

Houston Foret Interview

Interviewers: Carl Brasseaux and Don Davis

Carl Brasseaux: Well like he said we're just trying to capture – we don't have an agenda we're just trying to capture the history, Mr. Foret,

Houston Foret: Okay, no problem.

B: and so I before we get started I just wanted to get this on tape that it's okay for us to record this - we're going to put it at the University so that people who are writing the history of the industry or study – you know, the coast - can use this material you know, whether this is gonna be um in books , articles, or um, documentaries, whatever.

F: Whatever I can do to help. You know but it may not come out exactly like ya'll want to have it, you know.

B: Oh no. We want

F: You know, we Cajun down here. We speak different than ya'll. Most of the Cajun I do and everything I don't even finish my sentences or pronounce my words exactly right. We just – raised like that. This is the way of talking, you know.

B: Well, this is what we want..

F: You know we start in English, sometimes we finish in French, you know.

(inaudible)

B: Okay. Um, we simply want to begin at the beginning, going back to your earliest experiences with the dried shrimp industry and we'll just work our way up to the present and see how it's changed over all that time. So when did you first become involved with shrimp drying?

F: Well the shrimp drying - I started the business in 1968. And from there it just kind of grew up. But my father in law was in the uh, dry shrimp business over water. He had shrimp drying platforms like around Seabreeze area. And from there it just kind of filled in and as a kid we had a uh, just this little area we had in Cocodrie . I mean when I started in business we had like about ten shrimp drying platforms around in this little area right here – and even when I was young, you know out of school or vacation stuff like that going in the afternoon I would go and help but I just got into it and what can you do you know I was and you know as I got out of school, in other words, I started shrimping with my father and I got a business of my own with shrimping. What can I say, uh, in 1968 there was friend of my that I did business with all the time and he offered me his place and I took the place over and from there it just gradually grew little by little.

B: Now before that you were shrimping on your own....

F: I was shrimping on my own, yes. Before that, yeah.

B: Mmhhh. And what were you doing with the shrimp were you selling – were you taking them to drying platforms?

F: Well when I was – when I was starting in the business, there was no ice – that was just - everything was drying. And uh, you would just go out without any ice in the morning and come back in around 10, 11, 12 o'clock and they could cook the shrimp and dry them – that's how the process was. And through the years after that you know like probably in the uh late 40s early 50s they started having some people that started coming with trucks and started trucking shrimp to some of the processing plants you see. We always had some processing plant – but it wasn't the way they do it right now. People would go out with their boats, and they would camp out and you would have another freight boat that would go out there with ice and you would trawl like 9, 10, 11, 12 o'clock, and you sell the shrimp to the boat, and they would ice it up, and when they had their load, they would bring it in and to the processing plant. And that's how the process really started. And in the uh on the ice business - but the uh system of dry shrimp is uh, a whole different ballgame. There's a lot of people that take credit for something down the line and you always forget one part. The American Indians were the first ones who really started all of that. And you really never hear about that, you know. It's - really blows my mind why they don't talk about that. They give all the credit to the Chinese and the Philippines and everything else – which you know what they did a big part on it. They didn't come over here and show the Cajuns how to dry shrimp. The Cajuns learned from the American Indians. And it was not in a process of selling – all they were doing was on the way of – there was no ice those days. They would catch shrimp – they would dry them in their yard with some boards or whatever they could find, or the porch, whatever they could find – they would dry their shrimp and they would keep that for their own use or they would trade with somebody else in other words - for their grocery bill – at that's just a chain reaction – that's how they survived with that. And they'd get along with the Chinese and the Philippines and everything else, and they started building big ol' platforms, and they started buying shrimp from the Cajuns – actually what they did, the Philippines and the Chinese – they started a market for it. That's when the market really started, they started by -it was really cheap in those days - they would (inaudible) the men and everything else – and they uh, as they went on it kind of grew by itself – and then some of the American people started building our own shrimp drying platforms, and again they'd come back – we were talking about Mr. Louis Blum, uh, his dad Leopold was one of the big wheels of buying a lot of – a lot of dried shrimp, and if just went on and on. And then uh, a few years after that we had another old man by the name of mr roy picoult – which he's played a uh, a big role there in...the other one -

B: How did - well you talked about his role - what exactly was his role what exactly did -

F: Well, he was he started at um selling vegetables and what he did with the vegetables and everything else and you know – people didn't have any money, so what he would trade vegetables for shrimp and he goes and sell shrimp – and he was selling to the Chinese and everything else – to Mr. Howard and everything else – and it gradually through the years so that building up to where he started on his own. You know I used to call him the king of the dried shrimp, Mr. Roy I mean. Without him I wouldn't be nothing today. I mean he really made me – him and I were real good friends. And uh, he bought, I mean thousands of pounds of shrimp (inaudible). And he had, like all these platforms over water – they were all selling shrimp to Mr. Roy. I mean, they would dry them for him, and everything was brought by boat, I mean there was no vehicles. He had a little warehouse uh, I guess about 17 miles from here. And all this probably was by boat – they would bring them up, and he probably had about 20 or 30 shrimp drying platforms selling shrimp for him over water. And we would go over there and uh, he would finally – people didn't have no money – so they'd just go ahead and these shrimp drying platforms – when they go out to buy the shrimp, he would give money for them to start buying shrimp, and they'd come in and after that they'd sell the dried shrimp to him and he'd come and take his money back. It was a family uh, thing what it was. These guys over water like they'd leave all their families – and they would go sometimes two or three months without even coming in – they'd just stay at their shrimp drying platform – they had all the food they wanted right there.

B: Well, about how – that's a question I have. We all wonder about is how many people were there on a typical platform? Because I know that they had camps...

F: They had camps all the way around.

Don Davis: All the way around?

F: Well those days what it is you know, the guy that owned the platform he might've had three or four employees with him. But everybody was... (inaudible). They had to have their families out there. They all pitch in together to help cook the shrimp, dry the shrimp, peel the shrimp – but they would all work together as a group. That's how they would work, you know.

D: And they would be there for both seasons then...

F: Both seasons, yeah. Well you had like your brown shrimp season, the brown shrimp season was always in our area over here. And then these same people that own shrimp dry platforms in our area over the coast had some little further to the west – like you go toward Morgan City, uh, not exactly Morgan City - before you get to the Atchafalaya river which is called um, Point au Fer? Well right there they had a bunch of them right there. An there you had Oyster Bayou – Oyster Bayou had uh, I don't know - 8, 10 shrimp drying platforms. They had (Bayou Heron?) right there – it was like a city over there you had so many – I don't even know how many platforms, but it was a city - I mean a lot of people that was right here. And like I said they all worked together.

B: Well that's , you just told us something that uh, we didn't know about – about the platforms west of here.

H: The reason the shrimp was to the west – Our shrimp is always on a migration. Shrimp migrate during winter to the west so they get to a point where this area over here – you only had some shrimp was, was scarce - not enough to run the shrimp drying platforms, but they had shrimp drying platforms over to the west part of us – which is still Terrebonne parish. And after the shrimp migrated west, well the people grabbed up their boats and equipment and they move back further west. They would work that probably uh, probably till March, you see? And the area over here usually stops around, you know, December – sometimes we had January – but most of the time in December. The shrimp over here would stop based on the weather and everything else. We don't have the winter we used to have. We used to have some serious bad winters. And the winter was really moved our shrimp to the west. And as these guys were doing that in that area over there, it's amazing. You can't explain it. In those days there was nobody going in a plane and taking pictures, but if we would have that, that would be something that would very interesting um...

D: So basically there were platforms all along the coast?

F: All over the coast. All over the coast.

D: Do you remember, and it would be your grandfather or father, telling you, when you built a shrimp over water, and it was a period before ice, how did they do that? How do you just go out there with wood and build a platform?

F: A lot of these people were living out there. They were living out there. That was – my father was raised in Bay St. Elaine – but I don't know if you're familiar...

D: Bay St. Elaine?

F: Bay St. Elaine – that's where my father was raised at. He was just uh, it was all land there, you know.

D: So you would put in a piling by hand..

F: We put in the piling by hand. Well it wasn't no big piling – it was just a little bitty stake – we just cut a board - that was our stake, you know.

D: And then, and then how big would most of these platforms be?

