

## Sellers Interview

Interviewer: Carl Brasseaux (& "Judge")

Brasseaux: Let me just make sure this is working...Um, we have a form from LSU that they would like you to sign saying that it's okay for them to use to information...it's not a money-making proposition, it's simply for research purposes so that people will know what life was like. So is that okay with you? To record you for this?

Sellers: Yes. It's okay with me.

B: Okay.

S: It's okay [Judge]?

Judge: Oh, it's okay with me! Yes sir! Um, like I kinda said, I'm gonna be in and out, is it okay ever so often if I kinda pop in? Because I love to hear Mr. Red's stories.

B: Oh, by all means! Please do join us and pull up a chair if you've got time.

J: I might even come in and ask some of my own questions while he's here if that's okay.

B: Oh sure! Absolutely! No, we'd love to have you.

J: Maybe I can start off—because I have a doctor's appointment in a couple minutes, you know—

B: Sure! Sure! Well go ahead and start it off.

J: I haven't seen the eye doctor in about 15 years and my eyes are startin' to tell me--

B: It's time?

J: You need to see the eye doctor! Hahaha.

B: Well I have reached a point where my arms aren't long enough so—

J: Well that's kinda where I am! And I can't find my glasses often enough! I'm gonna have to get one of those things and tie 'em—

S: [INAUDIBLE]

J: Well I got a pocket but uh—

S: I got some—

J: I've had some trouble keeping up with glasses.

S: No pocket.

B: Mm hm.

J: Mr. Red. All right, at the club. When did you start working [over me]?

S: In Spring of '37. April.

J: 1937. So the clubhouse had been there...'37...'24...13 years. The club had been there for about 13 years when you started. I mean they didn't build it—you didn't help 'em build it.

S: I helped 'em add to it.

J: Add to it, yeah. When ya'll added to it ya'll brought carpenters in from outside?

S: Mr. Ben [Bearcurn] from [Pecorn] Island.

J: Mr. Ben [Bertran] from [Pecorn]—and what about the plans? Did ya'll have a set of plans that he worked from or—?

S: Mr. Mark told 'em what he wanted done.

J: Uh huh. You think Mr. Mark had some plans that they had sent from Chicago?

S: None of 'em [offered] the boss at that time.

J: Yeah. Okay.

S: I don't know why he got the plans, if that's how the people wanted if he wanted to just to add room, or...

J: Uh huh. Now, what did you remember—when you first went to work there, what was there? What buildings were at the—?

S: Well all the buildings were there.

J: The Annex was there?

S: Yeah.

J: Yeah? The Annex was there?

S: Oh yeah!

J: So the Annex was there by 1937?

S: Oh yeah, the Annex was there. They called it the ladies club!

J: Uh huh.

S: It housed the women that would come.

J: Uh huh.

S: And their husbands, you know.

J: And did the women come very often?

S: Well they--there were some that would come pretty regularly. The women loved that camp.

J: So the buildings that you added onto, I'm gonna guess, were the big club and the guide's quarters?

S: Yeah.

J: Both of those were added onto? But the—how 'bout the office?

S: No.

J: No, the office was always kinda like it is?

S: All we had to do was repair—square nails in there.

J: Uh huh.

S: Now, I'm asking these questions because you know we lost the guide's quarters in Ike and I've got some guys that are coming out and trying to help us figure out--well they're studying how it was put together because that's a different type of construction than the way they build things today. And as—we're trying to make plans to lift the big club. And when we lift it, I told 'em, I said, "It's been through three major storms, but it's always been underwater! I don't know what the wind's gonna do to it! I need you to come tell me when we pick it up, 10-14 feet in the air, if it's not gonna blow apart.

S: I don't wanna be involved in—

J: AHAHAHA.

S: Uh uh. Uh uh. I can't guarantee that.

J: Oh I know. So these engineers are looking only at the big club. Okay? And they're very impressed with the way it's constructed. Well what we're seeing is it looks like the original construction was board and baton. Like the warehouse was when you and I were working out there together. When you went out in '37, was it board and baton and you put the siding—that asbestos cement siding on it later? Or was that already on it?

S: On what?

J: On the big club and all the buildings.

S: Yeah.

J: You helped to put that on there? So when you went out all the buildings were board and baton type of construction? That's what you remember? Okay. And on the inside, in that the Annex was there and all the buildings were there, these guys are wondering how they built that. Do you remember when ya'll built the addition? And it's gonna be interesting to see if the addition is built the same way as the original construction. It looks like they took all these boards and laid 'em side-by-side and nailed 'em to a 2x4 or something top and bottom and then stood the wall up. You don't remember?

S: I don't remember.

J: I don't either. Okay. 'Cause the engineers were just--they were amazed and puzzled and they said, "Now how did they do this? And how did they join it--?" And what it looks like was done, was the walls were put up, and kind of very tentatively tacked in place and when they put the roof on, the roof locked everything together.

[?]: Interesting.

B: It is interesting.

J: It is very well built. They were amazed at how well--

S: What is amazing to me is that boat shed.

J: Yeah! Still standing!

S: Standing over the canal! And it's 2x4's and it's still there buddy.

J: Now—we—there were some iron beams on the outside. Do you remember adding those?

S: Oh yes. Oh yes.

J: And I think we've added a couple more since then. But just to hold it up, you know?

S: [We'll have to push a dead man out there to hold the] bulk heads. Did ya'll ever rebuild the bulkheads?

J: We have, yes sir. We've rebuilt the bulkheads. I'd love to bring you out there but it's--once we get to yard cleaned up after Ike. I wanted to bring ya'll this winter but it was so depressing I didn't want you to see that.

S: Well, not only that, I'm not solid on my feet too much.

J: Well, but we'd get one of the big boats and get you comfortable in there. We get it lookin' good and you still kickin', we'll get you out there. I promise. You and Miss Lilly and Mr. Ivy and...I wanna do that. I wanna do that for ya'll. Um. And the plant. We have a building we call the plant where we had a generator and they made ice out there.

S: They made ice out there—they had a set of batteries—[you nice] batteries. They furnish electricity. There was an old, big old engine that you get on the wheel to start.

J: Uh huh.

S: Run the [cord on it].

J: So before we had the gas that came from humble, the plant generated the electricity for all the buildings? And before [Slim Co.] came.

S: Yeah.

