Michael Vanover Interview

Interviewers: Carl Brasseaux and Don Davis

Don Davis: I'm kind of the audiophile. I'm the guy that'll try to keep it all going right. Most of the questions will come from Carl.

Michael Vanover: Okay

D: And if you don't mind, it is warm in here.

M: Yeah it's actually 62 degrees.

D: And uh, again, we're just interested if you could reiterate later the story about Freeport McMoRan or McMoRan that would be fine.

M: Which story?

D: Just the 30,000 well.

M: Oh yeah [inaudible] all about it.

D: Let's let...Oh, I need to get the legal niceties out of the way first, Mike. As we indicated to you earlier, this is part of an oral history program run and administered by Louisiana Sea Grant at LSU. The materials that it generates will be placed at LSU in Baton Rouge in the Sea Grant Office here and hopefully in Washington, D.C. and at the university in Lafayette. And it's going to be used for research purposes. It may be used in documentaries. It may be used in something like this, where some of the oral materials, some of the cultural materials make their way into a historic calendar about the history of the coastal (plain?). Um, I need to say upfront that there will be no monetary compensation for any of this, for anyone involved.

M: Yeah.

D: But basically, like I said, its whole intent is to preserve the living memory of the area for future generations and to make it available for researchers for interpretations. So, first of all is it okay for us to record this and to put it in these repositories?

M: Yes it is.

D: Okay, well thanks. And if at any time if you're uncomfortable with the questions, if you need to take a break for whatever reason, please just let us know.

D/C: Yeah and just give us your name and who you're associated with please.

M: My name is Michael Vanover and I am the president and C.E.O. of the Brownell Land Company located in Morgan City, Louisiana. A company which owns land in St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Iberia, Assumption, and Iberville Parishes.

D: Well what we'd like for you, Mike, to do is to give us an overview, please. You were talking earlier about the environmental changes that have taken place and the economic changes that have taken place in this area. So can you just give a sort of thumbnail sketch, from the beginning?

M: From the beginning. Well, early 50s, uh, Morgan City was a hot spot for oil and gas drilling. Uh, prior to that, it was a strictly, a, uh, fishing and trapping, shrimping industry. Uh, matter fact; the Brownell family owned the People's Ice Plant on Front Street at the time. And um, it, when the drilling started, it kicked off a whole new industry in Morgan City. It became a very active town. The city, the people, the [inaudible], they grew. Oil companies moved in, leased up properties. And they started drilling in the shallow water in the Gulf of Mexico out of Morgan City. It was a safe haven from hurricanes. And they started drilling on-shore and in the Atchafalaya Basin using barge rigs. The drilling at that time was pretty much restricted to more or less hydro pressure type wells. They didn't have steel. They couldn't manufacture pipe that could handle drill pressure...material at the early wells. So they were generally not deeper than 12,000 feet. And over the 50s and 60s they produced pretty much all of the production that was available for oil and gas above 12,000 feet. Then we started to get pipe developed in Japan. Sumitomo and Nippon Steel developed methods through which they could make a seamless casing that would have a greater tension, burst, and, uh, pressure rating than normal (electric?) oil pipe like they did at (Longstar?) Steel, for example.

D: And what's the timeframe here?

M: Timeframe is the late 60s.

D: Uh hmm.

M: When we really got the material that could let us go deeper. So we started drilling deeper and then as we drilled into the 12, 15, 16, 17, 18,000 foot ranges, we found new problems. We [inaudible] tremendous pressure. The challenge of drilling through all these depleted zones that were already there, made us use, uh, a multiple (strength?) casing, multiple designs, to make up...almost backwards going down to get down to the oil. And we managed to get down to that 15,000 foot, 18,000 foot. Then we were producing wells at around 10 to 15,000 PSI flowing pressure, greater volumes, greater volumes of oil. And that was really when everything kicked off. Money started flowing everywhere and money didn't mean anything at all.

D: So we're talking about early 70s.

M: Early 70s. Um, we'd go to Japan, for example. I'd go to Japan. I was working at Houston at the time. And I'd negotiate agreements for tonnage. We wouldn't even specify what we wanted, whether it was casing or sheet metal or whatever. It was just tonnage, because we couldn't get it here. The big United States steel [inaudible], it was just a big, inert giant. It couldn't keep up. It didn't improve its technology. It couldn't, it just could not do it. So we started buying pipe that could drill deeper. So then we started going down further, down to 19, 20,000 feet. And all of the sudden, we hit a new problem, called "sour gas," hydrogen sulfide. One that we never had to face before and we had a lot of accidents. Uh, a lot of times we'd have cows dying in a field a mile away from the drilling site and didn't understand why they were dying.

D: This was noxious gas being...

M: It was poisonous gas. What would happen, as we were drilling, it would come up and get into the aquifers. And the gas would flow with the aquifers and come up into the streams and it would go into the atmosphere and kill whatever breathed it. So, we had a whole new problem. We had, um, a situation where we had a sour gas that was deadly to deal with. And we had to find material that could not, it wouldn't rust. Sour gas acts on steel like electrolysis does. It destroys it. And uh, so, we went back to Japan and we met with them. We talked to them and convinced them that they should be making a softer material that could handle the tension, burst, and collapse of the stronger type materials. And they did that. Uh, they shipped that to us in boxes. Each tube was wrapped up in a box, because you couldn't ding it, dent it, or touch it. Because if you took a hammer and hit the pipe and then put it in a hole, the sour gas would attack that one spot. Because you changed the molecular structure of the steel when you hit it with the hammer. So that was a whole new area for us there. And that was kind of the, the beginning of a frontier of deep well drilling. And then over the years, we continued drilling into that 18 to 20,000 foot range. But deeper than that was very difficult because of the number of depleted zones and the lines that you had to run to get down to them.

D?: If I can interrupt you just for a second, as with this, we want to make sure that the technology's working as [inaudible].

C?: Yes, and we're good here.

D?: Okay, got it?

C?: Yes, we're good here.

D?: It says stereo, is that alright?

C?: Should be okay.

M: So we're working our way up through the generations of the beginning of the drilling, like hydro pressure to geopressure. Now we're going to geopressure hydrogen sulfide environment. And now we're going down deeper. We're working to what we talked about, like the McMoRan program.

C?: Now this was about 30,000...

M: This was about 30,000 feet and I don't know anything about the mechanics. The questions I had with McMoRan and (us?), when we agreed to the lease was I'd just like to see the mechanical design of the well. So I can understand and look at how you drilling that deep, how big a surface pipe are you starting with, and what kind of pipe you going to have down at the bottom to produce crude? Because there's got to be a tremendously large surface pipe to keep putting those liners all the way down. But they won't share that information yet. It's too; it's so confidential to them. They're drilling one well in the basin. Um, I had a meeting with them a few weeks ago and they're telling me, they probably, if they hit what they think they're going to hit, they're going to try to form an 8,000 acre unit, if the state will let them. Nobody's ever done that. Usually, a normal drilling, usually, right now is 320 to 360 acres. And they're talking 8,000 acres. And that's going to be a real big, big circle. And I would imagine if they do hit and form an 8,000 acre unit, that they're going to do several more wells in that unit to produce it quicker, to get to it. But that's the stage we're in right now of drilling. If that kicks off, that's going to be a tremendous amount of boost to that economy in south Louisiana, because that's a lot of gas, a lot of money being spent drilling those wells. And there will be a lot of a production coming out of it.

C: So you see sort of a renaissance taking place...?

M: Could very well be. We thought we were dead 20 years ago, as far as drilling, because we had explored all of the basin. We had wells everywhere. We had the geology and all the wells. And only thing we knew we had out there was landowners. Or some small gas [inaudible] and six to eight to ten feet that the larger companies in the 50s walked away from because it wasn't competitive to, economical to producing them. Smaller companies started coming in and buying the old wells. There you don't have any majors left out there. It's all little companies...

D: Well is [inaudible] commercial viable?

M: Yes it is. If you're small and if you're lifting cost isn't as great as the larger companies. A small company can come and take over a well. If they can use the existing well, drill it out and complete it, in another zone without having to run pipe, and not having to do too much excessive drilling, their lifting costs would probably 20 to 30 dollars a barrel. So they're making 80 bucks a barrel. So if the well makes 20 barrels a day, they could make money.

D: Right.

M: Shell Oil's lifting cost is 80 dollars a barrel. So, you know, they couldn't touch it in a million years. So the difference in lifting costs is why you got small companies in the basin that are buying up these little wells and going into these little zones and producing them, to make money.

D: So how many wells have been drilled on your property?

M: You know, I don't know.

D: Rough number. Under a thousand?

M: Yeah.

D: Okay.