F: Well they started on a small scale. But then they got to a point some of these platforms, like the one we're talking about to the west of us, around Oyster Bayou, some of these platforms were probably um, hard to say exactly, I'd probably have to say um, uh, a hundred thousand square feet. I mean huge things. Huge things. They could go there and put – those days it wouldn't go by the pound – they would go by the tub all the time and everything - and some of these platforms would hold like two thousand tubs of shrimp if it was a hundred thousand pounds, you know. That's just some serious shrimp there. And you know a lot of times you know, in the condition of the weather, you could dry shrimp to a certain extent, and then the condition of weather comes and, like during the summer months you could boil shrimp in the morning and go ahead and peel them in the afternoon. But sometimes you get cloudy weather then well you just, or you get rain – you start drying, and you have to pick them back up, then

spread them back out – so sometimes it would take them two or three days. And during winter months, you never could make it one day. Sometimes it was two days, sometimes a week before you could do all that. But you could say that they were cured with that salt boiling and that salt and everything else. The shrimp is cured. So once you got enough sun in to get some of the moisture...

B: Some of the moisture out, yeah.

F: ... the moisture out. As long as you can get 50 or 60 percent of moisture out – they still keep on drying themselves. And that's how they would do that. And then when the weather would get real hot – like you would get a real good front that would go through – and they would come down into it...well then they would dry up - then they'll spread everything out and get them real hot, and pile them back again. It's just like body heat if you put them together, the heat's gonna stay together right there. And I've seen people beat shrimp around the clock if it was like that. Or peel shrimp in the machine.

C: Now these, um, platforms had...

F: Yeah, well they were mainly it two the rows, it would start going in rows and it would come up like that – the reason it was like that - so you had a bar across with a pole in it. So when you put them - pile up your shrimp you put the (inaudible)...the water would fall it would fall the (inaudible). Right. if it would be flat, what would happen is your shrimp would get wet. They would get wet and in other words, they'll spoil on you.

B: Well, how often did that happen? How did people lose shrimp?

F: Oh it happens. It happens a lot of time. Shrimp was cheap those days. They really didn't make that much. And they lost a lot of shrimp um, but really throw them, completely throw them away — it wasn't that bad. What they did – if it was an all gray shrimp, in other words they wouldn't come out it would have a black looking color to them and they had a little odor in it, and that was always sold on the market – on a different scale on the markets. Um, it most of the people that would use that kind of shrimp were, even it was sold in Mexico. A lot of the stuff was sold in Cuba. Cuba was buying the garbage. And they would sell all the Cubans stuff like that. So yes – they lost shrimp, but not on a big big scale. Never lost a whole platform. They would lose maybe a couple hundred tubs, let's say you know - ten thousand pounds.

B: So it was a small percentage.

F: It was a small percentage in that time. And shrimp was so cheap in those days – they were buying shrimp like a dollar a tub, you know. Uh, a hundred pounds of shrimp you know so...

B: Okay so you dried the shrimp, Mr. Foret, and then what? The shrimp's dry. How do you get it to the, to Mr. Picoult?

F: Mr. Picoult – well after it was dry, when I started the business, there were vehicles in those days. So he would come and pick them up himself in his truck. What we would do we were – after we had them all dry and we had them in the peeling machine where we would peel them and everything else - you

just had the shrimp left. You know and it takes about 7 pounds - actually to make a good quality it takes about 8 pounds of fresh shrimp to make you a pound of dry shrimp. And so it - the percentage of it was very small for them to (inaudible) at that point, you know. And we would put that in 100 pound burlap sacks and he would bring it to his warehouse and from there he would take it and run it to his - well the first thing he would do he would take them out run them through a blower to and pick out all these - we only had some of the trash in there left, and from there, then he would bring them to different (inaudible) and he would pack them in boxes and ship them all over, you know.

B: These were coffee sacks?

H: Coffee sacks, yeah.

B: And do you have any idea how you got them? They just bought them the leftovers from the coffee dealers and the owners or...

F: Well they used to um, come in, in pallets. You know all new sacks.

B: Oh.

F: Yeah, they were all new sacks...and I'm sure there were some of them had the - I did see some of them that I had that had some coffee beans in it.

B: Um, you talked about the shells earlier - getting all the trash out. I know in the old days people used to dance the shrimp on the, on the platform but when did the beaters start?

F: The beaters really started coming out in, if I can remember, that was before my time too but - in the thirties - late twenties or early thirties. They started and they made a beater which is just a probably seen what it is. It's still in the same system - they never changed that you know - they might have been made a little differently in the way of peeling and everything else but it's still almost still in the same system that was what they started with.

B: So, you were talking about the number of um, platforms that they had here when you started. Now as you move up the bayou how many were there all together - do you remember when you started along the bayou...

H: See there was a lot we're getting - we're talking about Cocodrie. The guy, I was born - I was born and raised across the bayou right there in Cocodrie. Cocodrie was always for me, from Sevin Canal which is about a mile and a half, two miles from here, coming down to the end, right here, you now. That's what we - now they call Cocodrie all the way to Boudreaux Canal you see I'm not knocking nobody don't get me wrong you know. Cocodrie is where we're standing right now.

D: Trying to figure out how many were along the bayou heading up toward ...

F: We had shrimp drying platforms that I remember up until um, well lately um, last one that had a shrimp drying platform that was further up was like um, where Mr. Norris Price, but when he moved up it was, he was with drying at that time, you know. Um, we had the Blanchard family they had shrimp

platforms too um, which was the just a little – about a couple miles up the road from where Mr. Norris Price was at right ther, you know. We had old man (Toussant Foret?) had a shrimp drying platform in that area too.

D: Do you remember places like Coon Road and Seabreeze? Because we read that there were plat forms..

F: At Coon Road they had – one of the biggest platforms in our area was in Coon Road. It belongs to Roland Chauvin - the Chauvin family that built that - and that was a huge platform. Um, you can't get to there - it's all over water right now.

D: But if you left Cocodrie going south, how far would you have to go to get to Coon Road?

F: Coon Road - About five miles.

D: And how about at Seabreeze?

F: Sea breeze is about the same thing. All the coastline left is about five miles.

D: And was there platforms there too?

F: Yeah there were a lot of platforms at Seabreeze. The um, I can't remember the names of everybody but I remember (inaudible) Foret was my father-in- law, he had one there. (Inaudible) Pellegrin had one right there. Um, O'neal Sevin - he had a shrimp drying platform there. They had several down there I just can't think of who's there. Mr. Norris Price's was in that neighborhood too. His daddy, Stanley Price, had a platform in there.

D: What about the Lapyrouse family?

F: The Lapyrouse family uh, they were right where the crossroad were at right there. Carol Lapyrouse still does a little drying there, right when you get to Robinson canal - to your left right when you pass there – that's where Carol Lapyrouse is at. He still got a few drying. He just dries to sell in stores right now. His daddy was Lester Lapyrouse, and the other Lapyrouse was Chester Lapyrouse. They were two brothers, and the daddy really started the business - they were right where the crossroad goes to Dulac – I don't know if you're familiar with that - right across that little store – Cecil Lapyrouse? That little store – well right on the north side – that's where their shrimp drying platform was. Um, I believe that their daddy's name was Kyle Lapyrouse.

D: And when you go towards Dulac, on the dulac road? You come around and you go up over the bridge, and right there there's a cement...

F: A cement platform. That was a waste of time. They tried that. They also had a shrimp drying - cement drying platform over in um, Grand Isle. The reason they did not perform. The wood'll dry and we gotta go into the process if you have shrimp on the plank, you gotta go make rows in them because the sun will draw water out of the shrimp one way and then plank also draws water on the bottom. That's when you make rows in so your platform will dry back when you turn back your shrimp again. So you suck from

both sides. Well concrete don't do that. The concrete is over mud. The concrete will suck the water from mud. So what it does it'll dry the top side of your shrimp and then when you turn them back over it takes longer to dry, and it was very very - if you had any kind of humidity in it, it you couldn't even peel the shrimp. Because the shell wouldn't get crispy. I mean it worked, but it wasn't like the cypress planks.

D: So most all the platforms are made of cypress?

F: Cypress.

D: And do you remember - we have two question about cypress. First, where did It come from and you've already outlined what could easily 80 to 100 platforms. Easily.

