

Dr. Chris Cenac

Interviewer: Don Davis

Chris Cenac: To make it more personal, personal for Pierre

Don Davis: There is a little publication called Coastal Clips, which is just a brief summary of what they do. We suspect some of this may just be headlining. Carl and I chased the flood down the Atchafalaya. We actually got in the Atchafalaya, went to a friend of mine's camp underwater. Nice little article written about it. He's just ecstatic. I gave him multiple copies so he could give his children. We interviewed him. Roy is putting those interviews online so I have to figure out when it's coming up. Again the work of students, their first obligation is their education. Their second obligation is trying to help us out. We've had a couple that are really good. One of them is now in Virginia, she's on one of these, I don't know if you're familiar with Chris, almost all major universities in this country belong to a (contortion). You mentioned Harvard, alright let's say that I'm going to LSU. I can go to Harvard for a year on an exchange program. I either pay LSU's tuition or Harvard's tuition, whichever is less. So it's a great opportunity to be exposed to a whole new suite of instructors, you stay on track to graduate, but you get an opportunity to go some where's else to study. This young lady is working at the University, uh Virginia Tech? University of Virginia.

Roy Kron: Yes.

D: University of Virginia and she's an architect student. She was just marvelous, I mean. And she was from Napoleonville.

C: Glen Pitre's daddy when he was a young man made a living working on a sand crew.

D: Wow.

C: His younger brother graduated from Harvard, he's a lawyer. The other brother is a dermatologist. Okay, now you tell me, I mean if you...he worked as a sander on a sand crew okay.

D: Let me repeat again

C: Yeah yall do yall thing

D: What we need to do is, We are interviewing Dr. Chris Cenac. We need, Chris, your permission to allow us to interview you, understanding that all of this material will be archived either at LSU, ULL, Sea Grant Louisiana, National Sea Grant. It's being archived for other researchers in the future to use this material to enhance their research. We just need for you to say publically that you agree with us proceeding.

C: Absolutely I agree.

D: And would you begin by explaining the importance of the oyster in your family's history.

C: (laughter) Here we go. As we were talking earlier, I guess the oyster, okay. I decided to do this project and the project was I realized that my, I am a fourth generation descendant of an emigrant from France in South Louisiana and incidentally South Louisiana starts at the Atchafalaya and goes east. From the Atchafalaya west is another part of Louisiana which we don't consider South Louisiana. Prairie Louisiana, what have you. Anyway, my family was born and raised in Houma, Louisiana, 60 miles southwest of New Orleans. French origin, French language still spoken daily, significant French heritage in our area, fishing heritage and when I grew up, I always knew that my grandfather was in the oyster business cause that's what my daddy and brothers and sisters and cousins all talked about and today nobody is in the oyster business in my family. And as a little boy I would go on the, what we would then call pleasure boats, because we had a few family trawling vessels that were left over from the seafood era and we would spend the summer trawling and going to the beach. A camp at Timberly Island etc. etc. And I knew some of those older people, that's where I learned to speak French, on the boat. I spent many of summers, starting about eight or nine years old, didn't know there was anything else to do, I thought it was a wonderful thing. But then I got married and had children and my children, now I have eight grandchildren and the oldest one is eleven and I could see that the big difference between when I was a child that age and the children today. And it's a startling difference in my lifetime and I realize that she, Madelyn is the oldest. They go from one, 1 year old birthday party last Sunday. They go from one to eleven and we have eight and we going to have some more most likely. But I realize that and their mother is from Atlanta, Georgia and her mother has no concept, lives here in Houma about the history of her husband, my son and I realize that my grandchildren have absolutely no contact, realization, or understanding of their daddy's family, my family, or my father and I figured I had to do something and this was a learning processes from me more so than a project. I realized that when my father passed away, it will be 21 years in January, he was 77. How much was lost because of his passing away. Not so much that he was surgeon, but in his head cause he obviously was educated but he had all the knowledge because he preceded me and he was part of that when the oyster was king. They celebrated Houma Oyster, 1893 that was the year of the oyster and the obituary of his grandmother said that she was the mother of the pioneers of the great Houma Oyster Industry. I realized that he didn't put anything down and he always said that he was going to do it, he always says, said he was going to write a book and all of a sudden he was gone and I had a great mentor, he told me a lot. He encouraged me to speak French, he encouraged me to become a surgeon, he encouraged me to be educated, and he always told me about the importance of family. And on this wall, pictures of 75 of the grandchildren and all 14 of the children. My grandfather was a grandchild, son of the 12th child and I dare say that my daddy knew every single one of those people and I only knew 20. The grandchildren now only know about 6, the youngest is 86 and the oldest is 97 and obviously pretty soon that entire generation is gone. So I realize I had to do something and I did something my daddy should have done, it would have been a lot easier. But I did it because I wanted to preserve something about my family for my grandchildren, realizing and I'm not trying to be selfish, that if I didn't do it, it would never get done. It was just that time in my life, I was a surgeon, discontinued operating, doing surgery, I went to seek retirement, I needed a project so I started about ten years ago assimilating and I started doing an outline, I really didn't know exactly what I was doing. Then when I realized I had to get it done, about a little over four years ago I started seeking some help, Claire Domangue Joller, she went to high school with me and she's retired and a very capable writer and we started working together, unbeknownst to me, her great-

grandmother was my great-grandmother's sister so she was one of 12 also. But anyway we started putting this project together and after (laughter), when we first started she said, "Well are you going to pay me?" and I said, "Yeah." She said how much she wanted to make an hour I said that's fine. How many hours you think it's going to take to do this? She said probably around 60 hours. So I said okay. Well a little over four years later, it's many of thousands of hours, we finished. (laughter) So I can tell you that we didn't know where we were going or what we were doing, that's sort of obvious. But when I finished, and that's another story. I didn't know where I was going, what I was doing, and I didn't know how to stop it. And I asked Carl Brasseaux, Dr. Brasseaux. I said "Carl, How do you know when to stop?" And I'm sure you know this sounds, this will probably sounds very appropriate, He said, "You'll know." And I really didn't know what he meant at the time but that's exactly what happened and I just said, "Okay, time to stop." So he was absolutely correct and small things like that happen and you don't realize how important and how intelligent a person can be. He said it in two words. "You'll know." and that was it.

D: And I think it's important that we understand that what we are talking about is a book, "Eyes of an Eagle" published, distributed and tells a remarkable story of the oyster business and you mention 1893. That was the jump off point to a lot of technological innervations. Some of which your family through one of the oyster companies incorporated in their business. So we start at 1893 or there about and just explain the steps evolved with your family's business evolution.