J: And ya'll had to haul coal oil out there to run that?

S: Yeah. And then we got some generators. Originally the generators were in the shop.

J: Uh huh.

S: But then we built some cement forms and put 'em up in there so they'd be a lot stronger than [INAUDIBLE].

J: Uh huh.

S: Well yeah we had put the lights out at 9 o'clock but...

J: Oh yeah, that was the rule, huh?

S: Everything was tight.

J: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Uh...well let's see...And ya'll dug the pitcher pond? The pond out front of the Annex and the big club?

S: Yeah.

J: Now remember ya'll had told me ya'll dug that with shovels by hand, huh?

S: No. That was--

J: No? That was with the draglines?

S: There was a drag line and we filled in, you see, there was a slope in front there, was a low bridge, there was smite--

J: The slope was where?

S: From the building you see the ridge, there's a marsh would stand in front of the guide camp and see the rabbits come out to feed there along the rows.

J: So that was marsh? Fell on the north side of the road?

S: Oh yeah. They were right there in front of—between the canal and the yard.

J: I'll be.

S: Yep.

J: Were they right outside the yard, right now, the rat beds?

S: Well I'm glad they didn't come in back...

J: Oh yeah, muskrat? You can stand up there and watch them, even during the day. You can watch 'em moving around.

S: That's something to see.

J: Yeah. Uh...well, I'm gonna...uh...

B: Not a problem. We'll be sure you get a copy of this.

J: Okay.

B: And please, by all means, do—whenever you're here, you wanna sit in, just come on in and pull up a chair.

J: Well good. Well, just pour your heart out, whatever you remember Mr. Red, they—it's gonna be good for historians and it might even be good for us, I hope, we can learn a lot from it.

B: It's a win-win situation.

J: Yeah. Yeah. Okay well good luck and ya'll have fun, that's the important thing.

B: Well we had a great time last time!

J: Well good.

B: I won't speak for Mr. Sellers but I know we did.

J: Ya'll want some coffee? Mr. Sellers? There's a pot of coffee—

S: Not for me.

B: Okay thank you.

S: I drink my coffee in the morning and before I go to bed and that's it.

B: Well. I'm gonna start by asking you again, Mr. Sellers to give us your full name and the day you were born and where you were born and your parents' names.

S: I don't know exactly where I was born but I came from [Calwallan]. My mother probably came to town for the birthing, or you know, in those days the doctor would go to the house—

B: Right.

S: So I can't give you that exactly but I came from [Calawalla].

B: Okay and what day were you born on?

S: October 5th 1917.

B: And your parents had—I think your mother, you said had lived originally on Chenier-Ortigue.

S: Chenier-Ortigue.

B: Okay. And your dad was from the parish also? He was from [Cal Walla]. He [was a redhead].

B: Uh huh. And I told you, with the recording the first time, the machine didn't work and we missed the first couple of questions so the first thing I wanna ask you is to tell me again, the story you told us about going from Chenier-Ortigue out toward—on the beach toward marsh island and about all the oysters out there and the amount of oysters they used to have in Vermillion Bay and around Marsh Island.

S: There were oysters out there—Oyster Bay, as a matter of fact, you could—I had a cousin that was raised on Chenier-Ortigue and when I'd go over there we'd walk over towards Marsh Island at the Point and we'd see the oysters or whatever and we'd bring a jug of water and an oyster knife and get barrel full of oysters, just walk right there and pick out all the oysters.

B: But, according to the maps we have, apparently there were a lot of reefs all the way from the shoreline all the way to Marsh Island and maybe even beyond Marsh Island.

S: Oh yeah. Beyond. There were, for about, oh yeah. Charlie [Moshimike]. They say that later they leased those oyster reefs, the Duprees had a reef, Charlie [Moshimack] had a reef, my grandfather, [Polan] LaPlace had a reef. Pole LaPlace was the son of Polan.

B: Mm hm. Now they were leasing when you were young and were going out there? They were already leasing those lands?

S: Yeah.

B: And they'd go out and [tong] them, I guess, to—

S: They'd tong 'em.

B: Mm hm. And how would they them—I would assume they were shipping them to Abbeville from there?

S: [Of it], they'd put 'em on his oyster boat. They all had a boat and they'd load that boat and they'd bring 'em in.

B: Now, the oysters, I'm guessing, for the Duprees were going to the restaurant. But what about—?

S: To the restaurant. The restaurant was open at that time.

B: Okay, now what about the—you talked about the others who were your—was it your grandfather, you said?

S: My grandfather was on that side of the bridge, you know, just past the bridge it was—[throw 'em] on my back, he was an old switch that married one of my grandfather's sisters. And he had the store and sold the—

B: He just sold through his store locally?

S: No, no, no! He sold them from his shop!

B: Ah. And where would they ship them? To Abbeville?

S: Well I don't know where they were shipping them at that time.

B: Mm hm.

S: Sold locally.

B: Mm hm.

S: [Nicolette Duh]. I can remember that.

B: Times have changed!

S: Oh yes.

B: Um, the other thing I wanted to ask you about was you had described cutting a three [nos] through the marsh grass. Can you tell me again how you used to—what you used to use and how you used to cut a three [nos] through there.

S: Well we'd stomp 'em.

B: Uh huh. Did you use a bed shovel at all, for—?

S: Well we used a bed shovel for one—we made ditches between Promising Lake and the levee. We'd get out there and one on each side, scoop a bed shovel like a hole and clean it off.

B: But to cut the—to clean [hoss] you would just get out and walk it then? Is that?

S: Oh yeah.

B: Okay, well the next thing I wanna talk about is the cattle industry and we—because where I grew up, we grew cattle and so that's been a personal interest to me. And you were talking about the Millers and how they have cattle drives. Now, the cattle drives would start in the Grand Chenier area? Is that—?

S: Yeah, we'd start over in Cameron.

B: In Cameron. And that would just run them along the beach?

S: Run them along the beach.

B: Now, as far as Chenier-Ortigue?

S: Oh yes.

B: Mm hm. Now, one of the things, when I listen back to our conversation, last week, one of the questions I had that I didn't think to ask you at the time was about fresh water. When they're driving the cattle along the beach there, where would they find freshwater for the—?

S: Well, I guess it was the streams that were flowing [rigole].

B: Mm hm.

S: And they'd get by a canal, they'd drink, you see?

