

Shane: Veterinarian in Lafayette has a small cannon that was dredged up out of the Teche, so he says and I don't know if it was used on a plantation to announce the steamboat showed up or when a steamboat announced it was showing up or if it is a Spanish era cannon, but he has them in his office there on

Carl: That's interesting because I don't remember them actually sending a cannon out here. They sent muskets to the militia but I don't remember seeing in the correspondence any

S: I think it looks like a swivel gun really, it might be like this long and um C: Somebody may have had it on a boat (laughter)

S: I have a picture of it, but who knows

D: Are we ready to go?

C: I think we are good to go.

S: Alright.

C: Okay Shane, let's see if we can get all the equipment (loud noises) S: Okay

C: Wait, wait, there we go

D: feedback, volume

S: Jenifer Rider went to interview my dad on Friday

D: Mm hmm

S: for a project she is working on

C: How is your dad?

S: His health's not that great but he is still working, you know

C: How old is he now?

S: 72, yeah. I interviewed him and Johnny Allen at Vermillionville for one of the lectures and it actually went really well. Dad didn't want to do it but I think he got a big kick out of it because you know he acts like he doesn't like hearing from fans but he really does, you know so. It was the same thing about being interviewed you know, he acted like he didn't want to do it but I know he enjoyed it.

C: Well great. Well what we would like to do today is Shane for you to give us an overview of the McIlhenny family's conservation efforts. You know just a desolation that we can preserve for researchers, it is a great introduction, I think, that's what we are looking for. An introduction for people

... as far as what they have done over the decades and we first need to get your permission to record this, to put it in the archives at UL, at LSU, and Sea Grant and make it available to researchers.

S: Yeah, sure.

C: And obviously there won't be any type of compensation to anyone S: Right, right

C: But we do want to get your authorization.

S: Okay. I think you have to start with Edmund McIlhenny who was born in 1815, died in 1890. I wouldn't say that he himself was a conservationist but he was a self-taught naturalist. He was interested in biology; he was interested in geology, even astronomy. And he comes across as

being very modern. He was very up-to-date with science and was, he embraced Darwin's theory of evolution. The McIlhennys still have a children's book about evolution that Edmund gave to E.A. McIlhenny as a child and this caused a little bit of trouble with his wife, Mary Eliza who was a very devout, Mary Eliza Avery I should say. She was a very devout Episcopalian and it bothered her a lot that her husband really wasn't religious and he doesn't really talk at all about religion. I don't know if he was an atheist or deist or something like that but he seems very secular and E.A. McIlhenny was very much his father's son. When he was born in 1872, he grew up here on the island and took after his father, was like his father a self-taught naturalist and well E.A. went to Lehigh University for some time but dropped out in 1893 [1894] to go on Frederick Cook's arctic expedition of that year. As you may know Cook and Perry were the two rivals to see who could get to the North Pole first and even today their present day defenders are very passionate about which one got there first, if either, and it turned into a rather nasty rivalry. But this was not that expedition, it was another arctic expedition and it ended when Cook's ship The Miranda hit a submerged reef off the coast of Greenland and sank, but not before the crew was able to transfer to another ship and E.A. came back home, went on a other arctic expedition in 1897-98 to Point Barrow, Alaska and it was during that expedition that E.A. helped to rescue over 100 sailors whose ships got stuck in drift ice which then crushed the ships, they sank, this was a San Francisco Whaling Fleet that came a little too late in the year off the coast of Point Barrow. E.A. had gone up there to collect biological and anthropological specimens, in other words he wanted samples of Eskimo clothing, the types of tools they used. He put together an Eskimo lexicon which we have here, just handwritten dictionary of Eskimo terms. He studied, you know their folk ways, how did they have celebrations, how did they hunt; he went on some whaling hunts with the Eskimo and photographed them. We have over 30 glass plate negatives here that he took while in arctic and then there were a lot more in Philadelphia, I think its the University of Pennsylvania, he gave the 11 tons of artifacts that he brought back to the Wister Institute in Philadelphia, who at that time was interested in bones and rest went to the University of Pennsylvania, I think that is the name of the university. And it is all still at this university, I don't know what the Wister Institute did with its stuff. But, and there are copies of a lot of this stuff at the Bedford Whaling Museum which is in Massachusetts, Maine, I don't know.