C: Let me go back to 1809 briefly. The oyster industry then and the subsequent industry now, the seafood industry if you will I think can be absolutely without a question documented to 1809 when Napoleon Bonaparte made the famous statement, "An army marches on it's stomach." In those days to wage war, you could only wage war in the summer and the spring because you would advance, comadear whatever food was available, use it, and go, keep going. In the winter you couldn't do that, so they only fought wars in the summer and spring so when Napoleon realized that he needed a mechanism for his army to have food to travel and march. He put an ad in the parish newspaper Le Monde. Twelve thousand Franks in 1809, that's got to be a lot of money, for someone to invent a container that you can carry marching food for his army. And Mr. Nicholas Appert came up with a glass jar and made by hand but it was fragile but the idea of putting food in a container was then seized upon by Mr. Thomas Kinset in England where he decided to make a tin can and they were made by hand, saudered if you will, square made by hand and a guy could make 12 or 14 a day and then improved technology for the container and then he began to put the seafood and other food into the can but it would spoil, particularly seafood and dairy products. So he cooked, he boiled it and then they put the cover on the can, slit, with a slit on the top. He really didn't realize what he was doing and then another individual, Mr. Kinset came to New York and Connecticut and brought that technology in the 1840s or there about and the United States was just beginning I guess the Industrial Revolution on the East coast and another individual and I just can't think of his name right now added calcium chloride to the water which when they were boiling these cans with the food product in it, it raised the temperature to about 275 or so degrees and the food lasted longer and the cooking time went from 6 hours down to just a couple of hours. So that's another advancement, then the steam retorque was invented around 1860 and it again improved the quality of what was in the container and by that time we had the ability, technique, technology to make a round can and then we developed a machine to make the little rim on the can so you can just put the cover and then the term (medically) sealed became the important thing of the day. Now all of this is occurring and nobody knows why steaming oysters and seafood and vegetables preserves it for a certain period of time. Louie Pasteur came around in the 1860s in France

and identified the bacteria that caused decomposition of foods, particularly dairy products and seafood. Incidentally he had five children, two died of Typhoid Fever and the third died of a brain tumor, Louie Pasteur. So by 1860, we understood the process, we had the can, and it's the Civil War, and the result of the Civil War, obviously the East Coast was the most advanced technologically, supposedly that's why we lost down here in the south. We were Agrarian and they were industrial. But after the Civil War in 1865, what happened from 1865 to the 1880s on the New England coast from Connecticut, New York, down to the lower Chesapeake Bay besides a huge population increase you had the industrial revolution, you had tremendous resource on the Eastern shore of protein, a natural resource, oyster. An oyster was unlike a cow or a chicken or a pig or a goat, you didn't have to feed it, you didn't have to raise it, you didn't have to take care of it. All you had to do was go pick it up. You could pick it up and eat it. It was the first fast food of the day. Now we have tremendous resources Chesapeake Bay and the Eastern shore, we got technology, we got a can, we got the steam retorque, we know how to preserve the food, we have transportation now, railroads. In 18, 1830 John Gorrie was a doctor in Apalachicola, Florida, a town very close to there, small town, he was treating malaria patients and he had the idea that it looked like to him if he kept his patients cool, they did better because they all had fever and there was no air condition or anything obviously, put them on the porch. So ice in those days came south from the Great Lakes and were transported by boat down the Mississippi River in crude ice chest if you will, wooden with hay stacked between the walls, it obviously melted pretty fast so he would hang a block of ice and had some people standing on the porch with these big fans blowing the air over the ice onto his patients and they did better. So he was an inventor somewhat also and he invented the crude compressor, the first air conditioning if you will and over night it froze up and that was the first time man had ever made a frozen water to make ice. He died penniless, nobody believed it would be any significant thing and 1863 to 1867 the first commercial production of block ice occurred in New Orleans, The New Orleans Ice Manufacturing Company I think was the name. Before that time a fella by the name of Fredrick Tudor from up on the Northeast coast was the first multi-millionaire in the United States, the very first self made man because he was bring ice down south, that's how he made his money. To make a long story short, 1860 we got railroads, we got a can, now we got refrigeration and we have the westward expansion. New England area, everybody is heading west, the cowboys and the Indians and whatever. Now everything is pretty quiet down here in the south. We reconstructing and reconstruction, everything in our south Louisiana lagged 20 to 40 years behind everything else. For instance, we didn't get ice in Terrebonne parish until 1898 but they had ice in New Orleans in the 1860s, commercial ice. Now after 1855 the railroad was built from Algiers to Brasier City, Morgan City and it passed through Schriever, present day Schriever was called Terrebonne Station. 1872 they ran a spur from Terrebonne Station to downtown Houma and every once and a while there would be ice on that boat and the plantation owners had ice but very limited and no place to keep it. So 1870s everything's picking up on the East coast for the seafood industry, population is growing, people are heading West, we harvesting and there are no rules and regulations. By 1880 the resource was overfished and what happened the financial people, the industrial people that were in the seafood business realized what was happening and they needed resource so they began to go south. Apalachicola, Florida, Mobile, Biloxi, Gulfport area and lower Plaquemines parish and subsequently lower Terrebonne. The Croatian, Slovenians got to the lower Plaquemines area around 1820s and they brought with them several things from their coastal living in Croatia. The Leuti was shallow draft boat that they used in the sardine fishery there, single masted shallow draft and they were building these boats in Plaquemines and they were living off the land like everybody else, oysters and wild game, etc. New Orleans was an established city before the war and ... times before the Civil War there was a market there all you had to do was by (cardel), go up river, couldn't sail against the river, so they had something pulling you called the (cardel) on the banks, then the steam engine came and they could pull it by steam, but they had a market on the levee Mississippi River in downtown New Orleans and traditionally that's where the oyster fishermen