B: Now, when they got the Chenier-Ortigue area, there were ponds out there?

S: Yeah!

B: Or where would they get fresh water?

S: [Sand] Lake and things like that. They called Sand Lake back of the MacElainey property between the Michael Henney and the Lockes.

B: Mm hm.

S: That was the channel that would go out of Chenier-Ortigue would come from Sand Lake, it would [grain] that area of the marsh and then my grandfather had a boat on a stand, you see, and he'd go Lake Author or Morgan City or [over easy] to get supplies or lumber or whatever.

B: Now, how big were the herds that they would drive, do you have any recollection of about how many head of cattle they would normally drive?

S: No I have no idea, sir.

B: Okay. Uh the—

S: It was—the families would get together and they'd lease that land—

B: So they'd all pool their cattle together and drive 'em?

S: They'd pool the cattle and drive 'em.

B: Mm hm.

S: At one time they were swimming across the Calcasieu River over there to Cameron, you know, and they'd cross that big marsh and all of that. [Sonno Sero] was in charge of that, he was the sheriff when my son went to work for the Sheriff's department. At one time he would work for Union Oil. Had [the camp] up there. He'd make my Nell's spurs and he'd come out the shop and work 'em out. I got to know him pretty good and when he got to be sheriff, he gave my son a job.

B: Mm hm. Now when they got to this area, they had special areas that they would keep them?

A: Yeah.

B: I mean, were there higher ridges where they put them when they—?

A: Well, it was livable up in that area.

B: Mm hm. Just generally speaking?

B: Now Judge asked me to ask you to tell me about an area called "The Stump."

S: The Stomp. That was Union Oil. Before you get to the camp. There was a ridge that ent all the way to Pecan Island. When they'd work the cattle over there, hell! That one time those cowboys would bring their wives and kids, they had those old Model-T's. They'd drive 'em all the way through the Stomp in [Marlatese].

B: Hm. So the ground was high enough for them to—

S: Yeah, at that time before they blocked it off with canals.

B: Right.

S: [Grueling] Canals. Oh yes.

B: That's amazing.

S: It is.

B: Now, they would keep horses? You said they would go by Model T out there. They would keep horses out in the sun—

S: They did. The men would ride the horses.

B: Oh I see. And the families would go in the—

S: The families would go in the old Model T's.

B: I see. Um...back in the early 1900's and the late 1800's there were cattle drives that would come from Texas all the way across and sometimes end up in places like

Abbeville where they would put 'em on cars and ship 'em off by train. Was any of that going on after you started work?

S: No, no. I never—I worked—I wasn't familiar with that.

B: That was before your time?

S: My daddy told me many a time what they'd do. They—from kinda on the way, on the way to [Caplan] there's a house out in the pasture over there? Big house. That was my great-grandfather's home. Matter of fact, he was living [with] his son there [little bitty cell]. But his name was [Camille] and there was my daddy, [Ory], Remy, my grandfather, and David were his sons and my daddy was one of Remy's son's. And they—and one of the times, what they'd do is drive those cattle across the forked island over there and turn 'em loose in the woods for the winter. He said there was some [feathers] in there and that prairie grass at that time.

B: Well that's interesting; they still had them as late as that! I know that they had them as late as about 1880 around Lafayette but it's interesting that they were still around that late over here too. Now when they would drive to cattle up into the Chenier-Ortigue area, was that just on a seasonal basis? I mean they keep them there during which seasons, Mr. Sellers?

S: Winter.

B: In winter? And then where would they drive them when summer's start?

S: [Brand] 'em in the fall and bring 'em back in the spring.

B: Okay.

S: Because the mosquitoes got too bad.

B: Right. But where--when they left Chenier-Ortigue that went back to the Cameron area, or—?

S: Oh yeah.

B: Mm hm. Now what about branding? When—do you have any idea when they would—?

S: Well, whenever there was a pen at Pecorn Island. Or they'd brand 'em at Mulberry. But...when I was mixed up with it, they were branding at Pecorn Island instead of [Roll Rosenville] and they'd drive 'em on through.

B: Mm hm. Um...the—you talked about them just turning the cattle loose. Were there still any kind of predators? Animals that would attack the calves? Uh back in those days? Were there still coyotes or is that something that has come back?

S: When I retired, the wolves began to come in.

B: Mm hm. But earlier than that they was nothing like that that was attacking the cattle?

S: No. Not at first.

B: Okay. About when did they start coming back? Do you remember?

S: That I don't know.

B: Mm hm.

S: Uh they evidently followed the beach. Well yes, there was several killed. Matter of fact, the—our guests the people that own the stock today, they'd come hunting and I had told some of the [Michael Henney's] from New Orleans that there was particularly one that had a toe missing.

B: You could see it on the tracks?



S: You could see the tracks. On our roam, because wolves hadn't been here and I said, "Okay." So one night, they walked out the camp for [mating] and they cut through the yard, either tracing a deer or something, and next morning [man thought water rat] and next morning he said, "Well was that what you was talking about?" I said, "Yes." "Well," he said, "You right."

B: I worry about—are there still bears?

S: No. Not that I know of. Never have seen a bear.

B: Okay. Because at one time, back in the late 1800's there were still bears in this area, from Abbeville on down, I was just curious to see—

S: Oh! There was a bear caught at the White property at Intracoastal. He'd come across some Live Oak. That's that bank over there.

B: Right.

S: At the White property and he—the corner Mr. Dave White, patched a corner across the edge of the marsh there and they caught him alongside the road. I had a white [INAUDIBLE] bear.

B: Mm hm.

S: I forget what year it was but there was one caught.

B: Um. I wanted to ask you a couple of other questions about cattle, Mr. Sellers. When you were little, the cattle that were here were just a mix of whatever could survive in the marsh area. Did people at some point make an attempt to bring in something like [Herfords] or Jerseys or something?

S: No.

B: There was never an attempt to do that?

S: Not until I was grown.

B: Mm hm. About when did they try that? And I'm wondering just how successful that was.

S: It was. They'd bring 'em in for milk. Milk cows.

B: Right.

S: Uh...But the Jerseys didn't do in the marsh.

B: Mm hm. And what about the whitefaces? Could they handle—? Because I know some people in the northern area would have a problem—

S: They were short-legged. You know, broad and short-legged. The first ones didn't succeed all that much but after they got bred and mixed with Brahmas and one thing and another, they survived. They did well.