M: Yeah, under a thousand. Um, if you really want to know that accurate information, you can talk to Weeks Gonzales Law Firm in New Orleans. Don, Gonzales, do you know him? It's an environmental attorney. I hired him...I guess when Kathleen Blanco was governor, the big oil companies were working on her to make the landowners liable for any pollution that would be...remained today. Because when Shell, for example, drilled a well and they had a pit and they had heavy metals, arsenic, everything in the world in it, it was okay. There wasn't any, there were no laws conducting that activity. So in her mind, it was not their fault. And the landowners profited from the oil wells so; therefore, they should be liable for the oil wells. So when I heard that she was talking about that, I hired Weeks Gonzales Law Firm to go look at every location on Brownell property that had been drilled. Every pipeline, every flow line, every well head, every structure. And make sure that it was properly abandoned and if it wasn't, we went after the companies to get it done. Not one company voluntarily came back to do it. We had to sue each and every company. Not for money, but to get them to go back and clean up the mess they left behind. And I'm at a stage now where I'm almost a hundred percent complete on every well that was ever drilled has been cleaned up properly. Every pit that was dirty has been dug up and re-filled. Everything's been done according to D.N.R. standards today.

D: So the pits themselves have been physically removed and...?

M: Yes, yes. Because they all filled with arsenic, heavy metals, you know, oil, of course. In the old days, if you had an oil spill, all you'd do was put soap on it, detergent. And, it would sink it to the bottom but it wouldn't get rid of it. So virtually around every platform we had out there, if you go and do soil samples around that platform, you had oil and many other things. So, I was concerned about that so I did that. And now other landowners are doing it and so is the state of Louisiana. They finally jumped in on the bandwagon, but I...They first told me, Kathleen had someone call me. I forgot who it was. And she's telling me that, he told me that I was hurting, could possibly hurt the oil and gas industry in Louisiana. And I told him; I said okay, I understand that could be so. I said, if you get the state to give me an indemnity against any liability that might occur from any pollution that might be on that land that I did not cause, I will stop. Oh we can't do that. I said, then I will continue inspecting my property and

cleaning up my property so that I don't get caught down the road with millions of dollars' worth of cleanup costs. It's been 5 years. It's been a long, long process and it's worked. And it's actually cleaned the basin. It's got all the pipeline, flow lines. And we've had some strange events happen. Just a couple months ago, I was in Colorado and John called me. He said, "We have a problem." I said, "What is it, John?" "Well these old flow lines in Bayou Pigeon, that were put there by Shell, purchased by Taylor, later sold to (El Log Apache?) And all the other companies involved in it. Uh, we cut them to remove them and they're hot." "What do you mean?" "Well, they're flowing gas." I said, "Well, let them flow for a while. It's probably just pressure in the line." Well a day later, they still flowing gas. So I said, "Well, we got to find out where the gas is coming from." We don't...so, we got people out there to follow the lines. But what happened, on our property, they were on the levy, and they got off our property and went underground. So we don't know where they were coming from, where they going, but we do know someone was pumping gas through those lines and nobody was telling anybody about it. So, those were hot lines that could've killed a bunch of people that we thought were all filled with water.

D: Right.

M: So you find things, you'd be amazed what you find when you start digging out there. We had a place in uh, up in um Bayou, uh (Pier Point?). We had about 130 acres of land that was radioactive from the oil, from, I think Placid was the company back then. Um when we inspected that land, we had a radioactive situation out there as well. And we had, uh, a 130 million dollar cleanup, for them to clean up, we got it cleaned up. But that's, I think, most oil companies now are looking at that and saying, hey, maybe we ought to make sure we clean up our land. And because you can't pass it on to the next guy that buys it, you know, the liability stays with the original owner for any pollution that may be on the property. So, that's kind of been a new thing we've been doing. But all in all, the gas oper...the oil and gas in the basin right now is at a standstill. Gas is, you know [inaudible] prices are running what 3.20 to 3.60 or something like that. And seven dollars is a break-even point for drilling a new gas well. So until we see gas prices exceed seven dollars, we're not going to see any activity in the basin, in the shallow gas wells, shallow gas drilling.

D: With the existing wells out there, I would assume that production has slowly tapered off over the years, is...

M: They're gone. They um...like the Brownell Land Company; we had one well that Davis drilled on the west bank of the Lake (Barett?). It was producing a small amount of oil and gas a day. And it was the secondary sand that was left behind by Union Texas Petroleum and they drilled the well in the 60s. And it, I just had got a call from them the other day that [inaudible] they pulling up the salt water [inaudible] off the property. And the only other well that we have right now, just one well, that's producing, is a basin exploration well. Knight Resources drilled it in the top of um Lake (Barett?). And it was producing 150 barrels a day and about 3 million cubic feet of gas a day. And then we had that sinkhole in Assumption Parish. Well, our gas sales line is Enterprise. They shut Enterprise down because it was too close to the sinkhole, so they shut us down. We had to shut the well down. We stayed shut down four

months, five months, trying to get a permit to go back and produce the oil and flare the gas. And by the time we brought it back online, now we're making 200 barrels of water a day, 50 barrels of oil, and less than a million cubic feet of gas a day which we're flaring. So that basically killed that well. That well's going to die. And that's the only one we have. We have no more producing wells on Brownell land. And most of the landowners are in a similar situation. There is nothing going on.

D: So, if I heard you right, your land is in five parishes and there's one well left.

M: That's right, one well left.

D: Well, in one way, would you consider yourself, um, a pioneer in going back on your land and ensuring that it was clean to specifications today for future generations?

M: Yes I would, because I was the first one to do it. First land company that actually jumped in, put all feet in and hired environmental lawyers who hired environmental experts to go out and soil test, look for debris left by the oil companies, the old heater treaters, any kind of piping, all the junk they leave behind, separators, oil heads, and get them, remove them off. So everything is clean. But, I caught heck from a lot of oil companies. A lot of landowners told me, I think you're making a mistake. Maybe, but I'm cleaning up the property, so that's not a mistake. You know, so, it may be a mistake when it comes to oil and gas and I didn't...It was coincidental, I think, that at the time I started this, oil and gas dropped off. At first I thought it was, nobody would talk to me, because they saw me going around suing everybody, trying to get them to come clean up their mess. And um, but after a couple years of it, I realized it wasn't me, it was the trend in the industry itself. There was nowhere to drill because the gas was too low.

D: Right.

M: But yeah, I was the first one.

D: Well, in view of the fact that there's only one producing well and you said this is reflective of the general situation in the basin, um, what is the future for landownership in the basin?

M: There is no future. The mitigation fees are so that to use the land is impractical. It's probably about 450 dollars an acre as far as the surface value. The only thing left is oil and gas and pipeline right-a-ways and those are getting more and more difficult to achieve. Permitting is getting harder. Cord drill is getting higher. And the real future, I think is, and this is from discussions with landowners and other oil companies in Houston, we're leaning more and more, although you don't see it in the marketplace, to natural gas. The plants being built, there are more plants being built to handle natural gas. A lot of cars are looking at natural gas. And I think we'll see a bubble in the, I mean a increase in the use of natural gas. The fact that gas prices are so low and all that shale drilling has produced so much gas, it has an excess of natural gas that dropped the price down. That's going to go away someday, because you can't keep producing it. And we still have a lot of gas in the basin. So when that bubble goes down, gas prices

come up. The demand for natural gas in different sectors of our industry, in our lives, changes [inaudible] natural gas run. And I think that's going to give a new life to the basin, but that might take ten years.

D: Okay, do you think most landowners are willing to wait?

M: They have to. There's nothing else to do. Landownership is a liability. It's not an asset. You have to worry about lawsuits. Everybody falls on it and breaks their leg.

D: Right, but if they divest themselves of the surface rights and keep the subsurface rights...

M: We've talked about that for 25 years. Very simply put, we don't trust the government. If you go back in history…you remember, used to work at LSU, Glasgow, Dr. Glasgow? He went to be Secretary of the Interior, I think. 60s, 70s, 50s, I don't remember when. You remember the islands off of Alabama that they donated as game areas, wildlife management areas for the bird habitat...?

D: No, I remember that.

M: Well, that landowner did that in contract with the government, retaining the right to drill for oil and gas and other products that might be beneficial to them. They were given that right. When Dr. Glasgow took over, he reviewed that situation, and he wrote a letter, which I can't quote, because I read it 40 years ago. Basically what it said was that drilling for oil and gas on these properties is contrary to purpose and the reason of setting up this as the natural wilderness area; therefore, we're removing that right. Okay. Took it away. And that killed the United States of America as far as landowners donating surface. The surface to this land is worthless to me. You know, I think most landowners that can do, they can donate that as a wilderness area and sit there and have it used by the general public, but maintain the right to drill for oil and gas, they'd do it. But you can't depend on that. And so, it won't happen. When was it, 60, 70, 80? Probably 80s, the late 80s, the state put on a, the Corps of Engineers went on this big issue about buying surface value for $50 an acre. Giving all the landowners the right to drill for oil and gas. They tried like crazy to get that going. And they sent out books on, I don't know if you've seen it, with piles of data with everything, you know, what did we do. Yeah, I remember the detail, but you could harvest the timbers, but you had to leave like (baso?) feet per acre of cypress. You had to leave a hundred feet between a waterfront and the beginning of the harvesting. All kind of rules like that, okay. And nobody trusted them. Nobody...They were saying, "If we give up our rights, what's going to happen? They're going to change it. They're going to take it away from us and then we won't have oil and gas." So, in fact, that land is worthless, except for oil and gas operations.