F: Easily, in the old coast I would say they had that.

D: And so if a plank is six inches, that's a lot of cypress.

H: Yeah.

D: The other thing is we know that the first boilers were wood fire. Again if you got 80 platforms, somebody is delivering lots of wood. We can't find anything out about who was involved in delivering the cypress in platforms and wood for the boilers.

H: Well, we had a lot of saw mills. Most of that lumber came from Raceland, uh, Chacahoula, that area right there – that was a lot of cypress. Cypress wasn't no problem. You can get all the cypress you wanna get. That was no problem to us. Even had - before my day and everything – Lake Boudreaux, all around Lake Boudreaux - that was all cypress in that area so. So that was no problem. And a lot of the wood they would use to boil was mostly oak. We had oak trees all over the area. I mean, we had oak trees in Cocodrie at one time, you know. There's only two or three of them left you know, so that's where the lumber came from. You had trees all over. The barrier islands were full of trees years ago and everything, so lumber never was a problem.

D: Now, do you remember when the shrimpers had flags?

F: Yeah.

D: That's something Carl and I would like you to talk about. What was the flags?

F: I'm not, well with the flag was – the one, the boat that had the flag was the freight boat. And you had several different companies that would do that. Every company had a different type of flag – you know, which flag, which boat, which one you were doing business with. That's what the flags were all about.

D: Do you have one? A flag?

F: No, I don't have one.

D: Have you ever seen one?

F: Yeah, I've seen flags but I don't remember, mostly we just - a lot of flags were never made because the salt used to come in sacks and stuff and that's what use for flags, you know. And they'd make a little decoration on it, you know. That's all that was. It wasn't nothing fancy. And some people had, you know American flags but they um, they all had the American flags - they believe in that, you know. But their flags was mostly like I'm talking about, you know. Some people, all they had was a sack. Some people had the - those days they used to call them uh, Chinese baskets, you know. It wasn't like tubs - just big ol' - when they first started it was made out of palmetto stuff like that. And then they come back and went to metal baskets and everything else and some of them people - all they would do is just flip the basket over in there and the mast up there let them know that's...

D: Mmhmm. That'll work.

H: That's all it was.

D: But it's hard to find out - we read these little notes. We don't know what that means. Okay. Alright.

H: Wasn't no big process just like ice - right now you go to a plant you get your ice - we used to have an ice plant a little further up there...and uh, you get to that ice plant and you go over there and you just blow whatever ice you want - it's already crushed, but they used to come in 330 pound blocks of ice. And they would put that inside that hole. And they had some little um, little flat boats kind of made out of cypress you know it would be maybe 2 feet wide, maybe 4, 5 feet long and everything else, and they would take that ice pick and break that ice to smaller pieces, maybe like 25, 50 pound blocks and they would put them in there and they had a little, whatever you call it, it was like a crusher, and you take like hammer and you just crush it up just like you do with an ice pick, you know. And that's the ice they would use to ice up their shrimp. It wasn't these...

B: How can the freight boats go out into the..

F: Well it was a - every day you had them going back and forth. You had some out there when they were full the others would come back...

B: Back and forth

D: And what companies were involved in the delivery of the freight?

F: Well, they had different people that had their own boats, but they would bring, like the (inaudible) Shrimp company, uh, you had Chauvin brothers, uh in Houma you had several like Batou Cheramie and it was um, I just can't, but anyhow but there were a lot of people in that area come in and...

D: We've been told Batou Cheramie was a character.

F: Batou Charamie. Yep. He was the king of everything. Especially oysters - he was a big, big in oysters.

D: And were you ever an oysterman?

F: I did that.

D: Okay. Hand (inaudible)?

F: (Inaudible) Fish would hang, fishing by hand, oyster, uh, lately was with dredge um,

D: But you hand (inaudible)

F: I hand (inaudible) them things. It was fun. It was nice.

D: Well, tell us a bit about that.

F: Well, my family, like my father, he had, he wasn't uh, a shrimper you know. He didn't start shrimping until the late forties. He was an oysterman. His daddy was an oysterman. They lived in, like I said over there in Bay St. Elaine like I talked about. And they would go there and they would fish oysters - it was all oyster time and they would live like that I mean that was their home. And they would go over there and they would fish oysters for maybe 4, 5 days, and they had a reef they called it, a cleaner reef where there were no oysters - and they had a cleaner reef, and after they catch the oysters, instead of leaving on boat - because the oysters were gonna die - every day they would go back and put them on there, and what they would do is to the drum big drums and leave the oysters out there. They would take some wire like all white and everything else and they'll make a fence all in the reef - something like maybe 50 by 50, 60 by, 60, something like that. They would throw back that oyster on that reef right there. And when they would get ready to go back to the market with it, they would go back and put the boat next to it right there, get the oysters up again and put them back in their boat again.

B: How 'd they deal with the (bigorneaux)?

F: The bigorneaux was a problem in those days. But anyhow they put that out and bring it to the market. They wouldn't leave them in long enough for the bigorneaux to damage them. They'd only be there for a week or so, you know.

B: I didn't know - I'm from up around Opelousas.

F: Well the bigorneaux - well what they would do with the bigorneaux is they would go to the other the reef and uh, what they would do is like, the time like March, April, May, that area right there they would take palmettos and they would tie them up on some poles and dry that in that reef. And then bigorneauxs they would climb up there and lay their eggs. So what they would do they would go out there in their skiff and they would pull the pole out and shake that in the boat and get the bigoneaux's out of there, and pull them on there so they could dry, you know. They weren't that stupid.

(inaudible)

D: If your family lived in Bay St. Elaine, would they, they survived all the hurricanes?

F: Yeah. Well those days it was a lot higher than what it is right now. Land done sank a lot. When I was a kid right here in Cocodrie - we're below sea level right now. We probably was about 4 feet higher there when we was right there and before all went down coming down and everything else, they started digging. Because my father - he was living over in Bay St. Elaine. And from Bay St. Elaine, in other words,

and then through coastal erosion and everything else and then hurricanes like he said, and everything else. So they moved a little bit further up. Which further up was probably 2 miles. It's called Bay (inaudible – French) It was a totally enclosed then when it was my grandfather's oyster reef. And it got the name (inaudible – French) because (French word) is a stick. And he had 300 sticks scattered in that pond. It was a closed in bay and all he did was cut a little bayou across it so he could go with the skiff and fish oysters in that area right there. And that's how he got his name if you look on the map - (inaudible) that's how it's got his name. And from there - they moved from there, and then a few years after again the hurricanes moved them a little further up, which is uh, just, you know again probably another 2 miles, maybe not that much you know. And uh, then that and then from there they moved to Cocodrie.

B: While we're on the subject of hurricanes, I've heard old folks along the coast talk about the signs. That they knew when a hurricane was coming. Can you talk a little bit about that?

They thought they knew. (laughter) Well it's – the only way they knew it was a hurricane, I mean it was there. So they really uh, you know it's - what is the uh, the answer well I don't know. It's just the idea that...

B: Well they believed they knew.

F: Yeah, They uh over there they just – it's just the condition of the weather, how it was and tide rises and everything else they know it's time to leave. But most of them you know, they stayed over here.

B: When they did leave where did they go?

J: Just, when they leave from Bay St. Elaine and they come to Cocodrie. Like the people from Cocodrie was used to leave and go to, you know, Chauvin. It's amazing how things changed, you know, through all the years. When I was a kid right here in Cocodrie we had about 400 people living here. Only got uh, lets see what we got right now, my nephew and his wife, uh, one of my cousins, and there's another friend of mine, four, you got five – you got about six people in Cocodrie that get their mail and, that I still get my mail in Cocodrie – I shouldn't say that. I don't really live here no more. I live in Chauvin. I used to...(inaudible). My wife lives in Chauvin, my family lives in Chauvin, but I live in Cocodrie. But anyhow that's how the system was in that area right there. And through the years with the hurricanes - people started moving further up. Just like water, people (FEMA kept moving them up?) Now if we had the regulations that we got today, if you wanna build, you gotta elevate your camp – if they'd have done that forty, fifty years ago, we'd still have a lot of people living in Cocodrie. The answer to that is, elevate you camp, hurricane comes, water goes underneath. In those days people had all small camps. And they're all almost on the ground, 2, 3 feet high. They put them when hurricane would come, well not exactly every time it would wash away. What they would do every one of them rooms, they would cut a hole in the floor 2 feet by 2 feet. When the hurricanes come, you just pull that floor out and the water comes in and the water goes back out. There was no insulation or nothing like in today's world. You know and that's how they survived through all of that. But people they moving going (inaudible). Some went to Houma and everything else. Now these people that are still alive wish they would've stayed in Cocodrie. Because they're in worse shape in Chauvin than they were in Cocodrie. But we would get a

hurricane in Cocodrie and you could come the day after the hurricane, you could come to Cocodrie - there's no more water. You got a mess – you got mud in your yard, but there's no water. When you get to Chauvin, Houma, stuff like that, it's all on the levee. Once the levee breaks over, you got a bath tub. It takes 3, 4 weeks before it dries up. So they're in worse shape being inside of there than they was outside of there.