brought their oysters for sale and you really didn't need ice because an oyster did well during the winter months for 5, 6, 7 days and so that was the first real market that was occurring in Louisiana, only in New Orleans where they had a population that could utilize the oysters and you had the resource, St. Bernard and Plaquemines, those parishes. Well while the Croatians are doing that, same thing is happening on the East coast so the whole oyster industry came south. The capital of the oyster industry in the south was Biloxi because Biloxi was strategically located halfway between Florida, Alabama, and New Orleans, the market so they brought all the seafood from East to Biloxi and from Biloxi they had the railroad. The railroad went straight to New Orleans. So all of this is happening by 1880 and there is still nothing happening in Houma. 1880, 1890 things are really blowing and going in Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, Mobile, etc. on the coast seafood, mostly oysters. Matter of fact, all oysters. There wasn't really much of a shrimp industry until the 20s, 1920 plus with the development of the trawl in 1917 off of St. Augustine, subsequent motorization of the fishing fleet and whatever, so we not going to talk about shrimp, we just going to talk about oysters because we just go pick them up and it was good. So in conjunction with what's happening around 1890 on the East coast depleting resource with another bad thing happened. Somebody died after they ate a raw oyster of Typhoid. Of course that made the news and all of a sudden nobody wanted to eat an oyster and it became, Typhoid fever is carried in the excrement's, your sewage if you will and it was all just put overboard and they ate a raw oyster from contaminated water and got Typhoid. Well that situation caused the Federal government to pass the first major legislation in pure food laws before the turn of the century. Make them inspect the plants and rules and regulations and put a number on each can so they could, if you got sick eating an oyster from that can they knew where it came from, began regulating the seafood industry. Along with that, the pure food laws came the regulations between the states because the resources being depleted. As the resources were being depleted, everybody else was trying to steal the other guy's oysters. So the quote "Oyster Navy" began and the Virginia Navy was fighting the Maryland Navy protecting their sea shores and their oyster beds and the big blow believe it or not was the hot dog at Coney Island. The invention of the hot dog was the final blow to the oyster industry on the East coast at the time because it became the craze and replacing the oyster craze, the oyster saloon as the fast food of the day. So with the Typhoid fever and the oyster, I mean the sickness of eating a raw oyster, the depleting resources, the hot dog, the whole industry came south. So that's enough for over there. Now what's happening here, south, meaning south Louisiana is nothing really. 1887, John Dalton and another individual from Morgan City, remember the railroad goes from New Orleans to Brasier City, now Morgan City and the reason is because the railroad was the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad in 1855. After the war it sort of went bankrupt and got dismantled because of the union problems, union troops sort of took it over. (You want me to wait? Keep going? Okay.) And Mr. Morgan put it back together and it became Morgan's Louisiana Texas Railroad and Brasier City subsequently became Morgan City because of the man who owned the railroad, but anyway they were bringing passengers from New Orleans by railroad through Schriever, here, stopped in Brasier City and they would get on a steam ship, Morgan's steam ships down the Atchafalaya West. That was the Western route for people that came down the river to New Orleans. You could go across the river in Algiers, get on the railroad and go west to Texas and further points west. So that was the mode that they did. So Mr. Dalton and his other friend, I can't think of his name this second, but they had an oyster shucking factory in Morgan City in 1887 and they were selling oysters to the steam ships and they would open them on the way west cause that was really the first viable commercial oyster situation that I know of on any scale. Everything else was local consumption, that's the first time that I have ever come across at that time somebody doing something commercially. Now they still didn't have ice per say, there was ice getting to Morgan City on the railroad but it's still very limited and once it got here, no way to keep it from melting. So I think you asked me to start around 1890. What happened was (Tophio) Cenac he was the fifth child of the fourteen. He was young man along with his brother-in-laws (Ujan and Salvador... and his older brother Baptise) and his younger

brother Jean-Pierre Jr. They had the resources in Terrebonne. Their father Jean Pierre Cenac Sr. acquired patents when he became, when he settled in Terrebonne parish in 1860 and a patent was roughly 640 acres a square mile and it became available. You want me to talk about that a little bit? Okay. Give me a minute. The state of Louisiana is sort of unique as we all know and this history is that, land wise, we all know that there was the Louisiana Purchase. The Louisiana Purchase occurred in 1802-1803 and the Federal government bought the property of the Louisiana Purchase basically from Louisiana present day all the way to Minnesota Canada, next to Canada all the way up and they bought it from France. Now everything west of the Louisiana Purchase land wise nobody wanted so you can leave New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, take a wagon and go to Colorado and stake out what you wanted and that was yours. You couldn't do that in the lands purchased by the Federal government because the Federal government owned that land so 1803, the Louisiana Purchase occurred. 1812, next year is the bicentennial of the state of Louisiana, 200 years, 2012. The celebration, the state of Louisiana, present day state minus a little bit, I mean plus a little bit of property came later, Felicianas was separated from all of the rest of the land. Louisiana became a state, they divided the state up into 16 interior departments. The interior departments covered the whole state at the time. Terrebonne, Lafourche, and Assumption were in the Lafourche interior. Now this is 1812. In 1822, the state further divided, well did over a period of time but for Terrebonne in 1822 they divided the Lafourche interior into parishes: Assumption ... Assumption, Lafourche, and lower Lafourche became Terrebonne. Lower Lafourche is a wilderness area. Population stopped here in Thibodauxville. They made headquarters of the Catholic Church was in Plattenville in Assumption parish, Labadieville now and similarly the priest was in Labadieville and he had a mission in Thibodauxville and there is nobody living in lower Lafourche. The census of 1830 in Terrebonne parish shows 237 households in the entire parish. This is quite remarkable because they were all immigrants basically and a few Indians but anyway and they all scattered. There is no central location so here we are in 1822, we got Terrebonne parish and by law you got every parish seat and they in 1828 they decided they were going to try to build a little court house and a jail on Bayou Cane where the present day mall is. They built a little, Mr. Dupre had a house there, they would meet in his house to have their official meeting and that didn't work out too good. They never did build the jail. And then in 1830s they moved to present day Bourg was called Canal Belongue because Mr. Hubert Madison Belongue, one of the settlers of Terrebonne parish was living there. And Mr. Watkins by the way was, he's an Englishman from England, a Scottish English. He was living at Williamsburg, I forgot to tell you that's where the mall is now called Williamsburg. He died so that's why the never did build the jail so they went to Mr. Belongue's property and here we are in the 30s and there is not a whole lot happening and the majority of the people in Terrebonne parish, the largest congregation of people was in Dulac, present day Dulac because there was on the coast and it was a natural harbor, natural access to the gulf so that's where most people lived. In 38, 1838 around that time, they were thinking they were going to move from Bourg and build a court house and a jail in Dulac. Then there was a bad hurricane and it had some repetitive storms and then they realized well we better not put it all down here because it keeps getting blown away and at that time Mr. Grinach and Mr. Belongue acquired part of the (Hatche) Grant and that's a picture of it right there and they decided, it just one ..., a couple ... wide and about 6 deep and that's where they were going to build the court house and build the jail around 1838 and Mrs. Dibais Gibson from (Chachauga), Louisiana, Gibson, Louisiana, present day Gibson thought that the little village they were making there, call it a name and they thought that Houma would be good, name it after the Indians that were there in the parish. So she came up with the name of Houma, present day Houma. Now we getting into the 40s, 50s, a lot of wars happening in Europe, a lot of different immigrants are coming, moving to the United States, few French origin, come to Louisiana because French was spoken or a type of French was spoken. Napoleonic wars and what have you and then the foreign French, from 1850s to 1860s was mass migration about 7,500 or so came during that period of time came to New Orleans from the South of France and the Pyrénées region. My great-

