment a moment.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: And that was an important source of income.

EDWARDS: That was the only source of income.

DAVIS: And you fast-forward into the 21st century—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and now we're dealing with alligator eggs, so yeah they trapped fur but they, they didn't ignore alligators. After all the Confederate armies walked in alligator shoes. So, alligators has to be in there somewhere.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: So, now we've come almost full circle. We went from trapping and now it's a sustainable resource and an important one. Those eggs are not trivial. We looked at – and

I'm going this in my own mind – agriculture. The only thing we haven't looked at is rice, and I'm guessing on the fringe of the marsh, highway 14 south—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —there may have been some drainage effort. I mean, all of Florence, in fact Florence was a land reclamation project by the Alped. It went broke three times to get it dry. So, right on—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —right on the fringe you've highway 14. There's a lot of little, not big – this is not a New Orleans kind of reclamation, and that I think went to rice.

EDWARDS: Right. 1:11:16

DAVIS: The – what's his name? (? 1:11:18) Watkins.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm. He owned most of the property that's now Vermilion.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: Mr. Watkins.

DAVIS: Yes. (? 1:11:26) Watkins. So, my guess is you've got a little rice land as well?

EDWARDS: A little rice land.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Yeah, a little rice land – all that marginal, seasonal marsh stuff that's labeled such – didn't come into rice production until the reclamation projects of the '50s and '60s, in that time period. Some of the land that was once rice – we had some probably couple hundred acres down at Pecan Island – and they made a few attempts, three, or four, or five, maybe even ten years worth of effort, but that's pasture land now, pasture land under pump. But it started out as a rice—

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: —you know, as a rice farm.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm. Alright now, again in that period and lets think of it this way, lets think of it 1900, easy number, to World War II—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and then World War II to the ‘50s, the ‘50s to the current. Have we missed anything from that period roughly 1900 to World War II?

EDWARDS: 1900 to World War II was the beginning—

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: —of us.

DAVIS: And that—

EDWARDS: And we pretty well touched on the beginning how Mr. McIlhenny got the folks together initially, how they went bust several times digging the access around the property, and I guess building the clubhouse and that kind of stuff. How they got the trappers to trap, the furs were sent up to New York, and they worked on that Louisiana Fur Inc., you know.

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: You got to have these furs; these are the best kind of marketing.

DAVIS: Now, too little appendages in your property that we haven’t addressed are the Rainey and the Audubon. Now, they’re – and does it, and does – is there—

EDWARDS: Well, Rainey is Audubon.

DAVIS: Oh, they’re the same!

EDWARDS: The Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary belongs to Audubon.

DAVIS: OK. How did that happen, cause it seems like it’s a little – you’re surrounded?

EDWARDS: No, we’re not surrounded – they’re not surrounded by us. They and McIlhenny are our eastern neighbors.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: OK?

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: And to the east of them is the State Wildlife Refuge.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Mr. Paul J. Rainey was one of the folks that I believe McIlhenny visited with. And Mr. Rainey, I don't know if he just didn't, if he came down and bought that property separate and apart when McIlhenny said, "I don't have enough to, to do the whole thing." If, if Rainey said, "Well, I'm just gonna buy my own, then." And he bought it and he had no family, and Timmy Vincent can tell you. He's a Rainey Refuge manager. He can tell you the history better than I, but my understanding is Mr. Rainey was an avid waterfowl hunter. He came down and hunted and hunted, and that's where he would hunt. And when he died he had no children, he had two sisters, or maybe he had two daughters, but neither one of them was interested in hunting. They were apparently very wealthy, and they made the donation of this property to the Audubon Society. Oh, and for years, for years it floated Audubon's boat with oil and gas production that came off of it. And then this current Audubon president, Mr. John Flicker I believe it is, he and/or the board made a no-drilling policy. A lot of the locals think, think that, that's a mistake, because you could have a drilling policy, do it right, do it right and show everybody else how to do it, cause it can be done right, you know.

DAVIS: Oh, I have no problem with that.

EDWARDS: Then you can do all kind of stuff, but I guess maybe the board – I don't know. That's only stuff this – and it has nothing to do with us. But anyway, currently they have a no-drilling policy. So, there hasn't been any drilling on Rainey for quite some time, but the, the, the Rainey Refuge for years, I believe, probably was the largest contributor to the, to the National Audubon Society.