B: So all the people that are – all the buildings that are over here - these are all camps for people?

F: Yeah. All recreation took over.

B: Right. And where the owners live mostly where, in Houma?

F: They all over there. Anywhere from Houma, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, you name it. Monroe, some out of state people that lives here. That got a camps over here.

B: Well we wondered about how many people actually live here. We were counting mailboxes coming down the other day.

F: Well a lot of people with the mailboxes down here are some of the, some of them that have the recreation camps that still get their mail over here. They'll come and they'll spend the whole summer down here, some of these people.

D: Do you ever remember hearing stories about um, the market hunters? The people who are making – it's legal to hunt?

F: Yeah.

D: We have – Carl and I found a reference that Chauvin was one of the largest producers of feathers for women's hats.

F: Yeah.

D: Well we haven't found anybody that knows anything about...

F: Well I can just tell you what was told to me and everything else. Before, I can tell you, before my time and everything. You had people from all over that used to come down with freight boats and spent time here just to go hunting in Cocodrie. People would, yeah. There was jobs because there was, I mean *beaucoup* duck in our area. And they would just come and kill it for the market. I've seen pictures I don't know what, through the hurricanes we lost, but I mean they had piles of duck. They had them hanging on their boats and you name it. But there was a market for it, you know. It's a funny thing – anything that's got a dollar involved in it - they gonna ruin it. Money corrupts people.

D: Well while we're on the subject, we're talking about things before your time – you hear any stories about people bringing whiskey in?

F: Yeah

D: During prohibition?

F: Yeah, during prohibition. Uh, this is a little interesting thing right there. They uh - the the place they used to store it was (Baudoin?) Island, which is totally gone now. They had people living there, oystering and everything else, at that time whiskey pass was a very small pass. And these people would come in, and they would go ahead and they couldn't bring it in - they'd hide their whiskey on Baudoin Island. And all these Cajuns around here, they would do all that and they would go at night and everything else and get all together with the people that were watching and everything else and they'd go and steal their whiskey..

(laughter)

B: The whiskey that was on the island – how did it make its way in?

F: By boats.

B: By boats? And where would they take it – to Chauvin, or?

F: well they would take it all over. All over and everything. You know. It was - my daddy used to tell me those stories – it was something else. Baudoin Island was the place they used to store it in.

B: And they'd bring it in from the boats off the coast?

F: Off the coast, yeah.

B: And it was the shrimpers that would go out and get it?

F: Well you had all these freight boats that was traveling all the time you know, I mean from all over the area that would come we had a lot of people that used to be like um, the - years ago they used to travel all the way from Mexico all the way to Spain – that's the area they would travel this area right here and really they would travel this area over here because there's an island we have, well it's not an island anymore but, which was called uh, Ship Shore. Which was a big ol' island they tell me, years ago, and you had your barrier islands over here which was pass – I it was a deep pass in between and there was a shelf that they get a lot of (inaudible) and ship shore itself is probably, by looking at the map of how wide it was and everything where the sandbars are and everything, it's probably 15, 20 miles long. That was an island right there. And they would come right there and that's where all the trading was made and everything else.

B: That's fascinating.

D: It is. When you talk about a freight boat – what kind of – how big was a freight boat?

H: they were not as big as what they sound like they was. You had some of them that probably were – I remember some freight boats in my day they're probably was you now 70, 80 feet long, you know. They were flat boats - they wouldn't draw much water and everything else. They had big cabins and everything else. What these freight boats would do and everything they would a lot of them freight

boats would leave from New Orleans. And they'd come down Bayou Lafourche and everything else, and they would bring a lot of the um, the groceries and everything else and they would sell the groceries to people on the canals.

B: Okay.

F: And a lot of times what they would do and everything you know these freight boats – because these Cajuns didn't have any money - and they would swap something back and forth for groceries and everything - it was all trade and everything.

D: Sure, Sure.

F: And everything else. And these freight boats would come and they'd go all the way to the island. We had the uh, like barrier islands we had the uh, used to have a bayou that would go all the way across - I hate to tell you all this stuff because it's grave for me in the future what I'm doing and working on. Ima tell you some of the stuff. Anyhow it's going to - you had that bayou all the way to Last Island. The whole island, which was the big island. Now you got Whiskey you got several that come all the way across. They had, and it would go across, that bayou, you had (inaudible) bayou, you had (inaudible bayou), that was a I mean bayou that was through the islands. Just like the bayou you had over here, but it was going through. But this bayou over here used to go all the way through. All the way, and you could ride that thing..that was again before my day – my grandfather told me that – that his daddy used to go to Last Island on horseback. Covered wagon and everything else.

B: Oh!

F: Yeah so there were some people all along the bayou and they get to the end...and then you got the bayou going through, and that bayou was taking up - the whole bayou goes all the way where we call Coon Point – but when you get to (inaudible) you used to call Village Bayou there's a village with a lot of people living right there and the um, when the French would call it Bayou de Village. And it would go all the way across from there, and then it goes back across and it would be land that goes all the way to Bayou (DeLord?) which come back all the way – there was all land that was there.

B: Well that's what I want to talk to you about before we leave today is about how this is changed 'cause that's it's amazing that I mean that you could go by horse, you said – even by wagon.

F: Wagon. Yeah. Even in my day now there was no wagon but I remember in my day is the land that we had in our area I mean you just had a - if you go right here across just a little cut they got past Cocodrie a little bit – it was – I mean you could you had and there was a small boat those days when that was made and you couldn't turn around if you were trawling – you had to turn around in the bay and then come back again. That's how narrow it was. And then we had the um, which we call Red Fish Island and everything else that was ...uh, well they call, it's called Pass La Poule - It was that area up about it was all land. People living all along that area. And the word Pass La Poule - it might even be on a map - the reason they called it - poulet is a chicken in French, and the neighbors that were living right here, there was a little (inaudible) that would kind of build across over there, and the chickens would jump over

that. That's why they would call it Pass la Poule. Haha That's why it's the name for that. And now well Pass La Poule and if you look from there where you go from one island pass, to where come around across, you got about roughly, of land right there, about 8 miles. That was completely gone. That's all water.

D: 8 miles.

H: And there were people living right there.

D: So there were people living south of Cocodrie?

F: Oh, more people people than were living in Cocodrie.

D: And you said there were four hundred people maybe living in Cocodrie.

F: Yeah. And in my time I was talking about in the forties and the fifties and all that, and the sixties, people started moving out after hurricane Audrey in '57 - that's when people started migrating a little bit farther. But still that time we had a lot...

D: Ya'll had a lot of flooding here?

F: Yeah we had a lot of flooding for - well we had not that much down because the way the camps were built, like I said, everybody had that hole in, and then water would come in and go back out, you know. The worst thing we got out of hurricane Audrey - I was young in those days and everything, you know - everybody had butane bottles, and that was a big thing. Where we got that. Was all of that floated away, if you look up there they got a bunch of trees gone, almost to Dulac over there - well that was, you know, you had to go back and pick up all these bottles and stuff..

(laughter)

D: Now how did you get butane? I mean you know

F: Well at that time we had trucks coming down and delivering at that time. That was in the fifties. We were living high class right there. We didn't get an electricity company until probably uh, '51, '52.

B: Rural electrification project. Okay. When did the roads come through here?