B: But it just took time.

S: Oh yeah.

B: One of the problems that the newspapers report back in the beginning, about 1880, when they first started reporting about the settlements in this part of the world, up through the 1920's is that whenever there was a hard winter lots and lots of cattle died out here. Was that still the case? Say from the 1930's through the 1940's?

S: Well, the—when you had a freeze here, in those days, it stayed frozen for a week. I've seen 'em go to the—seen 'em get the heat from the water. You know, it was warmer than—and they'd get on the edge of those levees and slide. Their feet would

weaken and it would--and so then they'd get in that cold water...and [get in there and they'd survive].

B: Right. The carcasses I guess were just left for the buzzards when--?

S: That's it.

B: Um, one of the things that the newspapers report pretty often too, is the outbreak of [Shatterguan].

S: [Shatterbon].

B: Uh, how—was that a frequent thing when you were little?

S: Yeah. Oh yeah. People had uh...sometimes it would clean them out of their work stock. Like mules, you know? They'd dig a hole like there and just dump 'em—the carcasses in there until it was over with. Then they'd stop it up.

B: Mm hm. Now, how would the people treat it? Because I mean, people get anthrax too.

S: Yeah.

B: So what would they do when a person came down—?

S: Well, uh, [our soul had mulberry], they didn't have doctors. And they treated themselves. They'd heat a knife, and cauterize it. Burn it off.

B: Mm hm. Well, that at least meets a question I had earlier about how people would treat themselves. Because, where I grew up, you know, out in the country there were no doctors, you know, before—I guess before about WWII so what would people do to treat illness when it popped up? I mean, did they go to a “treateur”? Did they get—find some kind of plants that would help fight the disease? How did they treat disease back in those days?

S: That's right, we had treateurs in those days. We had several good ones.

B: Uh huh. What kinds of things would they treat? I know my wife's grandfather treated sunstroke but I know people—

S: Uh, I had a sister-in-law that would treat for bleeding. I had an old cook at the camp that went fishing and he broke a—he had a pint jar, you know how—that net, it broke in the bottom of it underneath it aluminum boards and he stepped on it and that thing was on each side. I had to take my fingers and break it open, you see, and after it was broken naturally it wouldn't hold it anymore and I couldn't very well take him to town because he'd probably have bled to death. So I knew my sister in law, she lived back in [Moor] over there, could do that, and I called her. It was amazing. Another time I castrated a cat for one of my uncles in Intracoastal City and he was one of these guys that finds something to fuss about all the time [random], and so I called my sister in law, stopped it right there. That made him a pretty [cap] he bled you know.

B: Mm hm. Now, what about plants? Did people go out in the woods—?

S: Well, there were some plants—[“ouion dalis”] they called 'em. That was something that was very strong.

B: And what would they treat—

S: [INAUDIBLE] whiskey.

B: And what would they treat with that?

S: Oh...everything.

B: Hahaha!

S: Everything they thought it was a good [as shoes] taken with swig...yeah.

B: When did they first--when did the area get its first doctor? I'm talking out to Pecan Island...

S: Well—

B: Or was there ever a doctor?

S: Oh yeah. Chenier-Ortigue had a Dr. Sagrera they called him. Matter of fact he had married my great-grandmother. She was—she married to a LaPlace and she had that family and my grandfather. And he had property at Chenier-Ortigue, don't ask me how, or what, but they owned—they still own—the biggest part of Chenier-Ortigue. And he treated—he was a doctor. And over days—I don't know how much education the man had, probably experience mostly but, oh yeah.

B: Um, one thing before we—well, two things actually before we change subjects. Um, back in the early 1900's the state passed a law that saying that people raising their cattle had to dip their cattle in those vats to fight the tick. And I know it caused big problems in a lot of different places. Back home, in my parish, I know they arrested—or at least brought charges against hundreds and hundreds of people because they refused to dip their cattle.

S: Dip their cattle.

B: Was that still going on here? I mean were they dipping people?

S: Oh! we had an old jury that called—I lived with my grandfather and I had the rain over the call and throw in the rights.

B: Now, how would you do that? How would get it in? You put it in chute and force it?

S: In a chute.

B: And just force it to get in the—?

S: Yeah. Oh yeah.

B: Now how often would you dip a cow?

S: I forget if it was a month or—it was so often, you know.

B: Now, people were pretty good about following those rules here?

S: Oh yeah! Oh yeah. It was at that park...Como Park over there, he had it along side the road going to the back, you know? When you go into the park.

B: And everybody used that?

S: Everybody used the vat.

B: Mm hm.

S: They tried to say that cancer today was caused by dipping cattle. I wanna ask you something. Why didn't the calves die? They had to [circle] those pits and naturally that would be [ripping off points] for the dip. How could those calves survive? I don't know of any calves that died.

B: Do you know what actually they put in the dipping vat to kill the ticks?

S: It was dip. They called it dip and I know it was strong enough. I had a buddy that lived on Chenier-Ortigue, He killed three horses. He didn't cut his dip enough and they—he thought he was gonna wash 'em off with that solution so that that winter hair would come off and they'd come out slick. Those horses walked—oh I doubt if they walked a mile from his home down to the woods.

B: And just fell over and died?

S: Yeah. It burned them to death. That was strong stuff.

B: So they would get the stuff already mixed to put it in the vat?

S: [If they didn't have] a five-gallon can.

B: Hm. That's interesting.

S: Yeah.

B: Now, I know—I had interviewed the widow of a Mrs. Leon Packer. He was a veterinarian.

S: A veterinarian.

B: And he used to fly down—or she used to fly him I think down to this area to—

S: I don't know who would fly who would fly who but when I was a kid I heard talk of a Leon Packer.

B: Okay. Were people still using vets here in the 30's during the Great Depression and WWII?

S: Oh yes. Oh yes.

B: They'd come in from Abbeville or...?

S: Uh...and I knew 'em. But I can't remember. I'm sorry.

B: But they would come from Abbeville or [Capybara]?

S: Well there was one living here.

B: Oh there was one here! Okay.

S: And then we had a vet that came here after the war. He lived over there next to two [fellows' shop]. His daddy was a priest. He [would sit by us] at church there. You know, overseas they couldn't marry, I mean they...yeah.