DAVIS: Wow.

EDWARDS: You know.

DAVIS: Wow. Well, you know, Paul Kim, now—

EDWARDS: Uh huh.

DAVIS: —and I think that we need to go out to the clubhouse, and there is a manager, Mr. Vincent—

EDWARDS: Uh huh.

DAVIS: —who probably would very comfortable doing this kind of thing at the clubhouse.

EDWARDS: Yeah, well they don't have a clubhouse. They have a manager's – a warden's, a warden's—

DAVIS: Whatever – I—

EDWARDS: —house kind of thing, and they used to have two of them. They had two managers that rotate in and out, and they lost one of the houses in Rita, didn't rebuild it. And yet Timmy probably would feel comfortable if he had Paul's blessing and whoever's blessing, too.

DAVIS: Yeah, Paul would come with us. Yeah alright, so now we're in 1958.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: We've been doing this for almost two hours. Alright, we're gonna go back and talk about the clubhouse. It was built in the early 1920s.

EDWARDS: It was built in 1924. It's been added on to probably once and that was probably 50 years ago. It's been underwater four times in the – since 1924 and '24 is, that's 80 years ago, 85 years ago. First time was for hurricane Audrey. Hurricane Audrey put about four, not quite four feet of water in the clubhouse. It was a mess, clubhouse didn't move, we didn't lose any substantial buildings. Audrey happened in June, and the crew cleaned up, and as far as I know they hunted ducks that winter. The next time we had water was tropical storm Francis. I think it may have been a hurricane, but for a week or more it was a tropical storm. And if you recall, Francis sat off the coast of Corpus Cristi and just churned and churned and churned. It pushed water; it flooded all of coastal Louisiana from the Sabine to the Pearl and to various stages. There was high water everywhere. It came right about at, I think, during September during the alligator season. But it pushed about four inches of water, and the water came up so slowly – it pushed four inches of water in the clubhouse. When the water went down I went out to inspect the clubhouse and I complimented my guy out there because looked like they had already mopped the floors and looked great. The water just came up and when it went down, fshht, that was it. No mud, no nothing, but we took four inches of water. Then we had hurricane Rita. Hurricane Rita put six and a half feet of water in the clubhouse, just above the doors. No, excuse me, seven feet, seven feet of water in the clubhouse. It was an absolute horrible mess. We lost our warehouse, the old fur shed, and two fur sheds and the warehouse. And the fur sheds were some of these that you'd making photographs of where it was actually a barn where everybody would bring their skins in, I guess, and they would get – how they accounted for them I'm not exactly sure, but they had hundreds of muskrat pelts that they would hang on racks and they could pull the racks out during the day to dry in the sun and then push them in at the end of the day or in inclement weather in the barn. But when the weather was good they had them on rollers and they'd just roll the rollers out and dry them in the sun and put them back in the barn. So we went under for Rita and then for Ike we took another six and a half feet of water. So, the result is twice in the last three years like so many people along the coast we're beginning to say enough is enough, and I'm in serious negotiations right now with house-movers and engineers and all kinds of folks to tell us how do you take a 75 year old building that doesn't have exterior two by four stud walls, elevate it 14 feet in the air and have some assurance that when the wind is blowing at 90 miles per hour it doesn't just blow all apart.

(Laughter)

EDWARDS: It's held together through the floods fine, but we've had so drift and all that stuff in the yard we, we have real concerns that when we put it up there with the wind that it's gonna be like a kite and just go.