F: This road over there was - the blacktop- we had a little gravel road. When I was a kid it was a mud road - I remember you know what I'm ahead of my game, you know. When I was a kid, there was maybe two, three families that was living on this side the bayou - everybody was living on the other side the bayou. Everything was by boat. Where we sitting right here, there was a sugarcane plantation here. Out to the (??) sugarcane plantation, they were raising corn over here. You know , the other side of the you was the same but there was a little refinery which was before my day, that's correct.

D: A sugar refinery.

F: A little sugar refinery across the bayou right here. When I was a kid we used to go play out in the old building...part of the old wheels from the refinery and everything...right there.

D: Do you remember the Cordell? Is the Cordell something you remember?

F: No. I can't, remember that.

B: So there was a mud road?

F: There was a mud road. And then that ...mud road and then after that – well you could come I mean there was a again I don't you know I didn't - that was told to me and everything else..like the road would stop at Robinson canal. From Robinson canal coming down there was nothing but a dirt road. And everybody had cattle - all the people raising or farming or whatever they would do, but everybody's property they had a fence - a gate you get out the thing right there, open the gate, go back through, close the gate and come on down.

B: Hmm...there were some areas where I grew up it was the same thing.

D: So if you're going up the bayou, the first canal is Sevin?

F: Well Sevin canal is on the other side the bayou, now.

D: Alright and then its Robinson canal...

F: Robinson canal which is the uh, like the old bridge that don't open...

D: And then it's Boudreaux Canal.

F: Boudreaux canal, yeah.

D: And Boudreaux Canal was where the Indian Ridge....

F: Right, exactly.

D: And was that a big canning...

F: Yeah that was a big canner. Chauvin brothers was a big canner.

D: And the one thing that we're real curious about is the cans used in the canning trade. Now it'd probably be before your time. You had dried shrimp. And then they had canned shrimp. Do you remember when we started going from dried shrimp to canned shrimp?

F: Yeah. Well I that was even before my time and everything else, you know. But the, there was only one way when they started with the canned shrimp – that was a big deal and you know. Growing up. You know there was another way that you could get rid of your product. Wasn't just dried shrimp. In other words you had the canning plant. That's what all these boats were doing, you know, bringing up to Indian Ridge and by brother was canning it, and after they were canned, you know they would cure it.

And that went on – there was a lot of canning plants – but that started going sour in the early eighties. That’s when our price of shrimp started gradually – I mean it went sky high. And..

B: So that’s what put the canners out of business...

F: Put them out of business, yeah. What happened there – you could get imported shrimp at that time, canned shrimp cheaper than what they could put them in the cans. So, they didn’t even have the price. I remember well, uh, at that time, shrimp was like, a case of shrimp, huh, canned shrimp, was 7 for 42 dollars a case. That’s what it would sell for. And the uh, that’s our people - it would cost them 42 dollars to put them in the case, like 48 cans. The Chinese. When they started coming in with the canned goods – started putting them on the market like for 21 dollars a case. So they were putting them half the price what it was costing the people and they – I mean they have a lot of shrimp - ..so they lost a lot of money. They never could regroup that.

B: Um, what did um, would the cans, Mr. Foret, do you have any idea where they were getting the cans from? I mean, were they bringing it in from the east coast, something was made in Louisiana?

F: That I couldn’t tell you - I know it was all imported in but from where it was made I have no idea. You ‘d have to talk to some of the people that was in the canning business.

B: We thought maybe you wouldv’e...

F: Naw, I can’t help you on that. I remember all the cans coming in and everything else, you know.

D: Do you remember the term, ‘shrimp nickels’?

F: Shrimp nickels?

D: You know when, if the shrimp are peeled, by ladies sometimes children, they’d put in a little cup and then they were taken to a scale, and they were paid in the local coin. And there was some that said um, Indian Ridge Canning Company, some said Blum and Begeron, and it was like a nickel. And you collected those and local merchants like the store at Indian Ridge would accept those as payment. Have you ever seen any of those?

F: No I’ve never seen them. Uh, my day is they wasn’t using tokens. Uh, in my day they would use a little slip.

D: Hmm.

F: Little slip of paper and everything, they would give out a little slip of paper, you know, “x” amount of pounds of shrimp you peel and then you take that little slip and then you go in and they’ll pay you with that slip. They would doing to that right there just a little just like (inaudible) insurance. They take a bucket probably uh, you know, 2 gallon bucket, 2 1/2 gallon bucket and everything else and they were paid why a pound had so much per bucket..so you bring your paper to them , and you always have somebody – I did that myself too...would do that, you know. And you only had somebody that had one of them who would have the, like knock like a little, like a hole into your paper, you know. And every

time you give them a bucket of shrimp, headless, you take that and you popped a hole in it, and after they was finished all they had to do is count those little holes, you know how many buckets they uh, shrimp you had. Yeah. That's how they would – I remember that part. Which for the coins, though, I don't remember the coins.

D: The tokens, but the paper you remember.

F: I remember, yeah. As far as the, you know, just like when I was a kid, like across the bayou, the kids would get back to the shoreline - they had us if you go to Cocodrie toward the end they got one camp right there that still belongs to some family in Chauvin - well right there the Chauvins had a shrimp drying platform they had a oyster house, they had a fish house, and their grocery store was right there. I remember that well because I mean I was born probably within 200 feet of where that camp is at. I was born I was raised right there. And as a kid I remember we used to go over there and buy candies and cookies and whatever we wanted as a kid. We didn't have nickels – we didn't have quarter s- we had tokens. What it takes 5 tokens to get a penny – 5 pennies to get a nickel. Well I remember that – token was, again, it was a little round thing. It was made it was rust – it was a little metal and they had a little hole in the middle. And we could go out with tokens with two tokens I could get me a candy.

D: Do you remember the school boats? Were they very active...

Yeah they were pretty active. I never rode in them myself, you know, but I mean they were...they didn't - and over here another thing let me get back, um, right here, there was a little school house right there, and I'd go to school there, but before I was ready to go to school we had the road here so I could go to Boudreaux canal school. So they (inaudible) the school over there. Uh, right here um, where uh, (inaudible)'a at?

D: Mmhmm.

F: Right on the bayou was a building close to the bayou side there was a little school house. A red school house - where my uncle bought the building from the school board and he built his house in Dulac with that lumber right there.

B: Their boats - did they run with the putt - putt engines?

F: Yeah. The putt-putt engines.

D: Do you remember when they started putting the Model A? There was a Ford model four cylinder with a uh, flywheel, do you remember that?

F: Four cylinder, flywheel...oh yeah, yeah. Even before you had the, the, you know you uh the, old engines old four back engines and everything else...

D: And that would be called a gas boat?

F: A gas boat, yeah. Most of the people they had was you know some was called (inaudible) The other was called Fairbank engines. And these Fairbank engines had a big old flywheel. In fact, two double

flywheels. That's what gives it is power you know and, just turn that thing in and the flywheel would - the weight of the flywheel just keep throwing it on there so I could get a...

D: Putt putt putt putt putt putt putt

F: Yeah. Mhmm.

Interviewer: My father had two of those...

F: Hmm.

Yeah, those were some engines in those days. They left from there, then they went to, I mean, they went to the little bigger. They would come in with the Ford engines, the Model T Ford and everything, and then the 4 cylinder and everything else. And then from there they gradually grew up and they come back with a Fairbank engine which was a little bit more horsepower - these Fairbanks with the big flywheel - they were only three or four horsepower. Then they went up to like 20 horsepower, 30 horsepower, 40 horsepower - that was a big deal in those days. But you talk about, you know, how people use to work in that day, they'd say uh, when I was a kid - I remember that well - there was a guy he had a shrimp boat and he had a little model T, uh, truck - a little truck. He had a boat, and a truck with one engine.

B: He'd move it...

F: Yeah well he's go shrimping he'd take the engine out of his truck, put it in his boat, and he'd go shrimp. When he'd come back...

(laughter)

D: That's, that's doing it right. We'd go run over water, then we're just gonna run on land! That's - that's good.

F: During World War II tires was...you couldn't get none of what you needed and everything else. And he didn't have none - all he had was rims. ..And this rope tied around the rim and everything, and that was his rubber for him to ride on the road. It wouldn't that big of a deal - the road so rough, you know. It was a gravel road, so...

D: Now, did most of these people sell to either Mr. Picoult or Mr. Blum?

F: Yeah.

D: Alright so they were the largest...