C: Now you said Shane that they were self-taught, now I assume they both got a classical education which would have been the norm for the time, but so they basically emerged themselves in the literature?

S: Edmund McIlhenny came from a middle class background in Hagerstown, Maryland. His father ran a respectable tavern up there, in another words, sort of a hotel and a place to get something to eat. When he advertised its opening he used the word gentile in the advertisement twice I think to get home the point that its not that kind of tavern. But you know he had seven or eight kids and I can imagine he didn't want them growing up in the rough and tumble environment but you could also stable your horses there and he, this was the father, his name was John McIlhenny, he also was on the board of directors of the local bank. He was a member of the local Episcopal church, he was a volunteer fireman, he was moderator of the town which was their term for mayor. So he was a pretty civically involved guy. Edmund went to a school run by a guy named Coleman, I've seen ads for Coleman's school in the Hagerstown paper. But Edmund's father died when he was 17 and Edmund had to go to work as the second eldest son, went to work to support his mother and his other brothers and at that point disappears from the record for, well from 1832 when his father died until 1844. In one of them he shows up in New Orleans working for the Bank of Louisiana and there was sort of a chain

migration in a way because several other of the McIlhennys' sons end up in New Orleans also. One is a physician, one is a cotton factor and commission merchant, and I forget what the others are. They seem to be involved in real estate a lot. So Edmund did not go to college or maybe didn't even finish high school, I'm unsure but he paid for at least one of his older brothers to go to college and but educated himself, continued to educate himself, you can tell he is very well-read, especially on the topics of science and Edmund would, there is a letter in which he tells his wife, you know I'm going to knock off early today at the Tabasco factory because I really want to go for a walk, it is a beautiful day and I think I'll collect some rocks in the ravine or something like that cause Avery Island is a geographical or geological oddity, you know and he used the second floor of the Tabasco factory as his library and he also kept scientific experiments up there that he did, I think partly to get the children of the island interested in science. For example, he had a, he took a plant from the island and put it in a pot and then fed it instead of water, mercury and it turned the whole plant silver and I don't know if it killed the plant or not, I would think it did but that's one of the experiments he. He collected; he was very much interested in snakes and spiders. He kept them in little cages up there and had a rattlesnake for many years in the original Tabasco Sauce Factory and E.A., Edward Avery McIlhenny, and Walter did the same thing. Walter had a rattlesnake that he kept at the second Tabasco Sauce Factory for many years and would go out there every day and feed it mice or whatever, I don't think you could do that now with health and safety regulations but I'm trying to think of what the other experiments was that he did. We have, you know people who visited the Tabasco Factory in the 19th century, writing letters back to Edmund saying thank you for showing us the factory. You know, I'll never forget the snakes and spiders and that sort of thing. Also fossils, he kept fossils up there and in 1890, the same year that Edmund died, but before he died, paleontologist from Tulane, I think his name was Joor, came to the island to look at the fossils here and he wrote this up and published it in the proceedings of the New Orleans Scientific Society or something like that. I have it here and he says, Well I went to the island and I went to the Tabasco factory and in there Mr. McIlhenny had the fossils of the species and one of them was a giant sloth. And when we excavated the Tabasco

factory site in 2000-2001 using an archaeology team from the University of Alabama we found giant sloth fossils mixed in with the bricks so we are thinking when the building was torn down, the fossils were still there. Someone said they are just rocks so we will just throw them away, and that's what we dug up because they didn't get there naturally. They were tops of bricks. So then E.A. as I mentioned went off to Lee High. He then went on those two arctic expeditions and if I didn't mention this the first time, but the first expedition he was the official Ornithologist for the expedition and it was someone else's expedition, Cook. Second expedition was his own that the funded by offering to collect specimens for those two institutes in Philadelphia. I remember that the guy, I call it the University of Pennsylvania, I'm pretty sure that's what it was. His name was Dr. Pepper, I remember him. There are these letters from E.A. to Dr. Pepper. He's saying, "I'm in San Francisco now getting ready to get on the ship to go up to you know Point Barrow." There are some things that E.A. writes that you can't believe though because he had to take a good story and make it better. So for example in the 1930s he wrote a series, he wrote a column, I think it was a weekly column called 'Nature Ramblings' and it may have been for Huey P. Long's Newspaper, "The Progressive", was that his newspaper? And in some of those he says well for the next five columns I'm going to write about some of my adventures in the Arctic 30 years ago or so and he talks about how he crossed the Bering Straight during the winter when it was frozen solid to look for frozen mastodons. If you read his journal, he never crossed the Bering Straight to go into Russia to, Siberia to look for mastodons, nor do his two assistants who