D: What about for recreation, like there are hunting clubs that have been formed. I know some associated with the Wilbert Land Company. I've seen some with the White Lake Hunting Club and that sort of thing. Is that a viable source of income?

M: No, but it's a viable source of protection for you. These hunt clubs are my right hand. They're looking at the property to make sure that nobody falsely lives on it and builds houses on it...

D: So that [inaudible] on the ground, essentially?

M: Yeah, they're my first line of defense against abuse of the land. And I don't look at them as an income source. It's not enough money to run the company. It is very valuable asset to the landowner. Matter of fact, the insurance companies like it when you have hunting clubs, because they know somebody's out there looking at the land and they're insured.

D: And how many of those would you have on your property? A rough number.

M: Well, I'll have to think a minute...roughly ten. Virtually everything that we own is leased to hunt clubs except for a certain parcel of land around Grassy Lake we keep for the family.

D: So that would be deer as well as duck.

M: Deer. No duck. There's no ducks in the basin.

D: Okay so.

M: It's just deer.

D: Just deer.

M: Fur-bearing animals. They can hunt rabbit, squirrel, deer.

D: Sure. And with black powder ending Sat...Sunday, I imagine there are some people out there right now.

M: I was out there last night.

[Laughter all around]

D: Now, now, let's go back when this industry began in the Brownell name in terms of oil and gas. You've actually given us a wonderful understanding of the technology that drove the drilling. But what about, you have to have employees, you have to have boats, you have to have watchmen. What part of that industry did Brownell play a role in? Or was it all industry folks?

M: It was industry folks. The only thing that landowners did when this first started, they either hired or contracted a geology firm to keep an eye on the well, to look at the units they wanted to drill to make sure that you weren't being cut or someone wasn't drilling a well next door to you and draining a unit on

your well. We had to protect ourselves that way. But as far as all of the industry, oil and gas industry, liabilities, was everything operational.

D: Now these geological consultants were from New Orleans, I assume?

M: The one we had was from New Orleans. And he, I forgot his name, he's dead. It's been a long time. If I have any well drilled, I can look at the geology. Since I worked in the oil and gas industry, I can pretty much tell what the fault lines look like and what might be an (I.B.?). But only on a couple of cases have I had to hire a law firm to go after a (unitization?) problem. And in that which case I used that (old Band?) Firm in Lafayette to argue about...And most of what we argue about, like one well we had drilled, um, trying to think who drilled it, well anyways, [inaudible] up and over the basin. And I had the geology...let me back up. I guess about 15 years ago, a new word came into the industry, called 3D. We had linear seismic before that. And linear seismic is very difficult to interpret. You could get the same data and three different geologists come up with three different answers. So, they came through with linear. So when they did all of Brownell property, all of the land that I got I have on that map that's blacked-in. Those are different shoots that were done. And I have 100% of that data.

D: That's 3D data?

M: Yeah.

D: Okay.

M: That was my terms and conditions. You can do it, but I want 100% of all the data. I just don't want my land. I want everybody's. So they did that and then I downloaded that and I'm working with a company in Houston, an oil company in Houston, called Dimension Energy. And we downloaded all my data. And we looked at it and whenever I had a well drilled, I would send them what the oil company would send me and let them evaluate the accuracy of their estimated thing. Sometimes they do it. They'd come back and say, well Mike, you've got a 320 acre unit. You have a fault going down 40 or 50% of the south half of the unit. That is all goat pasture and that's included in the unit and that guy doesn't have any oil in the unit. So we'd go to court. Most time you'd lose. But we tried; we did go to court several times trying to say hey, that's the goat pasture. You got to take this guy out of the unit. Some you win, most of them we lost. Because once they set the unit up in this state, they didn't want to change it. That 3D seismic gave us a new life for about ten years. New drilling going on. Come to find out, it wasn't that accurate. You know, it was only really accurate when you had two or three wells that were drilled in an area where you could go to the state, get the download data and the production information on those wells and then use that as an overlay with the 3D. And they could come up with a better reading. But most of the wells that were drilled on our property using 3D were dry holes. It wasn't...it was good in drilling, you know, for us, because we got our lease options and mineral lease options and (minimum?) leases. And um, but it wasn't that productive. It was a failure.

D: Now how was your education background? Clearly you have an understanding of geology. Did you major in geology?

M: No. I graduated from Loyola University and I went to work for Shell Oil Company. And back then, Shell put you through a training program before they gave you a job. So I spent time in drilling. I spent time in exploration. I spent time in geology. I spent time in administration. I worked all those fields. And then, from working in the oil field, I'd work always in the drilling operation. I chose that, because that's what I like the best. And then doing that, you just learn by listening. You have the meetings and the geologists would explain to us what they think they have. And we'd have to make a decision whether or not we believe them and go drill the well. And then we'd have to do the administrative portion, which I did, was the...how much is this going to cost? What kind of materials are we going to need? Where are we getting them from? When will they be available? Which rigs are available? And we'd put an A.F.E. together, then we'd get it approved, then drill the well. A general rule of thumb from the time you identify a prospect, it's a minimum of 12 months before you can even drill it. Maybe sometimes two years, because you have to go out and look at the land...First of all, procure land leases. Identify ownership. Verify ownership. And then from that point, you gotta put all your economics together, do your A.F.E.s. Then you bring that to, what we called at that time, the, what kind of committee we used to have that ran the whole thing? Um, can't remember the name of it. But it was all leaders of each department. And we'd all meet then we'd talk about it. We'd look at the money and the budget for the following year, because you never did it that year, because you didn't have the money in the budget. So, we'd look at would we do, and how much budget, how much money we'd have. And then we'd pick the wells we'd drill based on the money available. And then we'd put that into next year's budget. And we'd prepare the A.F.E.s and then we'd drill them in the following year.

D: As a general rule of thumb, how many wells did, could you, could a company reasonably expect to come in? As opposed to dry holes. What percentage during this time frame?

M: Well the explorations 2 out of 10. In-field drilling is usually 10 out of 10. It depends, but we had some problems in the 80s where we had a lot of small companies. Davis Oil Company was one of them that I had to talk to, to the lawyers for. They, they would go in and find something and you had some big insurance companies looking to put money somewhere. So they'd give it to, like Davis, okay. Here's 500 million dollars. Put it in your drilling program. Well what Davis would do with that money is he'd figure out, well I think this unit is right here. I'm going to go right outside and drill a well with their money and see what we got. And those wells would be dry holes. And then they go outside and drill in those wells where the dry holes was. Then next thing you know, there was Etna, this one case I worked on, they were suing Davis, because they said they wasted their money. And so when I had to go to court on this thing and I told them, I said basically this is information that Davis supplied. The geological report, the drilling, the mechanics, the oil well, everything. Etna was not prudent then in their operations by not getting another geologist to confirm the data. They just took the word of Davis and they drilled the well. So you can't blame Davis for them being ignorant about oil and gas. And they lost the case. So, you know, that's how it worked. So your percentages of drilling is kind of...If you really are seriously using your money, you cannot (attend?) in-field drilling wells will produce. If you're using

other people's money, you might go to six out of ten, because you're playing with it. You're looking to see how far it goes. It's easier to use their money than your money, so (OPM?), we used to call it.

D: What's A.F.E.?

M: A.F.E. is the Authority For Expenditure.

D: Now how long did you work for Shell?

M: 15 years.

D: And then you became C.E.O. here?

M: No. When I was working for Shell, uh, Allied Corporation...When I worked for Shell, I was over their off-shore operations. And Allied Corporation, a guy named Bill (Gikes?), who's the chairman of the board for Allied, approached me to go to work for Allied Corporation in Houston. Because they wanted to start an off-shore drilling operation in their oil company. It was called Union Texas Petroleum. So, I talked to him, and, you know, you don't leave Shell. You kind of, you're born Shell, you stay Shell. So I didn't really want, was not interested in leaving. Of course, when I came back to Shell, all my buddies said, "Union who?" [Laughs]. It's a non-existent company. So, when I looked into Union Texas, it had 14 gas plants, one [inaudible] plant in Baton Rouge which was Allied. And now we had a couple little wells in Sulfur, Louisiana. And I thought about it, thought about. I got crossways with Shell. Turn that thing off a second.

D: Give me one second. Let me check and make sure please.