DAVIS: Now that's – I think everybody does, you know. There's this discussion about Audrey that when Audrey came through the Chenieres the next year everybody was back to normal. Well yeah, there was no FEMA, there was – so there's no flood insurance, they probably didn't have a bank loan—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —it was simply "OK, this is the risk, I'll rebuild" and they just did. Nobody – the utility companies didn't hold back power because you weren't elevated. There was none of this intrusion on what they felt they should do, and they just did it. Now, fifty years later they – rules have changed. You may have a banknote. I've always thought that the people who lived at places like Creole and Grand Cheniere and Johnson Bayou, and I don't mean this in anything but the utmost respect, they don't have 401Ks, they have land—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and the land is what they give their children. That's your inheritance—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and it's been that way for well over a hundred years, and now you're looking at a different playing field. And I understand change is just the way of life. I'm not naïve to that, but from a cultural perspective it's sometimes hard to accept, because you were brought up with the knowledge of your great grandfather, your grandfather, your father, now it's your turn, but you have some external forces that are interrupting what in your mind is an ancestral timeline that now makes things a bit uncomfortable, so I understand fully. My thought is we don't have to go to your clubhouse. No, we'd just get on—

EDWARDS: No, no.

DAVIS: —and go for a drive—

EDWARDS: I don't know how soon you want to do this.

DAVIS: Oh, with his schedule months.

EDWARDS: It might be a fascinating thing for him to see this place being lifted, and whether or not it happens this Spring or not, I don't know.

DAVIS: Well, just, I just want to say that that's something that might happen and you would enjoy the conversation.

EDWARDS: And my proposal if he's got the time, if you've got the time you can come here and visit, but it would be great. I can have a boat pick us up depending on the season and the weather, but a great – we'll leave Intracoastal, we'd go out through little Vermilion Bay and we'd see one of the Quipper projects.

DAVIS: Yes.

EDWARDS: One, one of the most successful terracing projects and probably one of the larger terracing projects—

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: —in the state that's in open water. I mean it's really doing a good thing. Go through – go to the Audubon camp cause it would probably be good for him, I mean, I hate, I would hate to monopolize only him, but it would be better.

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: We're neighbors. It's close enough. And then hopefully go from the Audubon camp to our camp and then, so he could appreciate this is how people used to get here, and then come back to the channel to where he could go—

DAVIS: September, October?

EDWARDS: Oh my God—

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: —look at this.

DAVIS: September, October, November?

EDWARDS: September's alligator season. My crew—

DAVIS: October?

EDWARDS: There's a possibility there may not be much of an alligator season this year.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: And that's market driven.

DAVIS: OK. So, why don't we, why don't we think of something late fall.

EDWARDS: But if there is no alligator season September's fine. October's a good month. October we are busy preparing for hunting season.

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: So, if it's October we could still do it, we could still do it, because it's gonna be me, but October's just a busier time.

DAVIS: Who—

EDWARDS: It's a wonderful time of year.

DAVIS: Well, let me—

EDWARDS: It's my favorite time of year.

DAVIS: Let me make a few calls and just see, because what you're telling us here – a great deal of what you've said I've never have seen written anywhere. And you've just clarified something that's always been nagging at me and I never could get the answer. Schooner Bayou, it's the wrong word.

EDWARDS: Why?

DAVIS: Schooners are not a boat type that you normally associate with Louisiana. Schooners are Chesapeake Bay, eastern seaboard, you know, the great sailing traditions in Rhode Island, not here.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Now, I understand that the workboats were schooner driven, they were sail driven. But as soon as you say cotton around White Lake the only way you could have moved it was by schooner. So, that term I almost bet will correspond when they were producing cotton. They needed a – somebody cut that old Intracoastal Canal.

EDWARDS: If you look at the map on the wall—

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: —where your buddy is… I bought that at a CCA banquet and it's supposedly is dated 1865, or there about right before or after the Civil War.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: There is this canal here—

DAVIS: Alright.

EDWARDS: —is shown.

DAVIS: OK.

EDWARDS: Now that's before the days of great public works projects.

DAVIS: Exactly, so my guess is that was dug by hand—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and for lack of a better term because we know it is (? 1:26:43). Does – and then gradually it was improved?

EDWARDS: Well, if you dug a (? 1:26:51) between that lake and the bay the tide opened it, made it Schooner Bayou.

DAVIS: Exactly.

EDWARDS: Schooner Bayou is a bayou, but it – for seven miles you have no bayou.