also kept journals, which we have the originals here. I guess he made them turn them over. Nobody mentions that happening you know so, but when he was way up to Alaska, he mentions in a letter that in the warehouse from which he was shipping out there was a pile of mastodon bones that someone had found in Siberia and brought back. So you can think, well maybe that is where he got the idea. He also claims he rescued Jack London while up there and gave him the pseudonym Jack London because he liked to sit around a campfire at night and tell stories in a fake cockney accent and he says so I gave him the name Jack London because he did that. Well I mean anybody can go to any number of Jack London biographies and see that London was the name of his step-father which he had from infancy and although London was in Alaska at the time, he was in the Klondike or some other area gold mining. He wasn't on any you know whaling expedition so. Another interesting, some of the other stories he tells that sound fabulous make sense. E.A. claimed that he got some wasi oranges from the Imperial gardens in Japan in exchange for rescuing a Japanese nobleman. Well there was a guy named Jujiro Wada on that expedition, he had left Japan around 1900 to come to America, ostensibly to go to, I think it was Yale and he, Wada himself, claimed that he was impressed into service, almost as soon as he got off the ship in San Francisco and was forced to serve as a cook on this whaling expedition and he used it as an opportunity to learn English, later he ended up, well he became an adventurer. He lived in Alaska for many years, he became a championship dog- sledder up there, he helped to pioneer the Iditarod trail, he was also know as a championship indoor marathon runner which I think was a popular past time in winter in Alaska. But he was also sort of a con man and a shyster in a way. E.A. teamed up with him later because they became friends during that winter when E.A. helped to rescue all those men, to search for gold at place called Bear Creek. So we have all these gold mining papers here and a lot of letters from Wada saying I just need \$5000 more and you know, not that E.A. ever regarded Wada as a shyster, but other people did and he is kind of well known in Japan today. There is a Jujiro Wada Memorial Association with chapters in Canada and Alaska and they just put together a musical about him in Japan in his hometown and the association sent

me a DVD of it. It's actually pretty well done. It's sort of like he has these fans, even today because he was a really remarkable guy. I forget how I got off on that tangent. But, oh, Wada was the son of a Samari who had died early in Wada's own life so he really didn't know his father and that's sort of a minor nobleman in a way. I don't think he was a Shogan but he was, and so well, okay he did rescue Jujiro Wada and they did become friends and maybe that's how this nobleman story came about. But yeah you do have to be careful when you go to E.A.'s own writings, not so much in his formal writings because he wrote a lot of academic articles and two or three books but whenever he is being interviewed by the media, he has a tendency to exaggerate. But it was between those two Arctic expeditions the one of 1893 [1894] and the one of 1897-98 that he founded the Bird City Wildfowl Refuge here. Originally he called it Bird Town and then he jokes that it got so popular that he changed it to Bird City but despite the cute name, this was a really serious effort on his part. He dammed up this low spot on the island where you had a natural spring and that created what is now today known as Willow Pond. That's the pond in Jungle Gardens where the egrets now nest on those elevated platforms made out of bamboo that is grown on the island. E.A. noticed that there were fewer and fewer egrets in this area because the plume hunters were killing them all. The plume hunters wanted the wispy feathers from the snowy egrets to decorate women's hats. This was the 1890s early 1900s.

C: This was the very peak of all of that.

S: and there were no laws against that sort of thing. So E.A. went out and found 8 egrets and, young egrets and brought them back to the island and raised them, fed them by hand daily over a summer. It was something he called a flying cage, which was a ... and then in the fall he opened the cage and let them leave and as he hoped they came back the next spring bring back more egrets with them. So that by 1911 which would be 16 years later he claimed there were tens of thousands if not over a hundred thousand birds, egrets in Willow Pond, which is now called Bird City. And so he was really I think ahead of the curve as far as being a conservationist is concerned. There is one article by Teddy Roosevelt, it's about his visit to some barrier islands in Louisiana where he, he was looking at the birds that lived there. He, Teddy Roosevelt never came to Avery Island despite what some sources say. But he knew about it and in that article he refers to Bird City as, he says the most significant, some superlative like that refuge in the country. He doesn't say why but I think it might be because it was done by a private individual who wasn't relying on the government to have an impact, of course it helps when you are wealthy and you have thousands of

BREAK IN TAPE

Don: We are recording!