grandfather was one of those from a town called which is very near Lourdes and Po.. Some local names that made that migration are Dupont, Mr. Jean Marie Dupont was from Benac, Jean-Pierre Cenac, Francois and his brother Jean-Pierre (Vigore), Mr. Armond St. Martin, they from (Tears), Mr. Jean-Pierre (Calese) Bourgeois from Carbone, Mr. Monture from Encausse... all of these people were immigrants small area from the south of France in the Pyrénées began to arrive in 1850s 1860s. My great-grandfather got here in 1860. There were fourteen buildings in the village of Houma. Most probably (God gave) ... the railroad from Algiers, got off the station, got off at Terrebonne station and we know pretty well why he came because Mr. Jean-Marie Dupont is from Benac and Mr. Jean-Pierre Cenac was from Barbizon, it's just a few miles apart. 1856 Mr. Dupont wound up in Houma. In 1860 Mr. Cenac did and the first recorded transaction of property acquisition by my great-grandfather was he and Mr. Dupont bought the corner of Barrel and Main Street today where Dupont's grocery store or department store is presently and they were in business together. My great-grandfather was a boulanger, certified French baker and Mr. Dupont ran the retail part of the business. The third child, Albert, Jean-Pierre's third child, his parain, or Godfather was Jean Marie Dupont and we've had that relationship a long time. Any way we in the 1860s, there were plantations the plantations were present in a lot of plantations at the time but they were mostly Yankees if you will or Americans who were wealthy people from the east coast came to the Mississippi Valley and wound up buying agricultural land in south Louisiana. The method, this is a long way to get to the word patent you know. A patent was a way that an individual could buy land and the Swamp Land Grants Act was passed after Louisiana became a state. A way that the government said instead of going like the Oklahoma Sooners, the land rush or what have you, we going to stake out some free property, we'll give it to you pretty cheap but you got to buy it from us so my great-grandfather began his first patent purchase was in 1867 and we have copies here. 640 acres when he died in 1914 he had acquired over, almost 5000 acres probably on the lower coast of Terrebonne. Included water bottoms was a patent said it went from Bayou Sally east to Bayou Platte and north to somewhere and east and everything that was in that patent was yours except navigable waterways, navigable waterways when the state 1812, Louisiana became a state. The state said we own all navigable waterways. Today you would think that means if you can navigate on it, it belongs to the state. Well in fact navigable does not mean navigate, it means commerce has to be occurring and there was no navigable waters in Terrebonne parish because there was no commerce in 1812 and all these canals we have now were man made, they were not there in 1812, unless its a natural body of water. The closest thing to a navigable waterway in Terrebonne parish is Bayou *Penchion* which is natural but there wasn't any commerce occurring. So a lot of people don't know that, it's very easy to understand if you want to know who owns this body of water, just find on the map of 1812, the oil company dug it or somebody else dug it or what have you, in my book a matter of fact, there is a whole section on the history of all the canals in Terrebonne parish. And people began digging canals in the early 1800s in Terrebonne, Madison canal and Minus canal and all these different land owners so they could get their market to New Orleans, their product to New Orleans by boat. But anyway, so patents were occurring. 1887, 1890, Mr. Dalton and his associates selling oysters ... Cenac, Baptise Cenac...(more French names) were taking oysters off of Pierre's water bottoms and what they could catch on the coast and they were sailing to Morgan City, bringing the oysters to Mr. Dalton so he could sell them and because the railroad went to Morgan City they had goods from New Orleans and they were bringing the goods back, groceries and other goods to Dulac and Jean-Pierre Cenac, Sr., had a store there ... so they were bringing the oysters to Morgan City, bringing the goods back by sail. The majority of the people in Terrebonne parish lived in Dulac. It was the hub, the economic hub. Still in 1880, they probably had, well in 1860 when he got to Houma, they had about 450 people in the village and surrounding area of Houma and by 1880 or 1890 they had about 1,500. Most of the people lived on the coast, Houma was still very small, present day Houma. So the family's first venture into the oyster trade was from water bottoms that their father had via patents to Morgan City. ... Tophio met his wife there,

Sylvia Burke and he was the first to realize, he says, Man we got our oysters over here and we bringing them over there, that guy is making all the money. 1891 there was 16 individuals in Houma, quote 'prominent business men' said that, man this looks like the oyster business might be good so they bought the *bature* (laughing) This is a lot of history. Houma is French Catholic, very small, went from Bayou Terrebonne, present day Lafayette Street west to Russell street east and it went back to around to Point Street area. That was the whole town. Out of town was anything other than within the confines of the village. Very Catholic and we began to have a lot of Eastern Europeans move down here and Jewish people, Protestants from the Les American, American Families, the Minors, the *Shacknors*, the McCulloughs, the plantation owners were all Protestants. Well we had St. Francis de Sales church, the oldest church, 1848 and they had St. Francis cemetery #1. Catholics said no Protestants or Jews are being buried in St. Francis cemetery; Y'all got to go out of town. So the plantation owning families, Protestants, formed Magnolia Cemetery Association in present day downtown Houma but it was out of town and they did that in 1870s or so, 1880s. In 1891, the Bature of the Magnolia Cemetery Association was sold to these 16 business men, basically everything across from present day Magnolia Cemetery which is right next to present day Terrebonne General Hospital and they farmed Houma Fish and Oyster Company Limited. Well there were no oystermen in the business and it went under. 1893, Mr. Tophio Cenac married, living in Morgan City could see what was happening there and said now's my chance to come home, take my knowledge that I've learned here, go talk to my brothers and my daddy and I'm going to take over Houma Fish and he did in 1893. Sold all of his property in St. Mary's parish, moved to Houma, reorganized and started Houma Fish and Oyster Company Limited in 1893 as the owner. First step for the Cenac family, commercial, large scale oyster business. Couple of other people at the time, all local consumption. ...*Mr. Geaux, Francios Geaux* also from France, little small things. To bring it all together, here we are 1890, 1893, from the east coast here comes Robert J. Younger from Chesapeake, Baltimore. He comes to Terrebonne, okay. Here comes Mr. C.C. Miller from Connecticut. Mr. Miller is the guy that invented the shipping container. it's on the front over here, the Scealshipt System Scealshipt. It was a wooden shipping container held together with rings, metal rings and they shucked the oysters and 2.5 and 5 gallon cans to put them in the containers, iced them and put them on the railroad. So he brought the Scealshipt System to Terrebonne. He stated C.C. Miller & Company. Robert Younger started R.J. Younger & Company, all on Bayou Terrebonne. Tophio Cenac had Houma Fish & Oyster Company. 1896 remember them leaving the east coast, Biloxi, Gulfport, the market's happening, the business is getting organized, we got some commercialization, we got ice. 1898, well 1896 Jean-Charles Cenac, Tophio's younger brother leased Mr. H. N. Geradi had the bayou side opposite Houma Fish and that was not even in the city of Houma. That was not incorporated north of Bayou Terrebonne, that wasn't a part of Houma until, everything on this side, the north side of Bayou Terrebonne wasn't part of Houma until 1898 when they incorporated the little area on this side the bayou. So 1896 Jean-Charles Cenac acquired the lease that Mr. Geradi had from Mr. Chauvin on this side the bayou from Houma Fish who had sold it to Mr. Younger. Jean-Charles got the lease from Mr. Younger and he formed C Cenac & Company and then brought in his brother Albert and Mr. Felician Guidry and he subsequently brought in Mr. *O. B. Basset*. So we had Cenac brothers across the bayou from each other. They acquired C.C. Miller & Company. 1898 Dr. Jeff *Skrimpski* locates in Houma before 1890 but he started Houma Lighting & Ice Manufacturing Company which is a present day lawyers office on the corner of Church and Park. So we got ice in 1898 and with the ice we had electricity, we had the railroad and we got for the first time a telephone system. The Ray telephone system started in 1898. The Gray and then the Ray the same year. That I have the first telephone page for all the phones in the parish, Houma Fish & Oysters phone number was 3, Albert Cenac's Delivery table's phone number was 1, then I have the ads, that gets pretty basic if you know what I mean. We all starting at the same time. So by 1900, Houma is growing, we incorporated the north side, the bayou side and the other side, we got ice and electricity. First light bulbs in Terrebonne parish on a commercial bases in Houma Fish & Oyster. They got rid of the