M: Turn that thing off while we're taking a break.

[Trying to figure out the mics]

D: So you had a meeting with Allied.

M: Yeah, anyway, I went back and negotiated a contract with them and left Shell and I went to Houston, Texas.

D: You were in New Orleans at One Shell...?

M: At One Shell Square. So uh that's, my wife, we had just bought a house and she was putting up the last curtains when I flew back from Morristown, New Jersey, and I said, we're going, going to Houston. She had, she quit Shell. She came to Shell...She graduated from University of Missouri and Shell hired her when she was a junior to come work with them. And when she graduated, they sent her to New Orleans. That's how I met her. We started dating and we couldn't...At that time, you couldn't date

anybody in the same company. So, she had to quit. She went to work for Freeport McMoRan. And then we moved to Houston, Texas. That started Union Texas Petroleum career. I worked there for 15 years. And in that time, it was in infancy. The company was in its infancy. It had a lot of room for growth. Lot of potential for adventure, if you will. So we started off on our first well in the Gulf of Mexico at Eugene Island 385. Got the, still got the, the little (imp with brig?) on the desk there. You see that little, one over there?

D: Oh yeah.

M: That's the first drop of oil in the platform that we put out there to drill the well. And um, so we started there and we started drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. We expanded our on-shore operations to the Permian Basin, to Oklahoma to [inaudible]. We bought (InStar?) in Lafayette to give us a base right there. And we bought (Supro Energy?) in the San Juan Basin. And um [inaudible] in New Mexico. So we were spreading out our on-shore and our off-shore wings. And then we decided to go international so we started drilling in Indonesia first. And then we moved to Pakistan in the Badin Field and we started drilling there. So we had Badin, we had Pakistan. We bought 20% ownership in the Piper Claymore platform, operating out of the North Sea. And we, so we had a worldwide operation after about ten years. And then, I guess, Bill quit, Bill retired, Bill Banks. He was a really good gentleman. And we hired a guy called Ed Hennessey to be chairman of the board of Allied Chemical. He had no knowledge whatsoever about oil and gas. And he kept calling me up there, you know, "where's the money, where's the money?" Oil and gas companies value their worth by barrel of oil equivalents, not by money in the bank. And he couldn't get it through his head. So, after about five years of making a mess with him, he finally decided he wanted to sell Union Texas to buy Signal. So he gave us three months. By the time we got off the plane in New Jersey and got to Houston, the Management Committee, that's what I was trying to think of. I called Jocelyn, my secretary, I said, have the Management Committee stay, because we're going to have a meeting by 7 o'clock at night. I get in from Morristown. I go up to my office and Jocelyn says, "Mr. Hennessey wants you to call him before you go in your meeting." So I called him and said "What's up?" And he says, "Don't worry about what I told you." He said, "I just made a deal with K.K.R. for 50% leverage buyout of the company for 500 million dollars." Aw man, that was the beginning of the end. Over the next 3 years or so, we fought that. First of all we sold off our on-shore properties then we sold off our hydrocarbon operation plants. Then we sold off our off-shores to LL and E. And it was so over-rated it was unreal. You remember (Layton Stood?), used to be a [inaudible]? I was on a landowners' board of directors for the Landowners' Association and Layton was on that too. And I told him, don't buy...don't buy. Anyway, he bought it, and it went under. He made a really bad decision. And they kept the international stuff. So that was at the point where the only option I had if I wanted to stay with them was to go international and I did not want to live in Pakistan or Indonesia. So, I retired. I took my package and basically, and I retired. And it was just coincidental at that time we decided to move back to Morgan City, because Renee and I had had a child that had C.P. It was very difficult living in a huge city. So we thought we'd move back here, be around family. I basically retired and I started a consulting company, called Vanover and Associates. And I did different things, like testify in court. I was the expert witness on different issues and stuff like that. And um, two years later, Doc Brownell, my father, we were boiling crawfish one day and he went to check on his camp. He had a dog out there

that he had to feed every day. So I got a phone call. They found his boat turning in circles in the river, you know, so we knew that something happened. So we found his body. He had died. So then, um, I knew nothing about landownership. And Doc didn't know anything about landownership either. He had no records. I mean, it was this poorly run company. It only ran, because it was making money. It had a secretary. So, Andy asked me if I would consider doing this. And I said, "Well, I'm retired. Find something to do." You know. So I came in here and I had to learn the land business. I knew the oil and gas side so I had a hand up. So at least I could talk to businesses and they couldn't fool me with what was going on. I knew we were paying for leases, I knew with the royalty [inaudible], I knew everything about it. So I had a, a little hand up on everybody when they come to talk to me, because I could talk their language. I knew what they were doing. But if you talked to me about timber management or I don't know anything about that. So that period of time, I finally found out, I didn't even know what the contracts we had. I had to wait til I'd get a check from somebody. And I'd call them and I'd say "Hey, look guys, Doc Brownell recently passed away and I'm trying to update our files and I can't seem to locate our original agreement. Could you send me a copy of it?" [Laughs]. And they'd send me a copy of it and I started making files of what we had and what money was coming in and why it was coming in and what was going on. It took about two years to fully develop all the activities that the company really had going. And finally I did it and of course things started dying off. So it's been a merry-go-round for land management, but even today, I do this, this is part-time. As you can imagine, there's nothing going on. But um, somebody's got to do it. And I can't seem to find anyone else in the Brownell family wanting to live in Morgan City to do it. So...

D: We talked about the economic changes that have taken place, like, and the challenges that has posed to someone in your position, what about, you talked earlier about the environmental changes. Have those impacted your responsibilities?

M: No. It's only hurt the nature of the basin. It basically took away the big bayous, the natural beauty. And um, any time you mess with nature, you mess with something else. What we found happened was over the years, you'd have your floods, you'd have your delta buildup, they called it. You had the lakes filling in. And you also had all of your bayous will fill in with sand on the edge of the banks. So after so many years of filling in, they would um...We had now river channels. We wouldn't have water flowing through the swamps like we used to, because these levies that were naturally built up on the rivers was killing the swamps. So we had a lot of dying trees. We had, the crawfish industry was suffering real bad. We had to really work hard to get the Corps to do some cutting. To cut some cuts in there that would flood the land back to try to restore it somewhat of the natural. But we did lose all of our lakes. And the original, and I remember the original plans the Corps came to. My dad was mayor at the time. Oh, he was mayor for like 35 years, but...He showed me the plans. They had it drawn down all over from (Christ?) Springs down...a 400 foot wide channel, 40 foot deep, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, okay. They got up north of Grand Lake up here and they ran out of money. So they had to stop. By the time they wanted to get started again, the environmental groups had formed. And these environmental groups wanted environmental impact studies. So they stopped them from continuing drilling. So what happened was that water would come boiling down and stop dead. And when it would stop dead, in Grand Lake and those areas, all the silt would fall out. It wasn't moving. And that was filling in the lakes

and gradually filled in the rivers. But sometimes you could see sandbars in the river though it was a hundred feet deep at one time. And so it, you know, whether it's good or bad, I think it depends who you talk to. Um we're better protected from hurricanes because of the delta buildup on the coast. We lost beautiful lakes and um destroyed most of our rivers and our bayous and now there are sandbars and all that stuff. But the country itself seems to be adapting to it, the land it. I mean the animals and the crawfish are coming back. And the only difference is...the problem to land on it causes trespass problems. Because where we used to own the land along the edge of the lake, now you got maybe 200 foot of sandbar in front of it, so that's state property. So people have a right to go on that property. When they go on that property and wind up running dogs on your property. And of course, that's only hunting and stuff, you know. It made it harder for us to control and to mark, to mark our lines of ownership and all that stuff. So...

D: So, let me get this right, if a lake fills in and that lake is…abuts your property, even though it's become land, you don't own it. The state owns it?

M: That's water bottom. Uh hmm.

D: Okay.

M: That's how the state acquired so much land in the basin.

D: Now there are reality shows related to swamp people. Do you have alligator leases?

M: Uh huh.

D: Okay.

M: Yeah.

D: Crawfish also?

M: No, I don't. If you tell this to people, I'm going to be, probably everybody be on my land, but we don't make money crawfishing and people do. So, I don't patrol the land or stop them from crawfishing [inaudible] our property. I buy insurance, hope they don't sue me. So, I don't do that, but I do the alligator tags. It's not really an income thing there. You don't make any money on that. But Troy Landry is a great alligator hunter. He's one of my...I started him on Brownell land. The landowners were scared to let him to do. Wilbert, for example, wouldn't let him. And I said I can't see any harm in it, because they're not on your land, they're in the bayou. They're in natural waterways so it's, they can't really sue you if somebody gets bitten, because they're in the bayou, you know. So I thought I'd take a chance with Troy and let him go do it. And now they doing that new one with Ricky Philips and uh. C.F.T. called me. They wanted a landowner involved in some of this filming, but I think, people don't like landowners. They got to realize we're the bad guys, you know, because we don't let anybody on the

land. They can't hunt on the land. And I said, "They don't like me." [Laughs]. I said, "You don't want me on a TV show." But they got, they have Ricky and I think Ricky's got an engineering degree from LSU. He's not a fool. He just chose to live the life he lives. And I think they have Clifford Range in that thing or they going to get him. Cliff's a mechanical engineer, retired. So they'll finally get some people that can talk and people with knowledge rather than those toothless wonders.