C: Alright, sorry for that interruption.

S: So I was saying that E.A. bought all these options on Marsh Island, then went up north on a lecture tour for the purpose of which was to raise money. He was selling what he called subscriptions to audience members who were in many cases wealthy northerners and he would go to places like Chicago and St. Louis, New York. Well he ended up meeting representatives from this eccentric millionaire named heiress named Mrs. Russell Sage and she sent some of her representatives down here, perhaps her

lawyer or someone like that, someone trusted and to investigate Marsh Island and Mrs. Russell Sage decided after reading his report, "I'll buy the whole thing. I'll buy all of Marsh Island." And she did and then a few years later E.A. convinced her to deed all of Marsh Island to the state of Louisiana. He had in the mean time run out and bought all of these options in Vermilion Parish and maybe part of Cameron on tens of thousands of acres and again not knowing how he was going to pay for it. Went on another lecture tour of the north and this time ran into representatives of the newly establish Rockefeller Foundation who ended up buying all this land and that became Rockefeller Wildfowl Refuge but only after E.A. a few years later convinced the Rockefeller Foundation to deed that land to the state of Louisiana also. In fact I think he managed to convince both the Sage Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation to deed both tracts of land the same year to the state of Louisiana so it was mentioned in all of the newspapers down here. It was a really big deal, big headlines, tens of thousands of acres now set aside for wildfowl protection. E.A. also went to Washington, D.C., with his 1913 film, did I make a copy of that for you? The snowy egret extermination.

C: I think so, yeah.

S: E.A. had gotten together with Pathé Frères News Reel Company* to make an 8 minute silent film called "The Snowy Egret and It's Extermination" and I've had some people say, "O this must be the earliest conservation film ever made." I don't know if it is or not. There are a few seconds of it in Ken Burns' Conservation Documentary he made on the National Park system but I'm not sure he knows what it's from originally. It looks like he got his hands on a really bad third

generation copy. What I have is much cleaner than what's there. He doesn't credit it at all but originally it came from this E.A. McIlhenny film. When E.A. writes to Pathé Frères later asking for new copies of the film he calls it 'my documentary', but I don't know what kind of arrangements he had with Pathé Frères. It looks, when you watch the documentary, it looks like they came down here, he helped them make it by letting them shoot on his land but then he's calling it 'my documentary', 'Please send me another copy of my documentary.' So E.A. showed this documentary in movie theaters in New Orleans and at conservation meetings around the country and the newspaper articles at the time talk about how shocking the video was, of course this was pre-television violence you know, people weren't used to seeing this sort of thing, but E.A. did show, or Pathé showed these plume hunters taking a bird, I don't remember if it was still alive or not but ripping the plumes out of it and throwing the rest away and then it showed the baby herrings or egrets back in the nest starving to death slowly. It looks like they went back to the nest over several days until they were practically dead. And the captions are right out of an earlier article from E.A. called "How I built a Bird City" which ran in the Saturday Evening Post or something like that. But later he developed it into a book called "Bird City", recycled a lot of his own writing is what I'm saying and so these captions are right out of something he had written earlier. And in a way some of the captions are vaguely sexist and racist. One of them says, "1600 years of civilizing of the highest race on the planet has not weeded out this primitive desire for adornment." There is a few seconds of a woman sort of preening herself with an egret hat on and then the last frame in the whole film is "Is it worth it Madame?" as if he is blaming women for this. And in fact in one of his articles he does pretty much in fact blame women for this so. He brought this film to Washington, D.C., and played it for congressmen

and senators when they were voting on a waterfowl protection law, I forget the name of the really big one from that time period.