kerosene lamps cause they had to get up early in the morning, 2, 3:00 in the morning, shuck oysters in the morning because during the day you had to ship them. Remember everything is being pulled with wagons, horses, oxen, there's no vehicles, you could only do that during the day so you shuck them early morning and you transport it in daylight. So we in 1900, we got electricity, we got ice, refrigeration, we got the railroad transportation, and we got the resources. My grandfather, William Jean-Pierre Cenac, when he was 13 or so, he, they were hunting ducks for the market in Dulac, and what you call it, no not a flood light, what you call

D: a hammer?

C: Yeah a hammer, a hammer shot gun. Well they went off, shot his arm right below his shoulder on the left and his two brothers came to Houma, got Dr. Jeff Skrimpski and Dr. St. Martin, quote 'doctors', sort of limited to what they could do and basically *aplantion* surgery that they learned in the Civil War. If you got shot in the knee, they just took your leg off above the knee. Nothing else to do, they shot the foot, take it off at the knee. Anyway, if you got shot in the belly, you just died cause there was no antibiotics, no nothing. So they left Dulac and they went by horse 27 miles that day and the following day they got back home with the two doctors, 24 hours later they put my grandfather on the kitchen table with *eitha* anesthesia and took his arm off and they took a piece of iron and just cauterized the stump, that was all they could do and that was in 189....ohh 1896, 1894 something like that. Well my great-grandfather said a one armed fisherman, farmer, plantation worker is not too good, I'm sending you to college in New Orleans. So he sent him to school in commercial college. He graduated in 1904 and his sheep-skin diploma sits right here and that hat is the hat that he wore for his college graduation. He comes back to town and he opens his oyster business where, next to the present, bank of Houma and property, on property that his mother-in-law owned. His mother-in-law was Elenor Monture Bourgeois, whose, when she was 13 years of age, when she, her birthday at age 13 occurred halfway across the Atlantic from Bardo to New Orleans. She was coming here at age 13 with her parents and they settled in Morgan City initially along with the Bourgeois family from Carbonne, France which is a little bit, its in the Midi-Pyrenees, I mean the Haute-Garonne area of France, right next to the Haute-Pyrenees but in the mountains area. So remember people weren't stopping in Houma, and they were taking the railroad going to Morgan City so one half of my immediate family came from France railroad to Morgan City, the Bourgeois family and the Monture family. And he was a land owner, same type of thing, he was a land owner, business man and what have you. He had the property on the bayou side, marries my grandmother Marie *Matlyne* Bourgeois and comes back from college and started his oyster business, William J. Cenac Oyster Company. Well it didn't take long, by 1907 all the brothers were getting together and they were buying out all the other oyster people. By 1910, Jean-Charles Cenac, William Jean-Pierre Cenac, Tophio Cenac, and Albert Cenac, four of the brothers were the largest shippers and packers of oysters in Terrebonne parish. State-wide what's happening at the time is the forerunner of the Wildlife and Fisheries Department, the Oyster Commission started in 1902 for the same problems developing here in Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, and Plaquemines that occurred in the east coast in Chesapeake Bay. When the Croatians ruined their oyster beds east of the Mississippi River, the St. Bernard people by overfishing, they went west to Terrebonne and Lafourche and so the state said what we going to try to do is let each parish regulate its own bedding areas so they formed the Oyster Commission and Mr. *Bowmalan* represented, Mr. *Bowmalan* from Houma was one of the first members, five or so members of the Oyster Commission and then 1802 and 1804 a few different legislation acts, 1806, I mean 1906, excuse me 1902, 1904, 1906. It became apparent that the parishes couldn't regulate it so we going to make it a state wide thing and regulatory enforcement and

they created the Oyster Commission went to the Conservation commission, it went to another name and it wound up being the Department of Conservation I think by 18, 1908 1910 something like that. So we were regulating and passing laws and deciding who could do what and in 1906 the only firm in the state of Louisiana from Terrebonne parish that could can, could buy, can, and ship out of state was Houma Fish & Oyster and C Cenac & Company. He gradually came together under C Cenac & Company was all the other businesses were assimilated, that was their trade name but there were other businesses locally that could buy and ship and shuck oysters and sell locally but not out of state.

D: Let me interrupt just a minute, your family now has all family members

C: All family members

D: involved in the oyster business. They were involved more in the wholesale retail side. How many people were providing these oysters to you?

C: Well, okay. The oldest son Baptise and Jean-Pierre Jr., they stayed. Well okay, right around like I told you 1890 to 1900 Albert, Tophio, William, and Dennis and Jean Charles were in Houma. They were on the retail side. Baptise, Jean-Pierre ... brother-in-law, Salvador Car.. brother-in-law, Ujan Car..., brother-in-law, and Jean-Pierre Cenac, Jr. stayed on the coast and they were on the harvesting side, okay.