B: Hm. Well, I'd like to change the subject just a little bit.

S: Okay.

B: And talk a little bit about what people did in their everyday lives. Because that's the kind of thing—unless you tell us, people are never gonna know. But um...well let's start by...lemme ask this question. Just how important was the family?

S: Oh the family was right there. It was it.

B: Mm hm. And what kind of things did the family do to keep those bonds? To keep the family strong?

S: Well every time we needed something or something we'd help each other.

B: I know where I grew up people grew cotton and when somebody was sick and they couldn't bring in the crop everybody—

S: Ooooh yeah.

B: in the neighborhood would get together and bring it in. Was that kind of thing going on here?

S: Oh yes. My brother in law, Johnny Vice, he had a neighbor, [Key Not Cro Vy], you know everybody worked together. Well he ruptured [penac] one year and he couldn't work. Johnny and his sons went and [bought] up his land and harvested his crops. Oh yeah. That's one special case I remember.

B: Well, that was a common thing where I grew up. Now, families back home would get together every weekend, especially in the wintertime, for Veillers. Did families do that?

S: Oh yeah! Hell! When I was a kid I can remember they'd come, they'd call it a [gadabotage]. Cotton in the last harvest, they'd save and throw it in a room and then the neighbors would gather and pull it out, and save it—

B: A [Gadapeutage]!

S: A [Gada potage].

B: I'd never heard of that but that's interesting. Uh, and they just visit and--

S: That's right. Made candy and drank [popen].

B: Now, the kids would help out with this too or was it just—?

S: Well, if they were big enough, they would do small [red. They'd stick a doggone ear on]—

B: Sure, no no, I've picked cotton so I know what you're talking about. Well people would—I know where I grew up and when there was a Veiller, people were always telling stories.

S: Mm hm.

B: Was part of it here too?

S: 'Course yeah.

B: What kind of stories would people tell each other?

S: Well, what...some things that some didn't wanna hear...I mean [you hear 'em] tellin' on somebody else or something like that--there was always a rascal in the bunch.

B: Now would they tell stories about times past or--?

S: Times passed. Oh yeah.

B: Um, do ya'll still have Balle de Maison?

S: Oh ho ho yeah they did! Had no dance halls. I can remember on the way to Intracoastal there was an old house that was a good-sized house—it was "Sorbette", they called it. I forget what the name is, but anyway, Pete Noel was a rascal. Him and Clyde Chory, at times they'd meet up, they had to fight. And they'd come in, [Sorbette] would crawl under the dance hall. They knew he was gonna do it, so he wanted to get out the way, so he let 'em have their fun.

B: Well, let me start off by asking you—because the people who are going to be listening to this will have no idea what a Balle de Maison was all about. Can you tell me about how people would go about organizing it? Where it was held—?

S: Well, they'd meet up at a certain place. An old building, or—

B: Would people take turns having it or was it always the same place?

S: Well, they—whenever—some places it was, like this place where [it's all bread dance hall like]. And other places—

B: It was just at a house.

S: The next time they would have it at my house.

B: Mm hm. Now how would they get the word out to people in the neighborhood?

S: Oh everybody would either go to church, or—

B: Okay because where I grew up, usually they would name one of the kids and say, "You tell everybody we're gonna have, you know, a balle samedi au soir," you know.

S: [Touson].

B: So people would just meet at church more or less, here, and get the word out?

S: Well, the word would get out. I mean I was in the marsh over there and I knew the price of fur. We'd meet up.

B: Well that's um—okay, so at the Balle du Maison how many people would normally show up over here in—where you grew up?

S: The closest neighbors anyway. And then their kids, you see.

B: And they would chaperone the girls?

S: Oh yes.

B: Now can you tell us a little bit about that? Now, the mothers would all sit in the room.

S: Oh yeah.

B: To supervise.

S: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

B: My grandfather used to tell me how, when he was growing up you were never alone at all with a girl. You know, if you walked with them there was somebody ahead of you and somebody behind you.

S: I was jitterbuggin' in...I forget if it was Thibodeaux or Houma...Houma I believe it was. Anyway, I met this girl at one of these [INAUDIBLE]. We [would eat], you see. And a young fella had to try to get close, she was sittin' in the dark in the back room over there, but she had a straight eye on the front room. Oh yeah. I'll never forget that.

B: Now, who would play at these things? you talked about—

S: The local—you had people that would play. Uh I had a brother in law, Orville White, and as a Jewish-er he's got a little joint just before you get to the bridge.

B: At Forked Island?

S: At Forked Island. Yeah. He--these guys would get together, you see—

B: Okay, well, lemme ask you, you said there were some guys who would get together, What kind of instruments would they play?

S: They'd play either an accordion or [T5], they'd call it--

B: Mm hm, sure. Triangle.

S: And water board, a guitar, all that make it go so we could stomp.

B: Did you ever hear of a musician named Bascum Muteau?

S: I heard so many, I don't remember.

B: Okay. Now, the reason I ask is, a lot of people who played said they learned from him and apparently nobody—

S: Well yeah, everybody learned from somebody else.

B: Right.

S: Just like the kids that learned from their daddy, or uncle or somebody. Oh yes.

B: Um, when you went to a dance hall, do they charge you to get in?

S: No. Oh no.

B: Just whatever you brought to drink over there.

S: A lot of times there was no drinking.

B: Well that's what I wanted to ask you. At a house dance, I know in my part of the world, you weren't allowed to drunk inside at a house dance. You had to go outside.

S: You had to go outside.

B: Was it the same thing here?

S: Oh yes. You couldn't drink here. At Chenier-Ortigue, when I worked over there, there was an old lady what made the best wine. She'd make Muscatine wine here or

get the kids to pick 'em for her, would sell it up at 20 cents a gallon. It was good wine. And it—I had an old buddy other there named Tom Foster. He'd hide his wine in the mesquite, see? And but they'd watch him and—

B: They found out where it was? Hahaha!

S: And he was a crippled man but he [ordered shrimp] were there. That man could pick up—an old crook or whatever when they wanted to change the tire he picked the damn thing up and...it was done right now. Or they would lock the wheels, you know. Didn't have to pick it up and straighten it out.

B: Now, the dance halls back where I grew up were pretty rough places. Was that true over here too?

S: Yeah. Especially over at Forked Island.