DAVIS: And you see you could come through Schooner Bayou, go White Lake into that – the Pecan Canal right behind Pecan Island which the mail boat came in.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Perfect connection. What I've got to do is figure out when Schooner Bayou or Schooner Canal or the predecessor of the GIWW—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —whatever we call it, was dug.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Because whenever you look at Louisiana transportation, north-south is not an issue cause you could go along the natural drainages north-south. So ya'll were – well when you go east-west that was labor intensive. In fact, a road through Cow Island, that road took almost 50 years to build, and, in fact, people there had to, by law, go out and cut because it was truly impenetrable. And this is a time when it all done by ax people, so you had to go out there and cut it. It took forever.

EDWARDS: The roads to where?

DAVIS: The – it's at Cow Island?

EDWARDS: Or in Big Woods in—

DAVIS: Yep, yep. So, clearly there was, you know, people have always thought about transportation. The railroads were really important because all those ducks that you were killing had to get to market quickly.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Once you had a railroad, whew, and they would go to New Orleans and they'd often be put on steamboats and served to the guests on steamboats. There's a lot of this connectivity, but one of the things that, that I'm really fascinated by is just the evolution of your property. During World War II we begin see a lot of change on the Chenieres. Not in terms of their geography, but in terms of people who were isolated. You know, they didn't have a fast food restaurant, a chamber of commerce, a traffic light, a bank.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: All of that came in the, well some cases the '70s. So, when, when people went to war and if they spoke French they were very helpful in North Africa. They came back. Now they had a different perspective. 1:29:21

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: They had experienced things differently. And I don't know about your workforce but undoubtedly, maybe your own family, certainly in my family I had family members that, that served in World War II. They came back different, not just on the Chenieres, they came back different. Did, have you heard stories about people who may have been born on the Chenieres, but after World War II they decided that, you know, maybe I want to go to work elsewhere. You know, when you go to Beaumont there's a section of Beaumont that's called Little Abbeville. It is a—

EDWARDS: Really?

DAVIS: Yes, a section within Beaumont, French speaking, and they came there because they could get a job in World War II. And Carl, in fact, has setup a, in the armory, a whole series of people who are interviewing people.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Dinner two day talking about Little Abbeville.

EDWARDS: Well, my mother went to, she went to – there's a business college over there, but she went there, but she used to tell me what—

DAVIS: Lamar?

EDWARDS: No, no, no.

DAVIS: No?

EDWARDS: We – it was called something else.

DAVIS: OK, alright.

EDWARDS: I don't think it was Lamar. Yeah, I think she just – if she went for a year she probably went for one semester to learn how to type and file and do stuff like that. She worked for a little while. Gah, I wish I could remember what it was called. But anyway, yeah, that's – so, Little Abbeville—

DAVIS: Yeah, it—

EDWARDS: —I can believe it.

DAVIS: And the thing is that World War II we forget about, in fact, some new students don't even know who won cause they don't learn it in school anymore.

EDWARDS: Really?

DAVIS: They're so far removed. They learn about Vietnam, not about WWI or WWII

EDWARDS: They shouldn't learn about – I mean they – we should learn about Vietnam, but we shouldn't learn about Vietnam.

DAVIS: So you have this period of time, you know, December 7, 1941, that completely remade the thought processes—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —of the folks, and I call them marsh-dwellers. They lived in a marsh. This was home.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: They were proud, independent, reliant, self-reliant—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —sort of had an attitude of – they were a barter system. Money didn't become important until oil royalties—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and they did well by their standards.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DAVIS: And I was just curious if you heard stories from your predecessors of how things changed. Clearly, they did in 1958 which isn't that far removed from the—

EDWARDS: Well, things change. In '50 when Mr. Donahue came onboard there were no duck leases. The only income on the property was from fur.

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: Prior to that there might have been a few cattle leases, maybe. I would say there were because Dr. Miller was on the property when hurricane Audrey came through. So, there was cattle leases. There was fur, there was cattle leases. I don't think there were any duck leases. If there were it was a handful, but realize, not until 1954 – is it '54 you said?

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: Was there a road to Pecan Island?

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: So, the vast majority of our property was not accessible 'til there was a road to Pecan Island. At that point in time then you could drive and come within 12 miles of probably all the property. Before that you had to go – there was no Freshwater Bayou, there was no Highway 82 to Pecan Island. So, you couldn't get to Pecan Island so all of that probably, you know, the only property you could get to unless you came on the mail boat which is how people got there.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: So, I mean, the people that could it, but that wasn't something you could sell, so people just went hunted and we didn't care, you know, the locals they didn't go deep into the marsh. They just went right off their property and shot some ducks.