[Laughter]

M: It's not their fault. Like the blond headed guy with no teeth, he can't...when he made a little money, he wanted to get his teeth fixed and they wouldn't let him. The History Channel didn't want him to get his teeth fixed [laughs]. They wanted him to look like that. But um, yeah, people were poaching alligators before. And this is just simply another method of controlling your land, by giving people the right to do it legally, they, in turn; protect your land from trespassers.

D: Yeah and you mentioned, like, if an oil company comes in to drill, they have to lease land and use the term, "bonus," and there were some other terms you used. Can you explain those terms to people? What they mean? It would be very helpful.

M: Okay, well, generally what'll happen, an oil company representative will contact you one way or another, usually now by e-mail. And make you an offer for a certain acreage of land. Send you a map with what they want on your land drawn out. And that original offer will contain what they call a "bonus," which is the upfront money they pay for the rental. And then you have "rental," which is equal to the same amount of acreage as the bonus. And then you have "royalty." And then the primary return of contract usually is 3 years. So let's just say that 250 dollars is a going rate for a mineral lease. So, you, they'll offer you 250 dollars per acre bonus, that's before they drill it. And that's good for one year. And if they don't drill in one year, they have to pay rental, which is the same amount of money as the bonus. And then once they do drill on the land and they produce oil and gas, a 25% royalty is pretty standard number. So the landowner will then receive 25% of any of the products removed from that well. And if they don't do anything in 3 years, the primary term of the lease, they may have, at the landowner's option, be able to come in and negotiate another one or two year extension of the lease. But there's no obligation on the landowner to extend that lease. And sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. If we think they're just trying to hold it to put together deals and get people to buy in. But I got a guy over here telling me I'm ready to drill right, well he gets it, but I have to wait three years. But that's it. The primary terms, of course you get your legal terms, your indemnity terms, and the product information terms. And the simple terms of the lease is simply bonus, rental, royalty, and primary term.

D: And there have been a couple of pretty significant Louisiana lawsuits where landowners have gone back and reassessed the oil companies' production and found out that their 25% wasn't correct. Does the oil company provide you the information: we produced x number of natural gas, x number of oil this month, and you have a right to go and check that?

M: Uh huh.

D: Okay.

M: Yeah you can check the meter run to see how much gas is flowing. You can check the sales slip to see how much oil was shipped. If you, that was just an option, though. That's not often done, because oil companies rarely would do that, because that would void their lease. And then all of the sudden, you own a hundred percent of what comes out of that well. But you get reports. I got one this morning. It says the only well I have going, which is a bad one...here's one right here...I'll show you...in this…what you do with every well. If you have 50 wells producing every morning, you want to get the [inaudible] report. You want to get day by day and monthly and then you keep it. And you look at your royalty and compare it to what they give you.

D: Well let's go back a minute, when you took over, your father apparently didn't have a lot of the contracts.

M: Yeah, he didn't know anything.

D: So you were really starting at ground zero and had to build up the knowledge to even know where to go get these records, is that correct?

M: That's right, that's right. Yeah, I didn't know. I couldn't find mineral leases. I couldn't find contracts. Because that was a simple method of waiting until it happened. Get a check. Call them up and play stupid. And then you were stupid, because you didn't have files. So I, you'd update your files and then I'd tell them, well, I'd like to...You can request that as the landowner. Even if it's not in the lease, you can request that they give you a daily drilling report, activity report. And these reports, you can look...you can have it for your files. It gives you the daily report. Like yesterday, okay.

D: Okay.

M: Downtime: zero. Tree choke time is up 13. Eight heater choke. We had 3,000 flowing pressure, 3,000 pounds. We flared 700,000 cubic feet of gas. Low pressure flare was 14...43 pounds; 43 barrels of oil were produced. 256 barrels of water. See what I'm talking about? This well just went to the dogs.

D: Wow.

M: So, if you want to, if you have any problem at all, you can, that's their sales line. That's the numbers that they sold. So you go back and you can figure out what the cost of gas is and you can figure out the cost of oil and you figure out 25% of that and then take your percentage of the royalty, of the ownership...you [inaudible] a 50% owner...and you can come real close to the number. And if that number's way off, you might want to go look at it.

D: All of this is posted on the internet?

M: No, no, just for me. That's private.

D: Okay.

M: Yeah, that's, they send that to me, because I'm the landowner on the well.

D: Okay.

M: It's not posted on...

D: Okay so they send it you by email, I take it?

M: Yeah.

C: Now...

D: Go ahead Carl...

C: No, I had some other questions but I wanted to lead us in another direction

D: Well that's where I'm headed, so an old family name in Morgan City is Kyle, specifically Ed Kyle. Were the Brownells and the Kyles ever involved in any joint businesses?

M: Only in wells, oil wells. Ed Kyle, Ed Kyle was me. He ran the Kyle-Paloma Company and he ran the Kyle-Peterman Land Company. Uh, Newman Trowbridge was involved in that. He was the attorney for them. And the guy that runs it now, his name is John (Hine?). He's a geologist in Houston. He runs a company called Tortuga Operations, a [inaudible] in the Cayman Islands. So John and I are counterparts and we talk constantly as I do with Rudy Sparks who's a counterpart. So all of our lands are near one another.

D: Okay, now Rudy Sparks is with the Williams?

M: With the Williams.

D: A Patterson...

M: Right. But he also manages Norman & Breaux Property on a contract basis.

D: Okay.

M: So you need to take Brownell, Kyle-Peterman, uh take Williams Property, Norman & Breaux Property, John (Red?) Lumber and (Chisholm?) Property, you got most of the property. And Wilbert. You got, that's pretty much it. So, we're, we don't talk. We don't violate any rule of conduct as far as how much are you asking for, how much are you getting? We never discuss that. But we do discuss activity. We do discuss, say uh John Doe Oil Company just called and they're interested in this section...certain area of land. You know, so, I'll go look at my map and see if I'm anywhere near it. If I do, I do a little prior research before the phone call to see where we're at. I look at the geology. I kind of get an idea of what they may be looking at and where I might be in that unit. And that gives me a negotiating edge on what I get from the lease. You know, if you look at the geology and they're drilling right here, and you're over here. There might be a 10% chance that you might even be in that unit; you have less negotiating capabilities of getting more money than you do if you're over here. So it just gives me an edge, an oil and gas edge. I know what you're looking for. I know where I'm at. And this this is what I want, you know. And when they know you know, they do what you tell them to do. They don't argue with you, you know. But um, we do talk and we do share knowledge. We talk; we get emails on a daily basis from each other. We'll forward articles that we might see about McMoRan drilling or about some other, some fuel being found here or this, or this new type of drilling program. We trade that data, industry data...

D: Now, how do you define a unit?

M: A unit used to be, well, you want to go back to the start?

D: Yes please.

M: In the old days, they'd drill a well. And they'd go out and they'd say, "Well, we can't take a chance. We're just going to draw a circle. And we gonna buy everybody in that circle." And then, when they drilled the well, they would drill the well, they'd flow the well, they'd test well to see what they had for, what kind of flowing, tubing pressure they had, how much volumes they had. And they'd gone down there and do a dipmeter survey. The dipmeter survey would give them an idea of where the unit goes, how big it is, and what it is. And then they'd draw it. It might be like this, you know, or it might be like this.

D: Could it be a circle?

M/D: It could be anything.

M: So they would go then, in that area well-defined, okay. And they would go to only those landowners and do royalty payments. They would drop the mineral lease with the rest of the people outside of the unit. They would not pay the rent on it. They already paid the one year rental, but they wouldn't pay the second year rental. At that time, it was put up on the landowners to get his own geologist to see if you agreed. Well, the last 15 years or so, they simplified it by making drilling units. They go in in front with D&R. They get a, usually a 320 acre drilling unit and they drill the well. And they don't care and

they don't try to go see where that goes. They tell the guy outside that unit that you might be in it, but we're draining you, you know. And it's up to you to look at it. So you have to get better at looking at geology. You have to look at the unit. You have to know more than you did a long time ago, because this has to be known upfront. And if they, if you want to challenge them, it's very expensive. If you see where they're drilling a well and you're not included in the unit and you think you are, you have geology to back it up, it would be behoove you to get a geologist and go meet with the companies. Say, "Look, I understand you're getting ready to drill. I know you did a mineral lease that's here. But our records indicate that this unit extends further than you think it does or than you want to admit it does. And we'd like you to include us in the unit." If you get them upfront, you usually can get them. But if you wait til they drill it and the unit's formed, it very difficult.