D: Now did they live

C: They lived there, yeah they lived there. They all stayed south. The storm of 1916 moved a bunch of them to Houma but the storm of '26 literally drove them to Houma cause there the whole coast of Terrebonne parish was really under then. Now let me give you a little bit about to try to get you your questions answered. 1890 we probably have 1,500 people, I have the exact numbers in my book, I just can't remember that now, in Houma. By 1900 we got 3,000, by 1910 we got 5,000. Late 1890s, 1900 the fire burnt the city of Houma down, all wooden buildings. They had this thing they had outhouses in, somebody apparently threw a cigarette into the outhouse. The outhouse caught fire right across from the court house, present day Ledet Insurance Company. It was a Saloon then, the *Zehringer* Saloon from Germany and he actually, his daddy signed Jean-Pierre Cenac's naturalization certificate as a witness. Mr. *Zehringer* and Mr. *Burger*. They were eastern European families here in Houma. So that's in 1884, but the Zehringer Saloon caught fire and burnt the city hall down cause the outhouse caught on fire, so they say. Anyway, the tremendous population increase was all due to the oyster industry. We doubled, then tripled in size from 1890 to 1910, the city of Houma, we had 600 Canotes. A canote is a French word for what you call a lugger today. A lugger is a water-born oyster transporter if you will. The word lugger comes from the Croatian word lugr, which is the word in their language for the square sail that went on a one masted leuti sailing vessel and its called a lugr sail and of course you know today luggers are still here today because that's the word we use for a small, shallow draft, slow moving vessel used in the oil field comes from the original word for a lugr sail. We had 600 Canotes in the oyster industry in Terrebonne parish, 1900 1910. Dr. Jeff Skrimpski opened the Lake Fish, not Lake Fish & Oyster Company, aw, packing company, I'll think of it in a second ... no, no, I'll think of it in a second, I have a picture of it, excuse me. It's the Pelican Lake Oyster & Packing Company, got it off the

label. Anyway that started about 1908, 1906. He imported 1,500 Bohemians from Baltimore and the east coast. Bohemians were basically Romanian and people of eastern origin working in factories there, got them to Houma and they doubled them up the population.

D: And he did this own his own?

C: On his own

D: Brought in 1,500 people.

C: In two waves, two or three waves for the Pelican Lake Oyster & Packing Company. Interestingly enough in the '20s and '30s Pelican Lake Oyster & Packing Company was the largest pumpkin canning company in the United States and I actually have pictures of wooden barges of pumpkins in Bayou Terrebonne here and they still can pumpkins. I can't remember, I don't know if I ever bought one a can of canned pumpkin but its still popular on the east coast. But it was the largest pumpkin canning company in the United States. But he was a doctor, he quit medicine in 1900 when he had the ice company, Houma Ice & Manufacturing Company and he was just selling electricity and he had the packing company so he got out of medicine. So Houma's got 5,000 people now, and we're in 1910, everything is good. Sugarcane business is going pretty good. The '20s, well in 1906 Tophio Cenac, he was the thinker, acquired the Ford agency. He had the first subsequently dealership, Ford dealership in this part of south Louisiana and he bought it so that they could have access to engines to put engines convert to sailing fishing fleet to motors, the engines. And he was instrumental in doing that, the sailing fleet was basically all motorized by 1930.

D: Now you mentioned 600 canotes.

C: yes

D: Were they built locally?

C: All built locally.

D: So you had ship rights, you had shipyards

C: Huge, huge amount of people all the way from Gibson all along the coast. I have* both ways when Gibson and both ways on Bayou Black.* Several shipyards in Terrebonne. The Guidry family, the *Barbalain* family in Houma to this day still in the shipyard business, boat repair business. I even have ads from 1900 1910 of sailboat repair ways in Houma.

D: In Houma

C: In Houma

D: And these boats were made out of Cypress? Pine?

C: All Cypress, well Cypress. I would tell you all Cypress because it was plentiful and good wood you know. There was some mahogany later. There was some mahogany which we now call Spanish Cedar but it was mahogany and the mahogany got here a little later in probably the '40s because Cypress, 1890 - 1920, man Cypress was the big deal and died. The whole industry started quitting. Oyster business was taking off 1900 and it continued to be the backbone of the economy until 1940. 1920, the teens 1915 the Mosaic disease began to affect the sugarcane crop 1915 sugarcane is bitter 1920 by 1925 all the plantations are busted, sugarcane crops decimated. A little history there, the Minor family and Mr. *Crumhar* went to a sugarcane expo I want to say South America somewhere and they talked to a guy that had Mosaic resistant PT, PT109 variety cane, sugarcane, brought it back and I think he had 120 stalks and he planted 60 of them and they all died. Then he planted 60 more in a different way some kind of way and they grew and that saved the entire sugar industry in Louisiana right here at Southdown Plantation in Houma. Its the Mosaic disease resistant cane to this day but there's some improvements but it started right here on Bayou Terrebonne, that's on Bayou Black I'm sorry. So sugarcane is going down, we have no shrimp industry, we have trapping, we have crabs all in, commercial crab business in Morgan City, not Houma cause the railroad again and we got trapping now, we got oysters going up, cane coming down.

D: And what about dried shrimp at that period?

C: The 20s, I was going to get into that. That's, dried shrimp is really doing well, it's taking off too. The Bloom family and the Bergerson, Shelly Bergerson.... I have a whole page of families that were in, I mean a list of names in the dried shrimp industry on the coast. that's a whole nother. Mr. ... and Mr. ... and their brother-in-law Mr. ... were on Little Cayou and he had Little Cayou Oyster Company and then the storm of 1909 ruined him and 1916 really ruined him so the *Orgeron* Brothers came to Houma and went in business a little down the bayou, all these oyster businesses by the way are out of town, just like the cemetery is out of town

D: On Bayou Terrebonne?

C: On Bayou Terrebonne. We all still out of town because you had these huge mounds of oyster shells and it must have smelled really bad and all they could do is put lime on them and nothing to do with them. They didn't know what to do with these oyster shells. ...Talk and talk. and a lot of things are happening. What we going to do with these oyster shells? Well the state says let's start trying to refurbish the reefs through education they realized that. We replenished the reefs. So Sister Lake in Houma was the first lake put under state control for bedding grounds, Terrebonne parish, I say Houma, Terrebonne parish. Sister Lake is where it all started, that's where they started replenishing the beds,

etc., etc., to get rid of all these huge mounds of oyster shells. Also in 1912, 1914, my grandfather and Mr. Younger and a couple other individuals formed Louisiana Crushing Company which was the first attempt in this area to take oyster shells, crush them for several things: chicken feed, fertilizer, road beds, and masonry objects, planters and what have you, I have some over there. So Louisiana Crushing Company was also started by my family. Like I said, but we still got family on the harvesting side, we still got family on the retail side, and the older people today, of course I'm a doctor and I'm 65 so I knew over the last 40 years or so practicing I met some older people and they all would come and say you know I worked for Mr. Albert, or I worked for Mr. Williams, I hauled oysters for Mr. Orgeron. Cause everybody in those days, if you lived in Terrebonne you were in the oyster industry.