DAVIS: So is it fair to say that up to 1950s some to Mr. Don-, Don-

EDWARDS: Donahue.

DAVIS: —Donahue you were just a custodian. And then after Mr. Donahue you suddenly became management. Now you were looking at real estate, at holdings, at how you could use this piece of land better with this piece of land. None of which could take place unless you had the highway. Fair enough?

EDWARDS: Unless you had some sort of access.

DAVIS: Yes, OK.

EDWARDS: And access came by way of the highway, came by way of oil field canals and the outboard motor.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

EDWARDS: I hate to say it came by way of Freshwater Bayou, cause it didn't. There were oil field canals. You could get to the property that way prior to the channel a lot safer than you can now. And there was the Intracoastal Canal. So, but the outboard and the affordability of that—

DAVIS: Hmm.

EDWARDS: I mean, you think about it way back then your boatmen, you marsh people had boats. People in Lafayette didn't have boats.

DAVIS: Oh, no, no.

EDWARDS: Most of them, you know. People in Baton Rouge didn't have boats. They wouldn't come down here.

DAVIS: Hm.

EDWARDS: So, you had a few local folks that had boats that went out into the marshes.

DAVIS: Now, did you have any local boat builders?

EDWARDS: Yeah. Oh yeah, the DeHart shipyard built boats. There was a trawl (? 1:35:36) in Perry. They built boats.

DAVIS: Hm. Hm.

EDWARDS: Those two for sure, and then Mr. Richard. You need to see Mr. Ivy, and you need to see him soon.

DAVIS: Ivy. What's it—

EDWARDS: Ivy Richard. I told you earlier—

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah, earlier. Yeah.

EDWARDS: Cause he is a wealth of information and his sister, Lily Sesac, their daddy worked for the company. Miss Lily married the farming family that lived out at Bell Isle, OK, in that hundred year old farmhouse.

DAVIS: OK, alright.

EDWARDS: And they've got stories they could probably tell you that you'd find most interesting.

DAVIS: Yeah, because—

EDWARDS: And they're old. I mean, they're in their 80s.

DAVIS: Yeah, I mean, are we talking metal boats or are we talking wood boats?

EDWARDS: Early on they were wooden boats.

DAVIS: Wow. Hm.

EDWARDS: I'm pretty sure the DeHarts built some wooden boats, and I'm pretty sure because their like third generation now. The (? 1:36:38) shipyard is closed down, but the Marine Waves is still there, the family is still here and around.

DAVIS: OK, alright.

EDWARDS: I don't know if the old man is still living or not, but they could probably tell you some stories.

DAVIS: Hm.

EDWARDS: But they all ended up transitioning to steel.

DAVIS: Now, you property does it go over to Cypremort Point?

EDWARDS: No, our west – easternmost holding is Buck Point.

DAVIS: OK, cause Cypremort Point, well Bayou Sally really. Bayou Sally – almost all of that is owned – was owned by Humble, or Humble Oil.

EDWARDS: Uh huh.

DAVIS: Humble had huge fields and we found some 1940s photography of the Humble – says "Humble Oil Bayou Sally," there's a camp which is a home, and a lady hanging her laundry outside. The reason that is important is that as Carl and I think about the wetlands I think we can look at eight kinds of settlement. Alright, now you – you have to understand how we're looking at this. Agriculture.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Oyster camps, particularly over in the delta plain.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Trapping.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Commercial duck hunting.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Industrial, and by that I mean sulfur mining brought people. You also had the oil companies at a time. They had to go in and you had to live at the site because there was no easy transportation. You have industrial. You have government service. You know, all of – whether is Rainey or Rockefeller or a lighthouse or – or a Civil War battlement or a lock – somebody was living there. They may have been local, they may not have. So, you see how we're trying to get a handle on how people used this large expansive real estate. And the one impediment we found was big here in Abbeville. It was also big in Lake Author. Nobody wants to talk about it was prohibition. I mean this was a funnel for illegal alcohol connected to the Chicago trade because of the railroads. There was very famous case here in Abbeville where they were actually using a rice mill, and they were taking the rice – in every bag they'd put a couple bottles. And the reason is you have a French speaking population, the alcohol was coming from French Guiana, the mothership for three miles offshore, French speaking, French speaking, and nobody that's a federal agent from Minnesota was gonna figure out how to chase anybody through the wetlands.