D: So by you having the seis...the [inaudible] seismic...

M: Records...

D: That is your unit archive.

M: Right, okay, that's right. You see all the green arrows on that map up there?

D: Yes

M: Those are prospects that I've identified through the 3D that we have.

D: Okay

M: And those are things I think will sell in the future, soon as gas prices go up. I'll be able to go to the oil companies. We go to the oil and gas expos and we'll actually put together a prospect list and give it to them. Say "Hey guys, you know..." My jump on them is I have the data, okay. I can't sell that data, but I can use that data for Brownell-Kidd use only, according to our contract. So I could say, "Hey guys, I tell you what, this is what we see. I've identified it. Will you look at that [inaudible] geology? Here's a cross-base of the geology. If you're interested in looking at that, you can go to Dimension Energy in Houston and you can look at that [inaudible]. Use your geologist to go over that data and all you got to pay for is the geologist with Dimension watching over your shoulder so you don't copy the data. It won't cost you any money up front." That's cuts a half a million to a million dollars out of their upfront costs of buying the data to look at it to begin with. So that's what these green arrows are. These are things that I have in my back pocket that I'm going to try to sell, when gas prices get up, to oil companies to come drill these units. I can show them where they're at. I can show them the map. I can show them the geology and they can make their decision. If they decide they like it, they'll buy a mineral lease and drill the well.

D: Now, the Brownell name is associated with the Brownell's & Drew's Lumber Company.

M: Right.

D: Brownell & Kidd?

M: Right.

D: I think K-I-d-d, maybe?

M: Uh huh.

D: Were there any other marriages with companies that were involved in, in primarily logging...?

M: Well it started off the Bur___ Lumber Company

D: Bourbon?

M: Berwick.

D: Berwick, okay.

M: And it was owned by the Brownells and it burned down. I don't know when. I'd have to go back, way back in the files. But when the Brownell-Berwick Lumber Company burned down, Brownell family formed a partnership with the Drews family and it became the Brownell-Drews Lumber Company.

D: Both in Morgan City?

M: Yeah it was up on the waterfront here. That's the map, that's the picture. That's the Brownell-Drews Lumber Company. I would think it would be in the 50s, um, Rowland Kidd came along. And I don't know why they got in bed with Rowland Kidd. It was a terrible thing, a terrible thing for the company. But Rowland Kidd came into the company and it became the Brownell-Kidd Company. Uh, after Rowland Kidd was kicked, gone, died, out of the way and it was the Brownell-Kidd Company still. That's when the LLCs came out. So we decided to form an LLC instead of a partnership and we made it the Brownell Land Company, LLC.

D: Now when was the Berwick Lumber Company formed, approximately?

M: Approximately 1895.

D: So it would be fair for Carl and I to say this company is a hundred years old?

M: Yes, oh yes, by all means.

D: Well, keeping with that theme about the lumber company, you mentioned earlier, Mike, about some of the (inora?) stumps, cypress stumps that you've seen out in the basin. Can you describe some of those?

M: Well, they're, they're huge. They still exist. Cyprus is very resistant to rot. But yeah, when you have high water and you can get in the swamps, back in different areas, you'll see these trees. They're, just guessing, probably at least 10 foot in diameter. And um they're rotted out, eaten out, but you can still see the base of the tree where it was.

D: Right.

M: And there was a lot of trees like that back then. The tales from the old people, before they cut the trees down, said that the cypress tree forest in the basin were huge trees with huge coverage with very little undergrowth because of the coverage. And the ground was walkable and was covered with cypress needles. It was just beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. And um, they cut them all down.

D: Right. I've seen one lithograph of a man standing in a wedge in one of these old growth cypress trees. And it looks like a sequoia. That thing is enormous. But he's [inaudible]. This grown man to actually fit inside of this wedge...

[Inaudible]

M: Can we take a little break and look at something?

D: Okay

M: ...still have that stuff here. I'm thinking about giving it to the cypress saw mill museum...

D: I just asked Mike to tell a little bit about the family ice plant.

C: Oh yes, People Ice Company.

M: Yes, People, People's Ice Company. Well I could tell you when I was a kid; I drove around 200 pound blocks of ice [laughs]. And um, [inaudible] ice company, it was located right there on Brownell property, right where the mill used to be. On the water front. You'd have shrimp boats that would come and park underneath the shoot. And you'd drag the big 200 pound blocks of ice and you'd throw them into the grinder and it would grind it up and put it into the shrimp boats. In this, when the oil and gas industry took off, the shrimping industry slowed down and eventually it became nonprofit company. So the Doc shut it down. We've had a couple other people try to do it in the past, but it's not economically feasible. Right now Morgan City, city of Morgan City has a grant to put a ice plant by the railroad bridge. They're working on feasibility studies. They're driving pilings and putting it on land and putting it on a barge. But it's actually a state grant that's going to pay for it and it's going to be run by a private enterprise, but

they're not going to have to pay for all of the equipment so they can make money. But it's done. They're trying to bring shrimp back here, bring the industry back into Morgan City.

D: About when did the plant shut down, you remember?

M: I'd say about probably 1960, 62, something like that.

D: Now one of the things we're always interested in is photography. And I honestly, Michael, can't remember, but I have some photography that was given to me, with the Brownell & Drews pullboat or at least one of their boats. It may have come from Catherine Dillsaver many years ago. So, when we look at the, when we look at your memory of this cypress industry, did the company own, let's call it a labor barge? That is, a house boat they'd take into the basin. People worked there and then they'd come out on the weekends. Do you ever recall the company owning anything like that?

M: Uh huh.

D: Wow.

M: Yeah, it was a sleeping quarters building. It wasn't in any of those pictures I showed you there. It's just a camp on a barge...

D: No, no I'm sorry, there is one in here. Let's look.

[Inaudible]

D: Oh yes.

C: There's several in there, Don.

D: This is magnificent. Well these are the kinds of things Carl and I would enjoy scanning, I think.

M: Well you can take them.

D: And we'll of course return them...Now, when you look at an image like this, there's always individuals who are working. Do you know if all those people came from Morgan City or are a lot of them came from Michigan, Minnesota...?

C: We have anecdotal data and very occasional reference in the newspapers...After the Civil War when the big logging companies first began to move in in the area, they moved in from the upper Midwest. And apparently they took a lot of their people with them. Um, we're talking about...From your experience from 1895 on, by that time, were they hiring local people?

M: You know, that, I don't know. I know the Brownell family were carpetbaggers. And um, they came down here from the north. And I would think that any industry would've attracted people from anywhere there's no work. I mean, maybe not out of state, but certainly from around the surrounding areas, but I don't know. I have no employment records at all.

D: Okay, well earlier, you mentioned a chain dog. Could you define that for us please?

M: Uh, yeah. A chain dog, it was a piece of equipment. It had approximately a 8 in long blade about a 1/2 inch thick, 1/4 inch, I mean an inch wide. Like a hatchet blade, almost. It was connected to a chain with another one on the other end. And they'd drive it into the log…one log, then drive the other one into another log and then do all of that. And they'd grab onto all of those logs. They had uh, the industry itself, they'd start off in the basin, go to Flat Lake. The process that they did, was like, almost like...they'd dredge a canal, a called a "pull-boat canal," okay. Then they'd dredge runs, like fingers off that canal, going to all the different areas. Which are smaller canals called pullboat runs...pullboat runs I guessed properly said, they called it pullboat runs. And they cut the trees down. They'd drag them out down that canal. They'd hook them up. They'd cut off the junk, the limbs on it. And they put chain dogs on them. They'd have [inaudible] like Flat Lake. In one case I can tell you as a fact Williams and Brownell owned a set of pilings out there, but, because we got sued, because somebody hit them about 40, 30 years ago...and they traced it back to us. But they'd take the logs out and they'd tie them to those pilings. Then the steam boat, I mean, the paddle boats you see, would go out there, hook onto that whole batch of logs and tow them into Morgan City to the building. And they'd pick them up and they'd process them in the mill. So it was just basically, you start off, you dredge your canals, then you put those dredges back there that you saw.

D: Right

M: And you'd pull the logs out and you put them in a pile. You cut the debris off of them. Trim them into stumps, logs. And then pull them out. Hang them in the lake. Bring them to the mill. It was a simple process and that's how it was done everywhere.

D: Now what was the primary product produced by the mill?

M: Lumber. As you saw in those reports, you had different grades of lumber. All the grow back cypress you see, now that everyone cherishes, that was actually used for packing boxes and stuff like that. Then you had the heart lumber, which was used for construction of boats and anything that was fine, that needed fine carpentry wood. And then, of course, you made shingles out the rest of the junk.