D: Lacy

S: Lacy. The Lacy Act, but E.A. writes about this later, he says "you know we brought the film up there and I played it for anyone who would watch. We would grab them in the hallway, pull them off in the side room, make them watch this 8 minute film and once we did we had them." So he was doing that sort of things, promoting wildfowl protection laws. He also banded over 200,000 birds during his lifetime because people didn't know where do they go when they migrate, when they leave Louisiana, where do they go? And you can see in some of his research he'll have a map of North America and Central America and you can see he is drawing all these lines showing where his birds ended up. We still have a lot of his bands that he didn't use. We have a lot of his banding records and he would write up for journals like The Auk for example. He would write up an article every so often, you know results of bird banding in Louisiana 1932-33 and then two years later he would do another one like that. And the people who would shoot these birds in Canada or in Mexico, or whatever would mail him the bands back and say well I shot this at wherever. And so that's another way he helped. He got into a real controversy, you know you had your conservation purist and then you had your Teddy Roosevelt type conservationist who would on one hand protect animals and on the other go out and shoot them, alright. And E.A. was very much a Teddy Roosevelt type of conservationist and he got into a big public knock down, drag out with a purist named William T. Hornaday who I think was at the, he wasn't at the New York Zoo or the Bronx's Zoo, he was at the, it's like the New York Zoological Society or something like that. Anyway he is still very well known. Well when

Hornaday found out that E.A. was trying to, well had bought this huge strip of land between McIlhenny Ward Refuge and Rockefeller Refuge and was going to make it into a hunting club, Hornaday wrote letters to all the members of the this hunting club who included people like John Parker, the governor of Louisiana, just well-to-do, politically connected people from all over the country really and just bitterly criticized E.A. McIlhenny in it saying the only reason he set up these two wildfowl refuges to being with was so he could get birds to come down here and when they happen to fly between the two, he could kill them. And E.A. is writing letters back because people who are friendly to E.A. are passing along Hornaday's letter to him and E.A. is then writing letters back defending himself. It ends up, it erupts into the newspapers and major newspapers in the country. We have clippings from the San Francisco Chronicle and New York Herald, New York Times, the Chicago papers, the people were following this all over the country and E.A.'s argument was look I tried to find people to buy this middle strip of land just like I found people to buy these Marsh Island and Rockefeller and McIlhenny Ward but I couldn't get up enough money so what I did was I founded a hunting club and we bought it. We only hunt on it three months out of the year. The other nine months there is no hunting allowed and we use the profits from the hunting club to hire game wardens to make sure no one goes poaching on the land. So it is sort of the Duck's Unlimited model but ahead of its time. And because of the negative publicity caused by Hornaday, a lot of the major owners backed out and it just turned into a big PR disaster for E.A. who was really knocked off his pedestal. He had been you know this great champion of conservation and now all these doubts were

C: And when does this controversy take place again?

S: In the early to mid 20s

D: Is that the property the morphed into the Vermillion Land Corporation?

S: I believe so. It's now called, well there is the Bayou Club which is the present day hunting club that did come out of that. It wasn't a complete failure but the scope of the club that they planned never took place. They had planned a huge hotel, sort of a Victorian hotel and you could go water skiing down there and you could go do this and you could do that, you could do deep sea fishing, you could play tennis, you could go golfing or you could hunt. We have some of the publicity books that were printed up. It came out to nothing on that scale but the Bayou Club is the current name of the hunting club, the McIlhennys are still members of it and the Vermillion Corporation has something to do with that. I think maybe they own the hunting club or something like that. There is a little orange history book called "A History of the Vermillion Corporation" and it's all in there. I think it was self-published but ULL or LSU may have copies of this book.

D: And Mrs. Russell Sage, where did her funds come from?

S: She married a very wealthy man, I don't know how he made his money if it was in coal or oil or something like that. She lived in Manhattan and was really sort of the quintessential you know millionaire shut away she didn't mingle with the general public. She would walk into Central Park but she had handlers around her that wouldn't let anyone near her. It was like the squirrels were her best friend or something like that. She had no direct contact with the general public, she was a real recluse. But I don't know how Russell Sage himself made his fortune.

D: Now there was a period that E.A. was also on the Oyster Commission?

S: Was he on the Oyster Commission?

D: Was he a member of the Oyster Commission?

S: I don't know, I mean it would make sense since he was president of McIlhenny Canning & Manufacturing Company which canned oysters and owned an oyster fleet. I don't know if that

D: I'll have to check that. Because there was awhile that he was involved in government, is that correct? S: No, not that I know of.

D: Okay.