F: They were the largest ones that they had right there. They were.

D: Do you remember people drying fish?

F: Yeah. I did that too.

D: Really?

Yeah. Not for the market – I just did that for my, for my own consumption, you know.

D: But you remember...

F: Oh yeah, yeah. They were doing that on, they were doing that with the same system that they do it with the shrimp when there was no shrimp - there's fish, and they salted them down you know, and salt them down for 2, 3 days, and they would get them back out. They would lay them out on the plat - some of them had string – put them on string. Others would lay them on their platforms. There was no shrimp, but here was fish, so they could work year round that way.

D: And who was buying the dried shr...fish?

F: Well a lot of the fish was sold again to the Chinese. Chinese would buy that. Mr. Blum's dad, Leopold and all that - they were all doing that.

B: Hmm. But it's mostly for the Chinese market.

F: Chinese market.

D: You mentioned the China baskets. Have you ever seen one?

F: Yeah I've seen that. I wish I would have one, but I don't have it anymore.

D: Well..

F: And I'm not sure check with Louis Blum – Skippy? They may have one at their place left.

D: Okay. Well can you describe them? What they look like?

F: They – they were made, probably in that big on top but pointed going down, you know. They were maybe that big on the bottom, but they were probably that big around on top you know.

B: And how much would they hold, about?

F: Probably hold uh, 100 lbs of shrimp,.

D: Wow.

F: But uh, I'm not sure, but I think Mr. Louis and them would have one out there.

D: Did you remember when you still had a lot of sail boats?

F: Some of them but it wasn't you know kinda got out of the way – well you still – they always had those, you know.

D: And did your daddy sailboat? When he had his oysters - when he went to his clean reef and he reaped all his oysters...

F: Yeah. That was all engines those days.

Alright, and then he...now where did he take those oysters?

These oysters would leave and go all the way to Batau Cheramie in Houma. All the way to Houma. That was a day's ride to go to Houma.

D: And he, and no bigoneaux, and he gets to Houma now what does he do- does he sell it in the bag or does he sell it...

F: No he sells it in bulk. He sell it - put them in baskets or when they were steaming oysters, in other words, then you would go ahead and pay them on the yield – whatever the yield would come out in the end.

D: So he wasn't putting them in sacks. He was just putting them...

F: They were all in bulk on the boat. It was all in bulk – they had to shovel them back out. When they get to Houma they would shovel them back. Either they were in baskets or whatever - they were all in baskets they had to put them in baskets to bring them to the steamer and everything, you know.

B: About how much – how many pounds in a load?

F: Well we'll have to go in to sacks - probably in those days, like 4 – 500 sacks, you know, 100 pound sacks..

B: Boat was pretty low in the water...

Yeah well you know the way they would load that, in those boats you had that much water in the deck. It was low – it was on the water. The cabin and that and everything else - they would uh, where that hole was that and everything else - they had boards that comes up probably 2 ft boards that for the cabin and everything the cabin was probably 2 feet above the deck and everything so the water was on the deck. The way the boat was made – not the whole boat was under water – what was made the middle of the boat - that was under water.

D: That's a lot of shrimp – that's a lot of oysters. And you're just , putt putt putt putt putt putt putt

F: Like I said, it would take them a day to go to Houma.

D: And where was the oyster dock in Houma?

F: It's uh, let's see if I could – they got all kind of buildings in that area, uh - right before you get to the Intracoastal bridge - when you get to the double bridge? At ...

D: In Bayou Terrebonne?

F: In bayou Terrebonne yeah. Uh, but the bridge uh...

D: The new bridge?

F: The new bridge, yeah where that double bridge is at...uh, if you'll be coming back from the west coming to the east like uh when you go over the Intracoastal right there you probably come maybe a quarter mile to your left – like a half a mile at the most – that's where it was right there. I'm trying to think what buildings they would have right there to give you an idea, I don't..

D: So it's...

F: On the opposite side of where Blum and Bergeron? On the opposite side.

D: Yes..

F: But hey also had a place around where Mr. Blum and them was at on the opposite side- on the opposite side of the bayou too right there – there was an ice plant and everything there was a building - there was another place right there. Batou was, like I said, just on the same side of where, like Skip and them are, but on the opposite side the bayou.

D: I gotcha.And then I guess he would get his groceries?

F: Yeah, you get every...

D: And then he'd putt putt putt back

F: Putt back, yeah.

D: And worked at least again maybe for a week..

F: Yeah. Mmhmm.

D: Okay. Hand (inaudible).

F: Hand (inaudible).

D: There wasn't a dredge.

F: There wasn't no dredge over there. There was all land.

D: And a small boat.

F: And a small boat.

D: About how big?

F: Well the boat I remember that he had was probably um, about 45 feet I guess.

D: Uh huh

F: It wasn't really- at that time it was a fairly good sized boat.

D: Yes

F: The, but the skiff they fished the oysters in was almost as big as the boat they had in that day. They had a – they used to have – they used to have a skiff and the skiff would probably was 30 feet long. And probably eight, nine, ten feet wide, and they would come into that boat right there..and they'd go out with their oysters and everything else..they also had that boat there loaded with oysters and the other boat.

B: And they would pull it behind...

F: Pull it behind, yeah.

B: Well who as making all the boats over here?

F: Everybody made their own boats. They had some people that were carpenters, but most everybody built their own boats.

D: Did you ever build a boat?

F: Yeah. I built a few boats. Small boats.

D: Wooden?

F: Wooden boats.

D: Cypress?

F: Cypress.

D: Wow. Hand caulked?

Yeah. Everything was by hand. Well we had skill saws and stuff like that but we all uh, it was all hand made.

D: Wow.

F: Biggest one that I built was 47 feet. I built that one in 1963. I built a few skiffs, small skiffs, you know, like 25, 30 feet- stuff like that, you know. For my own use - not to sell, you know. It was my own.

D: Now how did you - how did you figure out where to put, you know you, you come off your motor, you got a drive, and then you got the wheel. How did you figure out where to put the drive line through the hull? Did you just look at it?

F: Well you know you just look at it...know what size wheel you want to turn, so you go out about the size wheel - you want a low wheel, you got to direct the wire. If you want a lower wheel, you put a little bit more hang on the end, you know. We used to drill that - it was by hand there. We used a big old base you just put that there - and that was a solid block of iron, you know. Wood was used you know like , probably uh, well that was used probably 8 inch, probably by maybe 8 feet long, you know there wasn't many – but it was made on the wedge. And then you had to drill that hole...

D: You had to get it right the first time

F: It never was right. Never was right.

(laughter)

F: That engine never was that simple you always had it, you look at it...

(laughter)

F: They had people that tell you they had it right every time – they lied.

(laughter)

D: It was almost right

F: Yeah. It was good for what we needed for.

D: But it would get up on the step and run.

F: Well yeah. Well not the big one but the small one you had, like the Lafitte's type and everything else..

D: You built a Lafitte skiff?

F: Yeah. I built a Lafitte skiff, yeah. But it was easy to build that, you know, than everything else. It was a flat bottom and you know, not no beams and nothing like that, it was just flat bottoms. Those were little things.

D: Now when you built a Lafitte skiff you put an air cool motor or a water cool motor?

F: When we first started the Lafitte skiff we had a little engine, you know, we just had some smaller ones. As we got bigger, you know, we had the 25, 30 foot we were using big engines were using car engines in those days. Stuff like that, you know. Our best engine was the 350 Chevrolet, you know.

D: Oh!

F: That was our best engine.

(laughter)

D: A muscle boat. Haha. Yeah I was with a Mr. Billot? Uh, he worked for uh, (inaudible)... what was La Terre.

F: La Terre?

D: Yeah. Willie Billot. And Willie asked me to come with him- we was gonna go out in a lifette skiff. I'd never been in a Lafitte skiff. Well we were gonna go out in the morning. So I go to his house down uh, bayou Point au Chene. It is dark. I mean, it is dark. And he fires up the engine and he just goes. And I'm – I'm in the back going, how does he know? 'Cause you can't see! And he goes, and we're going real good,

and he kept looking at me and the sun comes up! And I stood up – I should've never stood up. Because then he made it go really fast.

(laughter)

D: And he got the biggest kick out of seeing me fall back feet in the air – and he just laughed and I said, 'What do you have in this?' and like he said a big 350, and he - it would run. He didn't want to catch shrimp - he wanted to out run 'em.

