

## Grand Isle Diaries Transcripts : 01 Farming or Fishing

1: If you really want a Louisiana Cajun man, you gotta know how to handle that man. If you don't know how to handle that man, you better go and learn just as fast as you can. He's a good hard-working man. He can make his living on the sea, or he can make his living on land, but you can't hold his hand all the time. You got to let him go. He gone make one or two runs in town. He gone come back to you just as fast as he can. That's a Louisiana Cajun man. If you really want to live, (unintelligible) from him. Give a woman a two drink on. He might last all night long. If you think he gonna float on, give another drink of that one. He gone stay on that dancing floor just as long the band gone play. That's a Louisiana Cajun man. (continues singing in background)

2: My ancestors were the Rigauds. They got approximately, well I'll say, a third of the island. There were two other families, two other gentlemen, that were also given land grants to Grand Isle, but my ancestors were the first ones to actually come down here and pioneer and live down here. The other gentlemen, I think, were like gentlemen, farmers, or French aristocrats from New Orleans, so they may have lived down here part-time, but my family was the first one to come out here and build homes and actually work the land.

3: Look at it today, you won't believe it, but this was plantation country. They raised sugar cane and cotton. They had slaves. They had a couple of very substantial plantation-type homes, and they produced I don't, off-hand, I don't remember how many barrels of sugar and how many bales of cotton, but it was fairly profitable, and it was your typical southern plantation being worked by slaves.

4: That's how we got our energy, a lot from driftwood blowing the beach forth especially in the wintertime. Now in the summertime, we had them two little burner kerosene stoves to cook with, and we lived them days 80 to 85 percent at a time on a third of the land. We could go kill dogs and catch fish, shrimp.

5. Very poor. His house had boards laid on the ground, wasn't like real floor. The roofing and I think the sides too were palmettos, very primitive living. It's almost like the Native Americans lived, you know, and they lived off the land. They would fish oysters, shrimp. Most of their food came with what they would either raise in their small gardens, or they'd make a few dollars selling shrimp to a place like Manila Village that the Filipinos and Chinese had shrimp drying platforms and what they would do, dry shrimp and fish also, you know.

6: Truck gardening. Raising vegetables they would sell as far away as New York and Chicago. It was ideal growing conditions. The soil was very rich and the mild climate. We were always some of the first on the market. That's always got top dollar for our crops.

7: They planted cucumbers, bush beans, pole beans.

8: Well the fishing, the smaller poor people that didn't own much land, they made their living by fishing and hunting and trapping. Yeah, there was always fishing here.

9: And then money got bigger but once they started getting oysters from the other side of the river and transferring them into, you know, cause on the other side of the river, the water was brackish, and then, they bring them into saltwater for them grow and get salty

10: Those fishermen lived in (unintelligible). The whole family was fishermen at the time on both sides, on my mother's side and my father's side.

11: I guess, you know, all we want to do is make a living on the waters, and it's like a farmer from up north, and we're farmers of the sea, and you give us a, we know what type of nets and what type of equipment we need to crab, to fish, any type of species to catch. That's, we were raised on the waters.

12: We'd go there, and we'd just would anchor the boat out, just stay tied up, and when a wind would come down and stuff like that, the water would become red with red fish.

13: My daddy was, they used to have what they'd call a sanding company. They'd fish with a net, and sometimes, they'd fish with a slaughter pole too, and they'd sell all that trout. They would string the trout on a palmetto leaf, string it in through the gills.

14: And we went and they had these, it was gotten, big king mackerel that weighed 20 pounds on the balance

15: While in summertime, they used to fish crab. Now when they'd fish crab, they never had no crab traps. You had to put a line, and the old Frenchmen used to call it a "palon," and it was maybe three or four miles long, and about every six foot, they used to put a bait, and they used to use cattle lips and cattle ears and put a slip knot in and measure and put a lip, and then, have a, like again, a small boat, and then, you had to stick, you had to steer, and you couldn't run fast. It had to go slow because every six foot, in them days, every bait had three or four crabs on it, and in the back of it, they had, they used to call it, a thatch stick. It was made like a Y. When you get to your line where you had a picket, then you had a brick on the end to bring your line down, and then, you had to hold it, and after you passed your

brick, you put that line into that thatching stick, and then, you run, and you had like a ping-pong net, but it was made out of, you used chicken wire because you didn't want to use a string or anything like that because a crab would bite it, and it would hold onto it, and you never had a chance, so you used to use a chicken wire and put it real tight. When you hit the crab, then he'd flap right off.

16: One of the things is going trumble netting which is with the nets to catch fish, had my uncles, my dad, and my grandfather. My grandfather used to say in French, "(speaks French)," that means "What's divine?" So I'm looking at my dad, he was in a flyer boat. He said, "When I tell you to jump, you're gonna jump with the stick on the back of the boat." So I must have been three and a half foot tall, four foot tall, the shortest one out of the bunch, but anyway, he was standing in front of the boat. He would hit with his feet like that on the boat. If you had any fish around, they would start moving, and my grandfather could tell how many fish they had.

17: Farming or fishing, that was it.