S: He was president of, I think he was first president of the Louisiana Chapter of the Audubon Society. In fact I have some of the Audubon Society stationary with his name on the letterhead. I don't ever remember E.A. being involved in government.

D: Okay, alright.

S: Now his brother, Rufus McIlhenny who was treasurer of McIlhenny Company was on the Police Jury here for Iberia Parish for many years and then of course. Well J. A. McIlhenny was his other brother, his older brother was very much involved in politics and public service.

D: That might be

S: John Avery McIlhenny after he got out of the Rough Riders in 1898-99 went into politics and served in the State House of, House of Representatives and then the Senate and then Roosevelt wrote to him and said there is a spot open on the Civil Service Commission and I'd like you to come up here and join that. So he went to Washington, eventually became president of the Civil Service, it sounds kind of boring but this is at the time the Civil Service reform was like the Health Care Reform is now, very controversial and heated and you had political groups that were founded for the purpose was which to call for Civil Service reform and the end of the spoil system and all that. (laughter) UL has a history of the Civil Service in which the, it's mentioned that J.A. did not get along with some of the other members and it got so bad that one of them threw a stapler at the other at a meeting or something like that but. Then in 19teens, like around 1917 or 1919, J.A. was, he transferred to the state department and ended up being the financial advisor to Haiti during the United States Occupation there and really was running the country because when the president of Haiti was a guy named Dartiguenave was his name and the Congress or Parliament of Haiti refused to do what the State Department said, J.A. just cut of their pay and said well we aren't going to pay your salary until you do what we say. He wasn't very well liked down there but it could have been J.A.

D: Yeah.

S: And J.A. knew Roosevelt and so Roosevelt knew E.A. but not as well as Roosevelt knew J.A. Roosevelt and J.A. were very close friends and in the Roosevelt correspondence you will see references to J.A. getting into pillow fights with the Roosevelt kids at the White House and J.A. brought Alice Roosevelt to the Island in 1903 for Mardi Gras, well first to New Orleans and then they brought her here and they were very close friends, yeah.

D: In your research on Marsh Island, on Marsh Island there is a water well. Was it a drill well, natural spring. Have you seen any reference to a school?

S: No, I've seen reference to cattle being raised on Marsh Island but I don't know whose cattle they were. I've never read that Marsh Island was permanently settled by anyone, that doesn't mean that it wasn't. I don't really know that much about Marsh Island and the McIlhennys, you had asked me earlier if the McIlhennys, John Craig Marsh, the earliest family member to live on the island because Judge Avery married John Craig Marsh's daughter whether it was named after him, and I've never seen any evidence of that. It may just be called Marsh Island because there is marsh there.

C: In addition to the egrets and game fowl, Shane, is there any other notable activity, conservation activity?

S: Well, yeah E.A. wrote books about reptiles, um not books but academic articles and popular articles about reptiles, amphibians, birds. Um he was interested in deer species on the island, which were eventually declared a distinct subspecies of deer and so it's called like, I forget the Latin name but its like variety McIlhennyi [*Odocoileus virginianus mcilhennyi*] or something like that. I mentioned about the bird banding he did, a lot of different species.

C: Yeah.

S: Right down to the vultures that we have on the island. He banded them too. He, you know I mean hunting really wasn't allowed on the island. He could hunt on the island because he was E.A. McIlhenny but he was interested in protecting the deer on the island. This was passed down to, I should go into Walter McIlhenny. Walter was the son of a Rough Rider and was trained under E.A. to run the company starting in 1940 and then he went off to fight in WWII where he was practically fearless, got the Navy Cross and the Silver Star, wounded twice, eventually retired as a ... General even though he started off as a Private. Walter was very interested in conservation, as was Walter's brother Jack who retired as a, retired around age 50 in the 1960s and never worked again for the rest of his life because he lived off Tabasco income and became a philanthropist and in fact left, gave a lot to LSU. You've got, E.A. McIlhenny reading room at LSU was funded by Jack McIlhenny, J.A.'s son, long after E.A. died and the books in there that formed the core of the E.A. McIlhenny room were not E.A.'s books. A lot of people think they were, they were Jack's books. E.A.'s books are still in his house and in the archives here. But Jack collected books about nature-related subjects and many of them from the 16th century or 17th century, gave them all to LSU, founded the Coypu Foundation with his estate when he died, which was a little joke on the nutria story because coypu is another name for nutria and as I've shown with my own research, E.A. McIlhenny was often blamed for single handedly bringing nutria to Louisiana, sometimes to North America as a whole, was at least the third nutria farmer in Louisiana and at least the second to let them loose in the wild on purpose. They did not get out accidentally as the myth always maintained. I've showed he let them go on purpose. So his nephew Jack named his foundation, Coypu as a little joke and they give tens of thousands of dollars a year, if not over a hundred thousand dollars a year to different academics or academic organizations to do biological research. And but Walter, when Walter was alive, with some prodding from Jack, Walter would give money to conservation efforts. Walter was in the, he was in the, I think the World Wildlife Federation. He gave several thousand dollars for example to the study of whale communication and sort of matched what Jack gave and the people who was