B: Why do you think that is? Is it because people coming in from different areas?

S: Yeah. People wouldn't intermix in those days, you know? If a stranger would come they didn't want him to Tomcat around their sisters or the girls.

B: Mm hm.

S: Oh no.

B: So there was—there were a lot of encounters there? I know there was a lot of violence where I grew up and very often somebody ended up getting stabbed or shot or something.

S: Mm. There was a fight all the time here, mostly.

B: Uh was there—? Back home they'd hire somebody to serve essentially as a...well, a bouncer I guess or constable, that's what they call 'em sometimes. Did you have that here too?

S: Yes.

B: Try to keep the peace and the...

S: Try to. We didn't care for...especially once somebody would get hurt.

B: Mm hm. Um...you talked earlier about the news spreading Mr. Sellers. Just how much were people up on things like state politics, national politics?

S: Oh! [Couzan Dur], man. He'd let you know.

B: So people--how did people get the word here? Did they begin to get radios and the 1930's?

S: Well whoever had a radio, it was open door.

B: Okay. So people would visit to listen or they'd just—?

S: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

B: Now these were I guess, the battery kind of radios? The battery types?

S: At first we had batteries.

B: That was—

S: Matter of fact I had—had the cam working at the camp and I had an old--you had one of these [INAUDIBLE] that big and a box of wine and you know you fit in the bottom of your [INAUDIBLE] already go a little bitty thing in those days. And I had one over there. That's how we heard about Pearl Harbor.

B: Ah! Now, you listened to—what kind of programs did you listen to? Because I know they had all kinds of—in addition to music, I assumed you listened to music too?

S: Well...there were certain programs that we would miss.

B: Okay. Well tell me which ones you would listen to.  
S: Goodnight Dove.  
B: Okay. What other programs did you listen to?  
S: Uh...  
B: Did you listen to things like Amos and Andy?  
S: Yeah things like that.  
B: Okay. And which stations were you catching out here?  
S: Mostly Lafayette.  
B: Okay. Because I know there were also clear channel stations you could get. There was one...WWL in New Orleans had--  
S: WWL was one of them.  
B: I knew there were a bunch of Mexican stations that would come in too but there was one--there were some from Texas I think that would clear channel and would come through here.  
S: Well hell, could catch anything over there—  
B: Whatever you could listen and get—  
S: We'd get whatever we could catch.  
B: Mm hm. What about music? Did you listen to music at all? On the radio?  
S: Uh...Anything for a pastime.  
B: Mm hm.  
S: Because sometimes I'd stay over there for the whole weekend by myself.  
B: Mm hm.  
S: See, somebody had to stay over there for the insurance.  
B: Well, I can see where a radio would be a nice thing to have!  
S: That was the reason I had it and I was a singer, you see? All of the others wasn't gettin' enough money to buy a radio yet...supply their family.  
B: Mm hm. How long would a battery last Mr. Sellers?  
S: Oh, those big batteries! They would last maybe 6 months. 'Course they lasted--I had to work I couldn't listen to the thing 24 hours a day.  
B: So when it died you'd trade it in at the store?  
S: No. Oh no! All you could do was throw it away.  
B: Oh okay.  
S: No way to charge it.  
B: Oh.  
S: But you didn't [INAUDIBLE].  
B: Well, speaking of buying things, where did you go when you needed something? Where did you go? To the store?  
S: Locally.  
B: Locally, right. Where would you go though, to find—?  
S: There was a store—it was my buddy—next to the railroad track where Abbeville Hardware is at now. It was [Dulas Mars] at that time. Yeah, first started working at Landry's store where the Black's—where the Black Restaurant is right now. Uh, that's where he started working for [A. O.] Landry. And then—  
B: So you'd come to Abbeville to shop?  
S: Yeah.  
B: And how would you get here? You'd come up by boat on the—?



S: On boat. Had to come up by boat.

B: Um...the uh...stories back around my era when people were growing up, they talk about during the depression about people making clothes out of flower sacks. Did they do that here too?

S: Aha! I had—an old buddy would make me some shorts out of flower sacks. [My aunt] feed sacks! He'd buy shirts. Oh yeah man. I was brought abroad Mr. Donahue, here, came out one time and we got a bunch of saw grass got in there. So I stripped and I had big ole flour, you know, and he didn't say nothin'. But "What the hell man." That's what I had to wear!

B: Mm hm.

S: Hell, I wore 'em. Shirts too.

B: What...I assume there were stores at Pecan Island and places like that for the locals. What kind of things did they carry in them? Just general dry goods, or--?

S: General things. Yeah we had [bring in] several [guns on an airboat] Mr. [Pete Dice] used to run the boat.

B: But it was still worth your while to go to Abbeville to shop?

S: Well, uh, I live here, you see. I had an [INAUDIBLE] that I'd come to Abbeville one weekend then I'd go to their house and—

B: Ah okay. Okay, well that—

S: [INAUDIBLE] [made his own] like the fella says. [Deserved to be with her]

B: Mm hm. Um...lemme ask you about this—about what people ate Mr. Sellers. Now, I know that there were seasonal differences and you ate things—whatever was—what was in the garden and—

S: Yeah, being grown, oh yes.

B: Now, what about wintertime. What kinds of things did you all eat in winter?

S: Well, they canned. These old women knew how to can stuff. We always...like we'd grow potatoes and put 'em in a mound, cover 'em with dirt, or put 'em in a "Potato House," they'd call 'em.

B: Right. Um do you all salt meat over here?

S: Oh Jesus Christ, yes. Oh yeah, we call out a porky a day. And you bring a big old—had a meat market right there at the red light where they—they had that theater there on the corner in Abbeville where on that side that's big old [INAUDIBLE] and we'd bring 'em up [with] our jar and fill it up with some [mush], you know, and [salted] meat.

B: Uh, do they seal it here with—back home they would melt lard—

S: Ooooh yes. Seal it.

B: And put it on top of the seal to keep—

S: Oh yes, the sausage, salt meat, and everything else.

B: Okay.

S: But yeah.

B: Um, what about boucheries? Did—?

S: Ooooh yes.

B: Now, back, home people—you usually had so many in neighborhood and they would each take a turn. How did it work over here?

S: It worked fine. I [was into there] there [over] there in Rice Cove. You go [catch] special for--

B: Mm hm. For your turn?