D: Right.

M: Shingles were a part of...

D: What about railroad ties?

M: I don't know if they made them out of cypress or oak trees.

D: Ok. Where was most of this marketed?

M: All over the country.

D: It wasn't strictly a local market?

M: Oh no, no it was shipped everywhere. If we thought that the steamboats would come to town, they'd load the schooners; I guess you'd call them. They'd load them up and they'd take them all over the country.

D: Hmm. Now, do you think that the manager of the Williams Lumber Company should be somebody that Carl and I chat with?

M: I think Rudy Sparks would be very valuable to talk to. He knows more than I do.

D: Alright.

M: I can't touch his knowledge on the land industry, lumber industry. He majored, that's his major, his education major and he does a really good job.

D: Alright.

C: Well thanks for the recommendation.

D: That would be very good.

M: Yeah, Rudy can enlighten a hell of a lot more than I can.

D: Okay. Well no, you've been very helpful. Trust us, you've been very helpful. So, as a landowner, and as a person who has an environmental interest in the basin, clearly it's in your blood. The basin is truly in your blood. And you're not finding any family member who's willing to take over the responsibility?

M: No. Um, it's simply because they don't want to live in Morgan City. We don't have...all of it. Just to go through Doc Brownell's direct descendants, Ann Bailey, Brownell-Bailey. Ann lives in New Orleans. She spends most of her time in Shelbyville, Tennessee. She's the major landowner, percentage-wise. We're split up. The Charleston family was the other side of Brownell clan. Uh those kids live in Annapolis, like the one that's looking at... (Carey?) Charleston. Uh, a couple of them live in New York. One of Ann's kids' lives in New York. One of the girls lives in Shelbyville. Patrick, who is the only male descendent on the Brownell side of Ann, direct descendant from Doctor Brownell, he lives in Atlanta and

he has no desire to move back to Morgan City. So uh, it's just the kids branching out. They going to different career fields... and Morgan City is attractive to me, because I grew up here. And I wanted to get away from big cities. I worked all my career in big cities. I wanted to slow down. I wanted to see and live a little bit. So I came back to Morgan City. And that's the way it is. In most cases, kids go, they take off. And this thing doesn't make enough money to really support a person that would be trying to support a family, you know.

C: Full term.

M: Yeah. It's just not enough money there.

D: Well, let me ask you to look down the road ten years. Based on your long experience here, what do you see?

M: I see a rejuvenation of drilling for natural gas. I see the country is going to change whether they want to or not. They going to depend on natural gas because it's green, it's readily available, and we have a 200 year surplus. And I think you'll see a lot of plants going natural gas. A lot of new industry being built. As we speak, there are things being built that would be using natural gas. There's a (driver?). And I think that's going to be our future. I think hydrocarbons and oil itself will become less attractive. And will be primarily used, still for gasoline, but for the byproducts of plastic and all the other components that go with it. And um the plastic industry is big on oil and gas. Did you know that Shell Oil Company, uh, Dan, I can't remember his name...He was a chemist with Shell Oil Company in Houston. He accidentally created the plastic bottle as a byproduct of what they were working on. And I remember talking to him, he says, you know, would you believe that Coca-Cola, all the soft drink companies want us to make these plastic bottles, but they want us to make them with a 13 week shelf life. So that the carbonated soda, gas out the Coke, will leach through the plastic in 13 weeks and become flat. He says it's the strategy, the marketing strategy. They don't want that bottle to stay good for a year. They want it...if you don't use it in three months; it's going to be...You ever have it go flat on you? It's designed that way. They make that plastic so that will happen. It's amazing, isn't it?

[Laughter]

D: You know, you and I've talked, uh, before we recorded. Would you comment a bit about your involvement in a fundraising event where sportsmen clean out their refrigerators and you have kind of a banquet? I know you were involved with that, maybe established it? We'd like to get that on tape please.

M: Well, this was something we've been doing from the Shrine Club, the Saint Mary's Shrine Club, part of the Acacia Temple in Baton Rouge. We support hospitals. We support handicapped children [inaudible] orthopedic and neurologically damaged children for free, regardless of whether you have money or you don't have money. We don't....we don't care. And I got involved with them, because I have a child that has C.P. So I've spent many years at that hospital. And um, we were trying to think of

fundraisers and talking about planning, and we were brainstorming at a meeting about fundraisers. And I thought about my freezer. It's always full of game. Each hunting season starts and here we go, I got a whole freezer full of last year's rabbits and ducks and deer. And I came up with the idea. I said, why don't we do a fundraiser on the Thursday night before Friday when hunting season opens up for squirrel and rabbit and deer. And have people, encourage them to empty their freezers and find people to cook the food and have a wild game dinner. And so we did it. We started off in the Bayou Vista community. The first year, we sold out 350 tickets.

D: And what year was that?

M: Fifteen years ago. We had our 15th annual one this September, last September. Um, we started off; I think we had alligator sauce piquante, turtle soup, and venison chili. And that's only the three dishes we had. And then it caught on with people, the Cajun people who loved to cook, of course, they started coming to us and saying hey, "I'll cook, I'll cook, I'll cook." So the second year we had it, we overloaded the place and they kicked us out, because they couldn't have...We had people parked half a mile away. So we went to the Morgan City auditorium and the fire marshal told us that we were limited to 1400 tickets. That's all we could sell. So we raised our cooks...we had 24 cooks, plus desserts of all kinds that people would bring in. And coffee. Uh and we sell...we wouldn't sell the tickets, per se. People would give money, donate $25 to the hospital and we would give them a ticket to come to our wild game dinner. We called it our Wild Game Appreciation Dinner for the supporters of the hospital. And it turned out; we sell 1400 tickets every year to the same people who bought them for 15 years. We don't have any extra tickets to sell. People call but we don't. We put them in envelopes. You bought ten last year. You can get ten again. And that's how it works out. But it's 24 different wild game dishes. Um, since it's kind of sensitive, you can't sell wild game. So we don't sell it, it's…It's just really appreciation. And to cover ourselves, we had the District Attorney cooking, the Wildlife and Fisheries cooking, the Sheriff Appointment cooking.

[Laughter]

M: So we kind of covered our back on that.

[Laughter]

M: And we, you know, we've had some people uh...the History Channel recorded it one time. We just make it very clear. We're not selling wild game. People are donating money to the hospital and we appreciate that. So we do this as one big appreciation dinner. And it's been a remarkable fundraiser. And it goes to, all the money goes to the hospital. Virtually everything that's done is donated. Uh everything, except the rental of the auditorium. The beer's donated. The coke's are donated. The food is donated. And the cooks. Uh I think maybe two or three out of 24 are Shriners. The rest of them are community... people in the community that just like to do it. And uh, it's been a great fun thing. It's women. It's children and men. We started off thinking doing only men, but we thought that might get rowdy so we thought if we let them bring their children and wife they might be a little more nice

[laughs]. So we started out that way. This worked great. It's been a great fundraiser. It's fun to do and it's good.

D: Well, growing up in Morgan City, you know, tell us what brought you back. I can understand living in a big city. But, there must be a childhood memory or two that has stuck with you.

M: Yeah, well I grew up in the swamp, basically. My grandfather was a fisherman and a trapper and I spent a lot of time with him up in all the rivers and the bayous around here. Doc Brownell was an avid sportsman. He loved to fish and hunt. And I grew up doing that. That was kind of what you lived for. Even in high school, in sports, I only played football because it usually ends around Thanksgiving. And that's when the hunting season starts. So I wouldn't play any other sports because I didn't want it to interfere with my ability to go hunting and fishing. And I just enjoy the outdoor life. And when to college, I got out of college I had to go to the real world and it was work and very little time, very little vacation. And uh...

D: And I would think in a place like Houston, very little opportunity.