EDWARDS: (Laughter)

DAVIS: And I've actually got a typed manuscript from a family in which they were looking for a loan – there was no money. And then he said, "But – after – well – once we got into prohibition everybody had money. And there've been, you know, on the eastern seaboard the Kennedys have no problem admitting they made their money in prohibition. In south Louisiana nobody will talk about it, nobody. Now I know some families that I think were involved and I have to find out.

EDWARDS: I've never heard any of that.

DAVIS: No, you won't. They don't talk about it. But I've interviewed people on Bayou Lafourche.

EDWARDS: You know why they don't talk about it?

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: Cause they're still doing it.

DAVIS: Well, they may very well be involved in some sort of contraband activity.

EDWARDS: (Laughter)

DAVIS: Yeah.

EDWARDS: You know, that may well be why, because – now, I've heard stories like that. Some families, people smuggling drugs and it's common knowledge around here who did what and there was a case but you don't know what really happened to people and everybody's still around.

DAVIS: Yeah, and it's not like we want to prosecute you. That's not our purpose. Our purpose is it's a whole in the history.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: And it did provide an income and it provided a lot of income and more importantly it probably provided the economic base for people to buy land, whatever. It – there's a real good case in Terrebonne Parish where one family started buying real estate and a fellow – a banker came to this particular individual and said, "Look, Billybob's got a share of the stock. You want to buy some share?" "Yeah I'll buy some shares." Apparently this went on for a while and finally the bank president walked in and introduced himself as the bank president and the fellow said, "Well yeah, I've got some stock in the bank." He said, "Well, sir you own 20% of the bank. Do you think you can come to one of our board of directors meetings?" Had no clue.

EDWARDS: Had no clue that he owned that much?

DAVIS: Had no clue that – that it much. It was just—

EDWARDS: He probably didn't have any money in the bank either.

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: (Laughter) He was all in the lands—

DAVIS: No.

EDWARDS: —and other things.

DAVIS: —things.

EDWARDS: (Laughter)

DAVIS: Well, at this particular family you're right. If I used the name you'd recognize it.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: And I'm thinking "we've got to find out about this." And I've seen one photograph at Leeville. You know, there's a canal at Leeville called the Southwest Louisiana Canal where there is a toll place, small almost camp-like. I've got a – I've seen a photograph. The alcohol was stacked to the rafters of the external rafter of the roof, alright. Five cases wide all the way around and then came out like a tunnel. So, you know, it wasn't insignificant.

EDWARDS: (Laughter) No, that's not insignificant.

DAVIS: And the Boston Club in New Orleans never was without alcohol through all of prohibition. And it was coming through the (? 1:43:01), Spanish speakers. Cuba was the source. We're trying to figure that one out. Again, we don't – I don't care what you do to data. It's your business. I'm just trying to get a handle on this industry that brought a lot of money, therefore, prosperity just like others and there were cases that if the Chicago connection shot somebody the locals would put them in jail. Last thing you wanted to do was to go to Angola in the '30s.

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: And there's – I've got plenty of cases. They'd just – they'd turn you in. That's not why we're doing this. We're helping our families. We don't see anything wrong with it, but if you shoot somebody you're going to go to our jails. Happened only one time and they never – there was never another case. They learned. It's alright, but don't hurt anybody. And they'd gladly bring it to the dock—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —but when you left the dock, if you hurt somebody you wouldn't get out of the state. So, you see there is some interesting stories—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —on issues that for whatever reason you don't want to talk about it. We may not find it, but we just have to keep nibbling away—

EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: —and just put that away for other generations. Cause I think we've done a good job today and I really appreciate your time, Judge. I know we've interrupted your morning and we would like to come back—

EDWARDS: You – you're welcome to come back.

DAVIS: —but we will – we will give you plenty of warning. Carl.

END