F: Yeah. You know we would build them light and everything else to make sure, I mean in today's world. I mean these skiffs are real modified stuff you have right here. All them fiberglass skiffs and everything else. Now they got all them big (inaudible), the big Caterpillars and everything else. But we were - but everything was light in those days. We would build them because - I mean it was something else, man. We growing up, man, we had speed, you know.

B: Well...(laughter)

D: Yes!

B: You going from a putt putt to a 350, you know.

D: Now, where did you get your (trawl?) boards? Did you make your trawl boards?

B: We made those or whatever, we...

D: Explain to us how you made a trawl board.

Well, it's hard to explain this. Let's say you, I'm gonna grab something like it'd be the paper right here. Just to get an idea of anything else. This right here. It's still...it would kind of look like this here. First we would do is take some board say we wanna make it this size here. We'd take some board some maybe some uh, 1 by 6 put it like this here, about 4 of them like this here. And we'd come back and put another board on top like this here.

D: Alright

B: Like this here, but we got our board made. Then we wanted to make you gotta drill a hole to put chains in there. So what we do with this thing right here is we figure whatever we have here – the length - we figure that – then we divide that by one third. And then, then that'll tell us where we're gonna go and put this hole over here. Then wherever you put this hole in the front right here, we go to the back and measure lets say we got 10 inches over here well we don't want 10 inches over here. We're gonna come out with 8 inches over here. Then we gonna come from the top fo them we come over here we gonna use 3 inches over here so we drill a hole here then we come back 3 inches and drill a little hole. Now on the bottom we do the same thing we got a you know we use a square – then what we do over here we just take it over here and we do the same thing over here. We'll come – we have 3 inches on the other one we have 3 inches over here. But we not gonna come 3 inches over here. We're gonna go 2 inches at the bottom. Just drill a hole right there and we put our chain. The reason - you could put the

same thing but you need less chain because you can't have your board pulling like this here. You gotta do like this here. So we kind of set our chains like this here. And it comes up with the chain, and that's what makes it open. If you got it too close, it'll stay like this here. So if you got it right - if you got too much then it's too hard to pull. So you gotta adjust ...

D: Mmhmm.

F: So that was, you know, everything we did we did uh, ourselves.

B: And there was also a lot of thought that went into it.

D: Yeah.

B: All this...

F: It's not what you think. It's not bad at all it's just the idea that - people don't want to tackle that, you know.

D: Now where did you get your wheels - 'cause usually those are made of brass.

F: Yeah brass, well in those days it was all brass. Now it's just stainless steel...(inaudible)..all kind of stuff. We would pick that up out of Houma, you know know, just...

D: So there was somebody in Houma...

F: Oh yeah. Houma Machine was doing that. They're still in business.

D: They would make what you...

F: Well, no, they wouldn't make the wheel. They would order it from other places, from - I don't know. And then, you know - you'll tell them what size shell you have and they come already (inaudible)and everything you know.

D: Alright

F: But they would come from other places. The place they'd come the most - they call them Michigan wheels - they come from Michigan.

D: Okay. Alright.

B: And what about the nets, Mr. Foret? Who um, you bought your nets or did people here make them?

F: Well, we always made our own nets, but when I started making that it was easy. Because you could go buy your...whatever amount of webbing you want. Already made you know. If you want you know most of them come 200 mats deep and whatever inches you want, and you just cut your net whatever shape you want to make your net. But before I started, you would go buy some string and just it wouldn't roll it was just string would come and you had to take the string and a needle and started with a needle and a

string. And you had to make all these holes. You had to make everything. And then after it was all made you had to go back and re-cut it. So it was time for them – time consuming.

D: Now did the men do that or did the women?

F: The women and the men – both of them did that – and the children.

D: And the children.

F: Everybody was there doing that. They'd just take – it was made out of cotton. These- they wouldn't last you had to dip them...

B: Well that's what I wanted to ask you about..

F: Yeah it was all cotton webbing. And they wouldn't last at all. I mean you really had to take care of them. I mean you had to dip them...and you know.

B: Dip them in what?

F: In tar....it was mostly tar in those days, and then you cut it with gasoline so it wouldn't be too thick. But then you had to watch you know, if you put them in the sun too long before you use it, the sun would burn them. So they – it was a mess. Then all of a sudden nylon comes in. That was, I mean that was a blessing that.

B: About when, do you remember when that change took place?

F: To nylon? It changed to nylon in the mid 50's. By the mid 50s it changed to nylon.

D: So you seen, or at least heard - may not have seen but you heard – when you went from sail vessel to a 3 to 5 horsepower what was it...

F: Fairbank.

D: Fairbank engine, to a model T to a model A to a Cummings diesel.

F: Oh yeah.

D: Is that fair?

F: Cummings diesel yeah.

D: (inaudible)

B: And eventually Chevrolet 350.

F: Well the Chevrolet was before the Cummings and everything else.

D: Wow. Mmhmm.

D: And, and, and what what kept you doing it?

F: Well that's the way of living, you know, around here. It's the way of living. Nothing else you could to.

D: But you've enjoyed every minute of it.

I enjoyed everything, yeah. It was – it was a blessing for me – it worked out good for me, you know. But uh, you, you had to work. I mean there was no such thing as not working, you know. I mean if you wanted to work you could survive.

D: And wouldn't you say that's true today?

F: It is –

D: I mean if you want to want to work you...

F: If you want to work you're gonna survive. But as far there was no job – you could find something to do.

D: Mmhmm.

F: And if the government would stop giving all they give away, you'd have more people working.

D: Mmhmm.

B: Well Don was talking about the changes that you've seen Mr. Foret – one of the things I'd like to ask you that, to share with us is how the land here has changed. You were talking about you know, people living in places that are open water now, you people you know the land subsiding can you tell us what you've seen in your lifetime?

F: Well – again if, there's so many different ways of it. Number one they blamed everything on when they rerouted the Mississippi river. Which I think it had a lot to do with it and everything else. But we had coastal erosion before that. But when they rerouted the Mississippi River and everything - closed bayou Lafourche and everything else like that...but then the oil field comes down here. They cut canals all kind of ways. There was no environmentalist telling them what to do, you know. If they felt like going to dry land and cutting a canal, they cut it right there. They didn't worry about nothing, you know. They just went over there and cut it. And the first thing you know I mean they just – it exploded to that, you know? And the one thing that I that I can say that they did by cutting the canals and everything else...it made a more place to raise seafood. We didn't have the amount of seafood – now it's starting to decrease – but in the 30s and 40s and all that even in the early 50s we didn't have the shrimp that we got today. People say that's (inaudible) they didn't have that much shrimp in those days. People had a hard time making a living with that. People thought making money selling shrimp – 1957 was the first year people can say in the state of Louisiana that they made money. After that it got better – as all these canals opened up changed your way of current and everything else. It made more estuaries everywhere – so it helped the shrimping and the fish the crabs it helped them tremendously. But now we're starting to see the backside of it. We're losing all our estuaries. Now all of these levees that they built - this is all

good. Don't get me wrong. They're caught. They've gotta do something to protect the homeowners and everything – but these levees right now is good. They gotta do that. But all that's gonna backfire one day. I may not see it, my kids will see it. What's gonna happen – you gonna have salt water – you gonna have fresh water. No more brackish water left at all. Without brackish water – you would not have any kind of seafood. But you need that brackish water – that's where all our seafood are raised at. And that's coming.

D: Mmhmm. Now, did you ever trap?

F: I did a little trapping, not enough to – when I was young and you know I had to try something , you know. I wasn't good at that.

D: Well the reason I asked...

Those animals are a lot smarter than me.

(laughter)

D: The reason I ask because you know when the trapping season, entire families would go out on a lease and trap you know, November December, January, February, so four months they were out. And that was when there were a lot of neutras...

Yeah.

D: ...and a lot of muskrat, there was alligator, and a man could make a few nickels. Particularly during periods like the Great Depression.

F: Some of the people made some serious money trapping. The rat was money those days. And they were catching a lot of rats. The (inaudible) rats. Neutra they didn't start catching neutral till the mid fifties over here.

D: Okay. When - when families went out there, Mr. Foret – about what percentage of the population are we talking about – let's say the like Cocodrie here.