M: Yeah and every time I'd fly from New Orleans to Houston, I'd look down at my camp on Grassy Lake, because that flight went right over that lake. And I look at it, "man, I wish I could retire." But most of it was just the love for the outside, I love outdoors. I love nature. I love going out there. I love being out there. Like I've told many of my friends that come to my camp, the fishing out there is a blessing. Catching fish is a bonus. We don't need to catch anything to go out there and to have fun. I just, I was just in love with the area. I always said I wanted to retire early. One of my jobs, when I, like I told you, we went to a training with Shell. I spent six months at that training in Human Resource Department. I was just young...21 year old kid out of college, you know. I'm looking and we'd hire somebody and we'd put 3,000 dollars into a fund called a Providence Fund that would cover that guy's retirement at age 65. And I'd sit there. I'd think, "How the heck can you make enough money with $3,000 to pay the man which is projected, retirement which would be for the projected wage he'd be making after all those years til he died." So at a meeting one time, I asked some of the leaders in the Human Resources Department, tell me about that, explain that to me. At that time, this was in the early 70s. At that time, well son, he said, "what you got to realize is that most men work til they're 65 years old. And die at 68 years old. So this is enough money to put them through 3 years of retirement. They live longer than that; we're dipping into the kitty." So, okay, that kind of wrung in as being sad, but true. So as I worked up into management position, I started giving performance evaluations to 50 year old, 55 year old men, and they were bad evaluations. They weren't very good. All they would tell me was, "I hate this job. 15 more years and I'm out of here. I'm a gone pecan." And I remember thinking, you're gone, you're stupid. You're going to work the best years of your life at a job you hate. You're going to retire and die in three years. How stupid can you be? So I vowed to myself that I would retire early. So I basically retired at 45 years old. Full retirement except for part-time stuff like this. I dedicated my work career to working, saving money, and um retirement early. And that's how I did it. But that's when I wanted to come back here. And Doc hadn't died then. He was still alive when I moved back to Morgan City. He died two years after I moved back here. But I just wanted to get out of the (carpet?) world. I wanted to

slow down and uh, I had friends of mine at equal jobs dying at 40 years old of heart attacks. And I was always on the plant, always going around the world. Never home. It's just a long time. So, this was an area I'm familiar with. I love. And I came back here.

D: Carl and I have been looking at recreation. That's why we're asking questions about...deer hunters. And we've run across some firearms we want to know if you've heard of. These are shotguns. Parker?

M: Yeah, it's a double barrel shotgun. Quit making them about 80 years ago, probably.

D: Purdey?

M: No.

D: H& H?

M: Yes.

D: Holland and Holland.

M: Right.

D: Holland and Holland. Do you know anybody that owns a Holland and Holland?

M: No.

D: But you know of it?

M: Yes.

D: Alright. A Purdey is like a Holland and Holland, except, we have a photograph of a Purdey for sale at their manufacturing site in London for $400,000.

M: Uh huh.

D: We feel pretty confident there's at least three of them in Louisiana. That becomes important when we start looking at the value of hunting to some people.

M: Uh huh.

C: Yeah, exactly.

D: Its economic impact is huge in Louisiana as you know.

[Inaudible]

C: Economy has largely turned a blind eye. But, as Don said, it shows the value people have...their personal priorities.

M: Sure, the hunting. Interesting. I have a Parker.

C: You do? Well, that's a very prestigious American firearm. Damascus turn barrel or not Damascus?

M: I don't know.

C: Okay.

M: I don't know. It's my grandfather's.

C: Wow.

M: But I have that at home. I looked at it the other day. I cleaned it out...

C: That's a tremendous heirloom.

M: Yeah. I got it from my grandpa. I got the Parker and, you remember the movie with Jimmy Stewart? I think he was in jail. And he made the first automatic weapon. The rifle with the barrel that would slide inside the barrel.

C: Uh huh.

M: I have that gun. That weapon is the 35 Remington Automatic. But the barrel actually, there's a solid barrel and the inner barrel actually goes back as the whole breech and shoves the bullet out.

C: Now, is that here in Morgan City or at your camp or in Colorado?

M: The rifle, the both of them are here. Uh, I got the Parker rifle in my son's bedroom, and I have the, I mean the shotgun, in my closet. All of my other guns that I have are…the other rifle on the wall.

D: Well, then, we know you're going back to Colorado. When you come back, would it be alright if Carl and I come and take one photograph of each firearm.

M: Uh huh.

D: Now we don't have to acknowledge it's in your collection, because that can be [inaudible].

M: Yeah.

D: But it's important for some things that we're working on to show that this is a firearm that has a lot of value to true hunters.

C: But the Parker especially, because it was a firearm that was highly, highly valued in the early 20th century.

M: Yeah, right.

D: Serious hunters.

M: Serious, yeah. Yeah, I've got both of them. You can take them any time you want. You could go do it today if you want.

D: Well, we've got another little thing we have to do. We'd like to do that. My grandfather, my dad's dad, had a Parker. I did not inherit the Parker. The Parkers disappeared in the family. I inherited a double barrel but not a Parker. And yet in the time period that Carl's talking about, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, a very important part of Americana. And if we can just get a photograph, that's all we want. That's the kind of record that we're trying to capture.

M: Yeah, we can get those pictures. I have another weapon but unfortunately it's in Colorado. I got a lot of old guns. A lot of, a lot of old rifles and stuff. But I have a Browning shotgun, gold engraved, gold trigger, two barrels, straight stock, English stock.

D/C: Wow.

M: And serial number. I've sent a picture to Browning. It was made before they started collecting their weapons to put in their museums.

D: Really?

M: It's a beautiful shotgun. They'd love to get their hands on it.

D: Oh, I bet. I have a Browning Automatic Belgian made. That was my father's. And that has, for my family, my mother only worked once in her entire life. She worked two weeks.

M: Uh huh.

D: Made enough money to buy that shotgun for my daddy. I have that gun. Now the double barrel I've given it to a friend who will take very good care of it. I'm not a gun person. But, that is important. And

the other thing that Carl and I...You've documented very well, that you played football until Thanksgiving because you wanted to get out and take advantage. Well, we've interviewed people that have quit a job because they wouldn't give them off. And that's very hard for us to go to regions outside of Louisiana. It's plain they don't get it.

M: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's just where we were raised, you know. Camp was a way of life. And being out in the swamp was a way of living for us. And you fall in love with it. You know, it's just something you can't get anywhere in the world. I've been all over the world and there's nothing like this place anywhere in the world.

D: Well I have one final question for you, Mike. Could you verbalize, tell us, what the importance of a camp is? Because, as you said, for people who are not, who haven't grown up with it, who aren't involved with it, it's another world. They don't understand it at all.

M: Solitude. Simply that. You go out to a camp. You got, you know, you have minimum creature comforts, which is adequate. And beautiful nature. Just sit there and listen to the birds. Look at the fish. Look at the gators. It's what you'd call meditation for some people. It is for me. I mean, I love to go just because there's nobody out there, because it's private and I don't have anybody around me. Importantly, we own the land, so the camp's on Grassy Lake, and Brownell owns most of the land around Grassy Lake. And I won't let anybody else put anything out there. So I don't have noises. I don't have people. I don't have radios blasting. You go out there and it's quite nice. I had to live there after Katrina. My wife and I, we were living in Berwick and we sold our house the day before Katrina was named a hurricane. My mom got married to a guy in New Orleans. So she was living in New Orleans. So I told Brownell, I said Mom, can I live in your house while I'm building a new house. She said sure. Well Katrina blows Charlie's house onto the water. Here they come, living here. So, the heck am I going to do? Well I got a house boat. I made a traditional house boat, like the old boats they used to live in.

D: Right.

M: A duplicate. I even used sinker cypress for all the lumber inside, made every board that's inside that boat. Beautiful boat. So, it's um, I had the camp on Grassy Lake. The hurricane blew down the wires. And the camps were the last thing they put back up. So, we had, I parked my boat in Stevensville behind one of my lots and we lived on that boat for three months. Renee, Russell, and I and two dogs. And it was okay. And we, she laughs sometimes. She says, "We know we're lucky. We, at least we have a roof over our heads...you know we have a roof." Had a great time. So then we got power back at the camp. Basically what we did, we left the boat in town. Boat to camp was only a ten minute boat ride. We go to the camp during the week and Renee would hang out. She'd paint. Her hobby is painting. So she'd stay out there and do her art work. And I'd come to town, come here for a few hours. Do whatever little coffee klatch I had. Go back to the camp and do whatever. And it was funny. One night we were sitting on the gazebo. Every evening we went on the gazebo. We had a martini. I'm sitting on the gazebo and I could hear this chopper coming. Choppity chop chop chop. Real loud noise. And it wasn't a Bell helicopter. I sat there and I never heard that helicopter before. And I'm listening and we didn't

know what was going on. And all the sudden, here comes a Blackhawk, right over the camp. Low altitude, maybe a hundred feet. Whoom! Boy they come [inaudible]. What in the world? And then an airboat comes flying out of the Persimmon Pass. And that helicopter heads towards that airboat and starts shooting at it. I mean it looked real. Explosions and all kind of stuff. Did World War III break out?

[Laughter]

M: I didn't know what the heck was going on. Well it was that movie, Deja Vu. I didn't know they were making a damn movie right there. Man, I didn't know what that… I look I said, did World War III break out?

[Laughter]

D: Now, does the Brownell own the land at Stevensville?

M: Uh, some.

D: Because there was a cypress logging mill at Stevensville at one time.

M: Don't know.

D: Yeah, I was told, I can get you close to the site if we were there.

M: But I don't know. I never saw it. Don't know if it existed in my life time.

D: Well, I've exhausted my list of questions.

C: I've exhausted mine.

D: I want to thank you...this was wonderful.

C/D: This was absolutely [inaudible].

C?: We really appreciate...