D: Now approximately how many oyster factories, companies? I've heard about six. You have C Cenac, you have the Williams, you have Houma Fish.... are we talking a dozen?

C: The St. Martins had a factory at *Daspy* or Boudreaux Canal and their shipping, they would bring them up the bayou Chauvin. I'm tell these people where we talking about, we in Chauvin, Louisiana, Bayou Little Cayou, bring them up the bayou to Bayou Terrebonne and the present day Water Life Museum on Park Avenue was Jean-Pierre Cenac's storage facility at one time and he sold it to Mr. Armond St. Martin around 1910 so the St. Martin's would have a storage facility here to label the oysters and what have you and bring them right up the street by Lafayette Street to put them on the railroad. So the St. Martins were down in Chauvin, the *Maries* are down in Chauvin, the *Lockgners* are in Grand Cayou, Chauvin Brothers are in Chauvin, C. Cenac & Company, Houma Fish & Oyster, R.J. Younger, CC Miller, Flechian Guidry, *Dr. Discrimpsey*, the Henrys, on Bayou Terrebonne. The major players maybe twenty big factors then

D: Now at that time, Montegut was becoming at least in the literature an important port or base of operation. When did Montegut start to become important from the fisherman's point of view?

C: Well Houma's here. Houma is the *venice* of America. Here is New Orleans, here is Houma, here is the Gulf. Houma's here. It sits at the confluence of five major tributaries in Bayou Lafourche over here way over here, originally Bayou Blue but not now. Bayou Terrebonne, Bayou Grand Cayou, Bayou Little Cayou, Bayou Dularge and the only bayou that turns west and goes to the Atchafalaya which was the key part of the growth of Houma in the early 1800s, I mean in the history of Houma in the 1800s. For some reason, everybody, they got to the east coast wanted to go west in the history of United States. When they came down the river and they got to New Orleans they wanted to go west but there was only two ways to go west, you could ride a horse all the way over there but you couldn't get across all of the Atchafalaya and all the rivers and there were no railroads or you could sail, go down the river and come up the river somewhere, well that was that. Now Mr. R.R. Barrel, Robert *Ruston* Barrel was an early settler in this area, Barrel Street. He got the idea, this was before the railroad now in the 1830s 1840s, he says I'm going to, I'm going to dig me a canal, I'm going to hook up the Mississippi River and I'm going to dig a canal to Westwego and I'm going to get to Bayou Barataria, and Bayou Barataria I'm going to take that and Bayou Segnette I'm going to take that and I'm going to wind up in Lake Salvador and then when I get to Lake Salvador, I'm going to dig me a canal from Lake Salvador to Lake Fields and I'm going to cross Lake Fields and I'm going to dig a canal from Lake Fields to Bayou Lafourche. Then you going to be able to leave New Orleans on the West Bank and come to Bayou Lafourche and I'm going to charge them some money. So he's the first one that did that. So he got you

to Bayou Lafourche. Okay and he said now a little later in the 1850s he said I'm going to start at Bayou Lafourche and I'm going to dig me a canal to present day Bourg and I'm going to go up to Bayou Terrebonne to present day Baratavia Street and Canal Street and I'm going to dig a canal from Bayou Terrebonne to Bayou Black and I'm going to get into Bayou Black and I'm going to be able to go all the way to the Atchafalaya River by boat. So you could leave Houma, I mean from the West Bank, Bayou Segnette, Bayou Baratavia, Bayou Segnette, Lake Salvador, Lake Fields, cross Bayou Lafourche, at Lockport they built the locks for the Baratavia canal at present day Lockport. From there you could make the big step to Bayou Terrebonne at Bourg, Montegut, settlements all along Bayou Terrebonne. Further down, Madison canal. The earliest settlements of Bayou Terrebonne, closest to the sea because that was where they were living. They came up, up town to Montegut, Bourg and then gradually to Houma. So the original settlers on Bayou Terrebonne other than the Indians were down in Madison Canal. You could take a boat from Bayou Terrebonne and/or horse and buggy and go all the way to Timberly Island at that time. So the main water transportation area when you got to Bayou Lafourche was quote 'the present day company canal', okay. Bayou Lafourche to Bayou Terrebonne to Bourg so that became the area and Sacred Heart Church was built there in Montegut in 1865 and my great-grandfather got married. The mission priest came from Assumption and the first mission church other than St. Francis which was in the city, that was too far away in Houma. He got married in Sacred Heart Church in 1865, probably one of the first marriages that occurred in the little church there, Sacred Heart Church and interestingly enough we have Vanderbilt High School here in Houma now named after Father Augustus Vanderbilt from Holland and he arrived in Terrebonne parish in 1914, became the priest at St. Francis de Sales and probably one of the first official acts he did as a priest in Terrebonne parish was my great-grandfather's funeral cause the eulogy, I have the eulogy which was by Father Vanderbilt and now we have Vanderbilt High School so he got married in the first little mission church and then he died with Father Vanderbilt, just a little history there. So we got people in Montegut, we got people in Bourg. The storms wiped out Madison Canal and that population and moved them north. The high ground was Bourg and Montegut, okay does that help you?

D: Now your family is involved in the oyster business. We starting to develop transportation, we have ice.

C: We got engines now.

D: And your Ford Motor Company or they call them Model T engines, Model As, big fly wheels

C: Yeah

D: But the industry is starting to develop

C: and other industries, we had marsh engines, ... we called them because you had to spin the fly wheel (sound effects) anyway it was ... it burned anything. Those engines, those early internal combustion engines of the type, you could put cooking oil in it, kerosene, gasoline, diesel, it burned anything. Okay now the Model T, I'm talking about the earlier engines

D: Mhmm

C: The earlier combustion engines, they burned anything. So the 20 horsepower Model T, the Model A was a 40 horsepower, that was a Cadillac (laughing) anyway it was an in-line engine gas engine and it's all here, everything's here and the economy of Terrebonne parish and surrounding coastal parishes, Lafourche and St. Mary rode the back of the oyster from 1900 to 1940. I forgot to say one thing. Around 1917 they drilled a gas well in Montegut at the Leret Field shallow, the city of Houma today, if you live in the city of Houma you get a check, everybody who owns a piece of property gets a check because the Houma gas field, you could actually in those days you could just put a pipe in the ground and get gas out the ground and there still are some active, the museum right across from the courthouse in the backyard of the museum the pipe is still sticking out the ground. Mr. Johnny Folkes, he was a machinist and he had a machine shop (laughs) and he got his own gas for his house. But anyway we got the gas discovered and they had a time when the gas never could get commercial and by 1920 and the early 20s the largest sugar mill in the United States, Lower Terrebonne Refining Company in Montegut owned by the Ellender brothers and a few other individuals. The first use of gas commercial was from the Leret Field in Montegut to the Lower Terrebonne Refinery, okay. No residential use and then they subsequently got a little pipeline together and by the 20s they had gas to five refineries in Terrebonne parish, the largest Lower Terrebonne and Southdown.