S: Oh yes. Yes sir. It was on a Friday I believe it was here. And...

B: Now, back home, sometimes they had people who instead of giving a calf would serve as a—would butcher the calf. Was that the same thing here or did people just take turns butchering the—

S: Well there was a certain place we'd bring the calf and butcher it there. Then they'd partition the meat.

B: Okay. And everybody would just come and get their share?

S: Yeah. We'd get together and butcher it.

B: Now, would people cook some?

S: Not necessarily.

B: Okay.

S: But in the country boucheries, they cooked. Oh yes.

B: Okay. Okay. Because back home they generally cooked and I—Okay, lemme just check on this...

[TAPE STOPS AND RESTARTS]

B: Okay Mr. Sellers, we're back. Let's see. Uh, can you talk a little bit Mr. Sellers about what people—I know back where I grew up, people did things on a seasonal basis. Every season they had certain things that they had to do and I assume the same thing was true here, even though it was quite different from where I grew up. Can you tell me a little bit about what people did? I guess let's start with the spring. Things that they had to do and it had to be done in the spring.

S: Yeah. You...thank you very much.

B: Thank you [Andrew].

Andrew: I figured by now ya'll's throats might be dry.

S: This is sweet.

B: Hits the spot, Mr. Sellers? Now see back home, People—you know, there were certain times when you had to plow, certain times when you had to build a fence, certain times when you had to do this, that, and the other—

S: For fences, you build fences any time because that old bull across over there and he's coming through, but...

B: Well what did people do here in the spring, Mr. Sellers that they only did in the spring?

S: Well usually, they'd have these cattle drives.

B: Okay.

S: [Brought 'em back], [INAUDIBLE]. And we'd grease up the traps, things like that. It had to be done. Because if you just let 'em rust in a pile...

B: You couldn't use 'em again.

S: No, no.

B: Now, when the summer came around, what did people do here that—I realize if you're working out in the marshes there it must be a huge problem with the mosquitoes and the gnats and everything else.

S: Well, in the spring we had the—like Judge was saying—the big building had a...oh hell, the chimney was as big [at] the logs, so we'd have firewood for that chimney. In the spring we'd use a cross-cut saw and build smoke and chop for the kitchen so—at the guide camp, we'd put it in with [rot], you see?

B: Right, right. So you couldn't leave it there for too long?

S: No.

B: Where would you go to find your firewood?

S: Well, we had to bring it in from Intracoastal.

B: Okay.

S: Mr. Mark, he didn't believe me, he'd taken off for Good Friday [INAUDIBLE] fireworks on the barge and he got rough [INAUDIBLE].

B: Hahahaha. Ha! Um. Okay. Well now, when the fall came around?

S: In the fall we got ready to hunt and trap. We had to clean out those [train houses segway to the blind]. Oh it was busy then.

B: Mm hm. But not as busy as in the winter, then, I assume. Winter was—

S: Well it was more busy because had to please outside people.

B: Mm hm.

S: People we work for.

B: Right. But they would come in--when would the people start coming in from the outside—?

S: Well when the huntin' season opened in October/November.

B: Well that's a little earlier than I thought it was so that's in October when people started coming here to hunt ducks. And how long did the season run?

S: Well it ran through January. [Thirty] before February. But January was—in those days you could hunt ducks...[11 or 25 and already had ducks]. It wasn't like it is now: you got no more ducks.

B: Mm hm.

S: But it's not only that, [that the more feed]—you know, it's—vegetation's [overlooked].

B: Mm hm. ...Now, did--People, I assume all had their household gardens?

S: Oh yes. Oh yes.

B: What kinds of things do you remember them growing, Mr. Sellers?

S: Squash, ochre, cucumbers, tomatoes, radish, and...the generals—cabbage.

B: Mm hm. Did they grow turnips here too?

S: Turnips! That's what I was trying to remember to pronounce. Oh yeah, Hell! We'd turn up a levee over there in the canopy and [INAUDIBLE] several seeds out there...we had turnips and mustard the whole year.

B: Um, while I'm thinking about it, the newspapers talk about people at Grand Chenier growing watermelons and shipping 'em at one time. Do you remember them ever doing that? I don't do that but I remember that people had a track alongside the road, they grew that corn and—oh yeah, those old-timers...Each one of them had a [INAUDIBLE]. It plowed that airport a mule.

B: Ah!

S: Yeah! It was little bigger than a golf course.

B: Well that's interesting. Um...you talked about—last time we were together, you talked about schooners coming in along the coast from Abbeville. Do you have any recollection of who was operating those schooners Mr. Sellers?

S: No. I remember the [Jo Be Chav].

B: Mm hm.

S: It had a paddle wheel—

B: Paddle wheel! And I actually have a picture of that.

S: I knew the old man that operated it.

B: Hm. Well, according to the newspapers there was a time when some of those small boats actually came out into the Gulf and went up along to coast here, and brought goods from Abbeville to some of the coastal communities.

S: They did that and they run moonshine.

B: Oh! really?

S: Yeah. I read an article not too long ago—"I'm Alone" was one of the boats.

B: And in fact, that's probably the single most controversial episode in all of prohibition. And it started I believe just off Marsh Island or in Vermillion Bay.

S: I remember, uh...

B: Do you remember hearing people talk about that?

S: For sure. I worked for a man that operated one of their boats.

B: Oh really? Well tell me how they used to—

S: They all flowed. They'd go—

B: No, what kind of boats were they off-loading to? I mean these were little fishing boats, or—?

S: Yeah, anything that they could—

B: Anything that would float?

S: Or ran. And they knew the entrances, you see. Oh yeah.

B: Um, well, lemme ask you about this because there is a newspaper article in the Abbeville paper about—right after the "I'm Alone" incident, they found a boxcar full of liquor in Gadon that had been apparently taken off the boat and moved inland, and they put it in a rice dryer and then eventually moved it onto a boxcar. And somebody on the railroad smelled a rat and—but, you have any idea where that liquor was going?

S: No.

B: Okay, I was just wondering if people—

S: They didn't know.

B: They didn't know themselves?

S: No no no no.

B: They'd suspect the people that—

S: It was a job.

B: Right. No, no, I understand that. It was a good-paying job according to the—

S: They'd give 'em so much or they'd give 'em a case of whiskey or something that [had their old fix].