F: Well the people from Cocodrie here wouldn't go no where else. They'd trap right around here. People from other places Chauvin, Houma, stuff like that - there wasn't a big percent of it. To say the percent – I couldn't say the percent. According to the population in those days and the population you have today – it's different ball game. It's hard to say, you know.

B: Well it's just to have some idea because there's nobody out with a beam counter saying you know and people like us really are grappling with it – trying to figure out just how many people went out into the marsh to trap in those days.

F: Well like I said, Cocodrie here we probably had that would trap local around here – wen Cocodrie was a lot of people and everything else - you probably had 20 people who were doing the trapping.

D: Okay

F: It's about all they had that were doing trapping. Then like in Chauvin and everywhere else you maybe had another 40, 50 people that would, but they're the ones that would go to camp they would have camps in the marshes and everything.

D: Mhmm

F: Well They – like it wasn't the percent they have – most people think it was.

B: Mhmm. Well..uh, I think we're just about, uh. Out of questions here.

D: But you've been absolutely wonderful.

F: I hope I've helped you some to...

D: You have. The one thing we'd like for you to think about, um, one of the things that the three of us are trying to get a hold of is if you've any family photographs or anything like that, that you would like to share - if you'd let us know we'll come and put it in a digital format. You keep you originals. Because Katrina, a lot of people lost their family albums. And all of that is important. We're more than happy to do it if you had...the other thing we can't find are early labels – we know that there were canneries but we can't find the labels.

F: Ya'll went to some of the canning plants?

D: Where?

F: Ya'll went to some of the guys that was doing the canning plant?

D: Uh, I don't know..

F: Because they could tell you or help you with something like that. And he's also in the dry shrimp business. Raymond Authement out of Grand Caillou – he has High Seas. He's still – that was his daddy was doing that – his grandfather was doing that and everything else...I would say if ya'll had time...give a call to him and he would be more than happy – his name is Raymond Authement. His grandfather was in the business...the business he's got right now is for his uncle. He took it up from his uncle ...it used to be called Terrebonne Canning. They still got the big warehouse...and he probably still got cans and he could tell you where the cans come from, from that point right....

D: Raymond...

F: Raymond Authement. And he lives in Grand Caillou. And the name of the company is called High Seas.

B: Okay. We're gonna do that.

F: And he can tell ya'll because his grandfather was one of the guys – one of the biggest they had in the dry shrimp business over water. He had a huge shrimp drying platform at uh, Point au Faire over there.

D: Um, where is Point au Faire?

F: Point au faire is the first set of land you hit uh, east of the Achafalaya River.

D: Alright. But was it on, on Point au Faire or was it at one of the bayous that go through Point au Faire?

H: Well it's in – ...(inaudible). The bayou (inaudible). You're coming from the gulf it was right there.

D: Okay. And it was a big platform?

H: Oh it was a big platform. It was his grandfather that had that - old man Alfanse Authement.

D: Alfanse. Alright.

H: You know what track back into the...I was gonna get to that when I was gonna get to the canning and everything but it was up the...but he's – and I'm sure that it's in that warehouse that they have cans. And they have labels. And they probably still have the machines that made the labels.

D: mhmmm. okay.

H: We're gonna make our way out there.

D: We're gonna go out there.

H: Because he's – he's the last one that's left - in Grand Caillou there used to be a lot of them there – Jesus Christ they had – I mean that one right there you had the (Lapelle packing?) company, those are the ones that invented the peeling machines. There are - that plant is still out open but it belongs to uh, Paul (inaudible) out of uh, Lafitte. Uh, some of these - somebody had brought that in. Some of these boys still run it for them. Uh, they may have still have some cans, I think. But I know for a fact - still the building is there I mean...Raymond's got a warehouse by I don't think anyone's gotten to that warehouse.

D: Hmm.

D: What's gonna happen to Cocodrie?

F: My prediction for Cocodrie - When they finish with all these levees they want to build – Cocodrie's gonna be history. When the hurricane comes from the gulf, wherever the water comes from – once you got all these levees – Cocodrie's gonna be history. Where can the water go besides this way here? I'm not saying next year. Ten years, twenty years - it might take fifty years, I don't know, or more, you know. Hard to say. But Cocodrie's gonna be history.

D: Hmm.

F: That's what I always say - it's too late now. If they would've never built any levees in our area, we would've been in a lot better shape. They started with the levees – and they cashed out now. They cashed out. I mean and I'm sure ya'll see what I mean. Even when they build a highway they want to elevate a highway. That's the levee – they stop the flow of the water. I mean look at New Orleans and everything. Even in Houma. They got levees. Where they put a levee there might be a 5 mile area that's

on the levee. Where the water goes? They gotta take the water and put it on somebody else's property. These guys right there they got it good Now when the water comes out here, I don't care how much pump you put on the levees- you will never pump the water that that rain's gonna give out. And that's the problem that we have in this world. And today I mean they have to build levees to protect because they screwed it up. Man screwed it up. Man created that problem. It's not mother nature it's man that created that problem.

D: So you're born in Cocodrie, worked in Cocodrie, and reluctantly live in Chauvin?

F: Yeah.

(laughter)

F: But when I built in Chauvin, well um, I just moved to Chauvin myself just a few years ago in fact then I got out of ...I got out of the shrimp business in 2000 I turned it over to my kids. But at that time I used to live ...right here. Camp right there. That was my home. You know I had a house where my family was raised in Chauvin there I'm a build another house in 2000, but I built it a little further up in Chauvin but on the opposite side by in between the bayou and the road but what I did – didn't go up on pilings – I pulled 400 loads of dirt on a slab but I am...like this last – like Hurricane Katrina and all of that stuff.. and Rita and everything else - I could've gone another five feet before I get water in my house. So I - I was bron and raised – I knew what water could do you know. And then it comes to put the elevation and everything you know – when they started and everything – I told them to see that the blacktop road right there - where it goes this one here –I said, throw a line on that thing see how high that is. So he said even with that road right there. I said, I'm gonna go a foot and a half higher than that. He said, why you wanna do that? In case we get a surge of water I don't want that to hit that levee over there. I don't want it to come back in my house – I want it to go right on through it.

D: Hmm. Good thought.

B: Yeah.

F: I mean – eventually one day you will have it, you know. But I mean it's gonna have to be a real, real major one, you know. You never know with that. Just like where we're standing right now when Cocodrie was high - my daddy told me in 1926 there were hurricanes, and they had 18 feet of water over here. On the ground..

B: For the hurricane

F: For a good example, maybe you don't know about it – you go on back toward Houma, when you get to the Texaco, four miles, right before you get there on your right there's a little cemetery there – the St. Louis cemetery

D: Mmhmm

F: That used to be the Henry family right there. They drowned in 1926.

D: The Texaco on the right, not on the left?

F: Texaco is on the left – and the little cemetery's to your right.

B: Right across...

F: Right before you get there.

B: Alright.

F: It'll be on the bayou side. They got a little fence, see they got a blue house right here. Uh, fence right there, but you see the crosses and the cement and everything else.

D: Hmm.

F: And I'm a tell you a little story about that. The woman and the three kids was there. Old man Henry – he was an oyster fisherman. He passed the hurricane over water when he was fishing oysters. He didn't come in. The people that worked in Cocodrie that would go over there they stopped – they said uh, "Look, I'm gonna pick you up, and we gonna bring you up." "Oh no," he said. We can't, I can't go," she said. "When My husband comes in and he finds out that I rode with another man she said he's gonna beat me." She said, "he's a jealous man." The woman and the three kids stayed right there and they all drowned. They picked them up on the other side of Lake Boudreaux over there that's where they floated to. But they could've saved those people's life.

B: Hmm.

D: Yeah well the hurricanes are a story in themselves. You know, 1919, 1915, uh 18...yeah. There's a whole series that played an important role in the history of Coastal Louisiana.

F: Yeah, it's something else what it does. But like I said if they could've saved these people's lives but, in those days that's how people were.

D: Mmhmm.

B: Well, we appreciate your sharing your time with us this morning. This is really really great, Mr. Foret.

F: Well I hope it helped...

D: Thank you Mr. Foret, you were very good. Now we may give you a call if we think of something later on...

F: No problem! Feel free to call me anytime

D: It was very very fine.