D: Now were you switching in your factories from let's say I don't know how you were creating steam. Were you using natural gas or were you first using wood or maybe coal?

C: Okay, the first Houma Light & Ice Manufacturing was steam to generate and it was direct current. The first light bulbs in Houma were DC, okay. Then when you started to get technological improvements the generator capacity became easier or better and you got A/C current and you went from there. The arc light was the next thing and then you went to the incandescent light and then all of that is occurring

D: Sure but in your factories though you were having to steam your oysters

C: Oh yeah, no question

D: Now the steam for that from a boiler would have found fire by wood?

C: Wood, coal

D: And then natural gas?

C: Subsequently I was going to tell you that stove right there, you look at that picture on that stove, that's my grandfather in the light coat on the right in front of his house on Park Avenue which is still standing. That's my grandmother's stove that he was an alderman from Ward 1. That's the picture of the alderman and the mayor of the city of Houma 1939, the first residential use of gas in Terrebonne parish.

That's the picture right there and that's the stove. Now before that, that was the stove, a kerosene stove, okay and before that was the wood stove of her mother, okay. That's 1939 residential gas in Houma, Louisiana, okay. Just a little aside, it was in the late 40s before they even had a telephone in Montegut, down the bayou only had telephone service in Houma per say.

D: But when you look at your oyster business, now clearly the can is important. A couple of questions. You can put a label on that can, it has to come from somewhere. You can stamp on the can as you would do a porcelain ad. You had to get the can from somewhere. And clearly with rail connections you're shipping from Houma up to twenty factories a lot of product. Where, where did all of these elements come from in this sequence of development? We've already talked about the can but you had to get cans, you don't produce steel in Louisiana.

C: Okay the cans and I have it written right there. In the 1860s they were producing about 5 million cans in the Baltimore area and by 1890, I hate to say the number but it was like 30 million cans because it was also Baltimore was canning us vegetables too. It was the first city in the United States to can seafood and vegetables in the same year, corn and oysters, okay they the first city to do that. I mean because they had the cans, they had the manufacturing.

D: Yes

C: Now I had something I wanted to tell you but I lost my trend of thought

D: American Can Company

C: Yeah, our cans came from New Orleans, C Cenac & Company came from New Orleans, only thing Houma ever had Mr. Teles Babin invented the Babin Pump. He invented that pump in the early 1900s and he did it all by hand, it was all local tinsmiths, we had no manufacturing capabilities at all to this day none in Terrebonne parish, Lafourche, or St. Mary relative to canning things, none. American Can in New Orleans I'm sure was the source. I also know that the labels and the stationary were made in New Orleans, the calling cards I have one right here for C Cenac & Company in 1906. I even have the man's name and his place of business in the French Quarter is a lithograph, it's a precursor to silent movies, you moved it back and forth and it's a calling card, I don't know if you saw it up there. But I have him and he was in business up until 1910 in New Orleans in the French Quarter. The labels of course were paper labels put on by hand. Then the canning process you could imprint upon the can itself and you see some of the cans here earlier with no colors to them, there is just a common can and it's imprinted and then they developed through advertising, colors and it all came out at one time and you didn't have to put the labels on by hand anymore but that's all done in New Orleans.

D: Now just continuing with that, certainly this is labor intensive. You have a whole display of what some people call trade tokens.

C: Oh yeah.

D: Now explain how that worked in the industry please.

C: Okay, my great-grandfather came from France, it cost him 10 Franks coins for his passport. It cost 170 Franks for his voyage, about \$30 U.S. at the time. When he got to New Orleans in 1860 there was no federal currency, every bank printed their own currency in each city. Canal Street Bank, Bank of New Orleans, etc. Those were bills, but they also had coins and they had you know Spanish coins and gold coins and a lot of different currencies. So he left with French Franks, he got to New Orleans 1860 and he had some paper money and from the paper money he got to Houma in 1861 and he was all of a sudden in the Civil War so then we have Civil War currency over some where we have Civil War currency, right there, we have Civil War currency and then after the Civil War nobody had any money, everybody's busted so we have reconstruction happening, still not a lot of economy business commerce, very rural, I'm talking about Terrebonne now, Terrebonne, Lafourche, below New Orleans, very rural but they did have merchants so the merchants developed a barter system trade tokens. They printed their own tokens. I have tokens from ... Bakery, I have tokens for the elementary school, Dupont Grocery Store, Angeron Lake Fish & Oyster Company, Houma Fish & Oyster Company. People if you shucked oysters you were paid with a Houma Fish & Oyster Company token and they got cent values 20 cents, 10 cents, whatever and then you could go to A M J Dupont or Mr. Jean-Marie Dupont then. You could go to Dupont's and use that token to get 10 cents worth of flour and then he if somebody needed change he would use that token to give you the change for an Ordone Plantation dollar token. The plantations had their own tokens and everybody was paid in tokens. They still never had a significant amount of national currency of course the banks did have national currency but the local people had the U.S. dollars, the local people trade old barter system in tokens, okay. On top of that, each town after the Civil War, during the Civil War mainly during the Civil War printed their own paper bills and that's what that collection is right there. The town of Thibodaux, town of Houma, towns of parish of St. Mary, Vermillionville, Lafayette, I have all of these. St. Martinville, every town had it's own paper currency. There was no money, there was no money. So and the plantation workers were always paid in tokens and it was smart business because the man that owned the plantation also had the plantation store so you worked all day, you got a token, you needed something to eat, you gave it back to him at the store. (laughing) So you he kept the token in his possession I guess you could say. So the currency that's the whole different part of history that nobody knows about but were used extensively in the seafood business as in the sugarcane or plantation business.

D: Well we've been at this for two hours.

C: Oh really

D: And we certainly appreciate your time. Clearly we may have to come back and the only reason

C: Remember this, we have to come back to 1920

D: Yeah, that's exactly right. Believe me we were not optimistic to think that Chris Cenac could summarize what he's learned in two hours but we knew that we could move to a point now that you have time to think about if you want to just walk around and we will film you but it's our experience after two hours and it's just time to say 'Thank you very much' and we will take you to lunch

C: That sounds good to me

D: And if you have to say here in Thibodaux we will go to wherever you want to go in Thibodaux

C: Yeah

D: If you want to go down to Chackbay to Boudreaux's

END OF TAPE