B: But they—do you have any idea where they were going? You said they brought the boats in, I mean was there...I'm just curious because that's we don't really know about the whole story right now, is after it was taken off the big boats, put on the little boats, where it ended up inside.

S: Yeah.

B: Because we know they brought 'em up the bayous and the back ways and all of this, but where it ended up is...

S: I have no idea.

B: Okay. Um...back home not many people were caught doing that and I wondered if there was the same thing here. Not many people got—?

S: No, there was a case for several young boys the age of my son for unloading...there was a barge was dope was unloaded here. [INAUDIBLE] local boys, two or three of them went to their parents, but...it was responsible people that owned the barge and supervised the damn thing and these kids went to—

B: They're the ones that went to their parents.

S: They're the ones that went to their parents and then their name was never mentioned.

B: Mm hm. Well, unfortunately that seems the way things usually go. Um, was there any trade with Galveston back from WWII that you remember? Because earlier in the 1900's there were still boats that came out from Galveston over here to trade.

S: Uh, I heard my grandfather talk about that. He went up there with his...And it's odd, I went swimming in that canal there. That water would drain that out before a storm stopped up the entrance, you see? And they would run their own [edge] to Chenier-Ortigue and you had some big oaks up there. I guess that's how they got settled because those people were looking for timber to repair their boats or whatever and they seen those oaks growing there and uh...

B: Um, do you remember—was there any activity after you started working for the Vermillion Corporation in the upper part of the parish where people were draining lands? You know, was that still a big on-going operation?

S: I mean...

B: In the parish—the lower part of Vermillion Parish, I mean.

S: Yeah.

B: Before WWII people were still actively draining?

S: Yes. I can remember when I was a kid, past where I lived man, you'd look out there and you would see it was gray with ducks, it was still a "Coulée Baton" they called, that comes on through. Well they cleaned all of this out now and they drained it, they're draining it and there's a girl even, forming the marsh out there.

[INAUDIBLE] and the lockes.

B: Mm hm. Now, they were using steam pumps or gas-powered pumps? What—you remember what they were using to get the water off?

S: They were using these suction pumps to—oh yes. Matter of fact, one of the Sagra's brother in law—Isaac's brother in law, he slipped and he got caught in the suction. He drowned down there and they didn't know what was the matter. They stopped the pump and dived down there and pulled him out.

B: Hm. So these were big pipes? ...Um...when we met last time, Mr. Sellers, you talked to us about people going to work for the oil companies as soon as they could because of the amount of money that they paid. Um, do you have any recollection of when people in the Pecan Island area and areas like that started working for the off-shore oil companies? I assume some of them—I know—well, that's why I'm asking, did

they do that, because I know in other areas, people started working offshore, they'd do that for so many weeks and then they'd come back and do something, you know, work the land, on their time off. Did people over in that area, the Chenier-Ortigue, Pecan Island area begin to do that also?

S: Yeah, they worked. But they got—they worked pretty regularly here.

B: Mm hm. What do you mean by that, Mr. Sellers, that they—?

S: They were employed.

B: Okay, right, but this—14 on 14 off and that kind of thing? ...Okay. Um, when--you told me last time that you had worked for the Vermillion Corporation from '37-'87. Now, in all those years that you were out there, how many times do you remember a hurricane coming across the Cheniers?

S: Well, there several there but we didn't notice them as Hurricanes. They were just bad weather.

B: Right. But how many times do you—I mean, we're talking about several times that the water came across the ridges?

S: Yeah, oh yeah. There was a...'57 I believe, right?

B: Yeah, Audrey.

S: Audrey.

B: Right.

S: And there was intervals.

B: Mm hm. But there were other times too, not just—?

S: '40. There was that there in '40 and—

B: Well, I wanted to ask you about that. If '40 had a tidal surge too or if it was just—I know it was a lot of rainfall but there was a tidal surge also?

S: Well we had plenty of water. That was the last time my daddy was out there. We had the line back up the packing plant, the Risner Packing Plant, there?

B: Yes sir.

S: You know, and uh...walk on, we had a water tower [race] and he had kidney stones but they didn't tame his kidneys enough because he never could come back.

B: Well I'm sor—Um...and you think that aggravated it, Mister—?

S: Yeah.

B: Walking through the water like that?

S: He should have been operated but his other kidney couldn't take it, and in those days people didn't give kidneys. So I could have given a kidney probably, but we didn't know about it.

B: Mm hm.

S: I think about it often now, I supported my daddy and mother for 12 years. He had--[each stage of suffering]. His fingers all got...

B: Um... I think that's really about it but the one question I wanna ask you before we stop, is how—when you work in the marsh like that, how do you deal with the mosquitoes and the snakes and the gnats and everything else. For somebody not coming from the marshes, who didn't grow up in the marshes, I'm just—it's curious to me how you're able to deal with that.

S: Sometimes I'd find 'em between my feet; I was just a fortunate man. I seen one of those storms, I believe it was before Audrey. You'd open the door, there'd be in the top of the door, stretched out in the crack—you'd open the door, a doggone snake would fall to the floor, or you'd take a shirt, you'd have an [unopened] shirt, there'd be a [pot pan] would be in the pocket, you had to—well, your shoes, shake 'em out! Because, you know, they'd hunker up.

B: And what about the mosquitoes? How do you handle that?

S: They bite. That's all I can tell you.

B: You just let 'em bite or did you all have something that you—you made something—?

S: We knew at that time—there was nothing much—citronella or stuff like that, here.

B: Well I just wondered if ya'll had made something yourselves, some kind of natural thing to...You just let 'em bite?

S: Bite. We had hide.

B: Mm hm.

S: It was tough. They still didn't bite too much, I mean they didn't bother us too much; it was a damn deer fly more than he'd give it to you.

B: Well, I've been bitten by those so I know what you're talking about.

S: Yes sir.

B: Well Mr. Sellers, I wanna tell you how much we appreciate your time, and your sharing these memories with us! Well I guess 100 years from now when somebody's listening to this...what you share with us is the only way they're gonna know what life was like for you and for people of your generation.

S: Well I guess your gonna have other people that can explain it to you better than me because I'm not that much a of a speaker—

B: Oh no, I doubt that Mr. Sellers.

S: Uh...well, thank you. Thank you for that—sharing with me.

B: No sir, thank you! Uh..let me just—

[TAPE ENDS]