doing the research, I don't remember their names but they were very well known in the world of ocean biology sort of leading the research at one time in that field. Walter wrote letters to Congress about the need to prevent alligator hunting, this was in the 70s when alligators were still fairly, well they were on the endangered species list or should have been. He wanted them on the list I think. So Walter was very much for protecting the alligator species. Now these were people in a lot of ways were socially conservative, but yet when it came to conservation, they were leading the way. Like I said, E.A. was a very big hunter but wanted to preserve certain wildfowl species and sometimes he came into conflict with other hunters you know.

D: Now you said he was a big hunter? Was he just shooting winged animals or was he going to Africa and safaris and that kind of thing?

S: E.A. shot wildfowl and deer, mainly in this area. I don't see him going off to hunt in other places. Walter was a big game hunter in Africa and India. He went on several safaris between the 1950s and 1980s when he passed away and we have all of his files about that. And he was shooting water buffalo, elephants, tigers, not jaguars but...I forget the other variety of big cats and some of these are now considered very endangered. I don't think he would have done that if they had been known to be endangered at the time. It just doesn't seem like something Walter would do. And Walter, it's like at the same time he is hunting these animals, he had a great deal of respect for them and looked very dimly at people who missed their prey and their prey had to run off wounded. He just thought that was the worst offense a hunter could make. He said you know if you're going to shoot, you shoot once and make it a clean kill because the idea of wounding an animal and having it suffer just, oh he didn't like that at all. I'm trying to think of some of the other things that Walter did conservation wise. A lot of his papers about conservation are in one or two particular file drawers. We can go look in there because I am forgetting some of the organizations he was involved in. It might have been Audubon or Sierra Club or

D: But back in the '30s E.A. was wing shooting, S: Yeah

D: basically wing shooting.

S: Yeah in fact some of the people who opposed him or vilify him during that controversy of the '20s in at least one instance found a photograph of him posing in front of what looks like 50 - 100 ducks strung out behind him and they are like you know look at this guy. He claims to be a conservationist and how can he be a conservationist when he does this. It's like I mentioned he was the Roosevelt type of conservation.

D: Do you know what kind of shotgun he used?

S: Oh, um a lot of them are still around, they are still being passed down. There was one that he called Long Tom and a guy wrote an entire article about it just about two years ago or so for some hunting magazine and I can find that out for you. The McIlhennys and Averys were, especially the McIlhennys they were into the Purdeys and Parker Brothers and these get passed down and they are still in the family today.

C: Well that's not surprising that they are heirloom items, they are highly priced.

S: Yeah there is a member of the family, Mrs. Matthew whose married name is Brown as in Brown's Velveteen Ice Cream or whatever it's called. Brown's Velvet Ice Cream. The Brown family married into the McIlhennys and they got a lot of the guns because they are big into hunting. When Walter died he allowed you know each family member to whom he was close to, to come in and pick out a gun out of his collection and you know he had inherited guns from his father the Rough Rider, from his uncle the Arctic Explorer. But yeah I can definitely get you some specifics.

D: Do you know if the McIlhennys ever belong to the Tally Ho Hunting Club?

S: I've never heard of it.

D: Alright, how about, there is a hunting club in an island of, out of Morgan City, S: Avoca

D: Avoca

S: Yeah, they were in Avoca. In fact, I didn't know we were going to talk about conservation and hunting, but for about 5 or 6 years, now because I found this out when I was working on Tabasco and Illustrated History of the Coffee Table Book. I was doing research on E.A. McIlhenny and in his 1940 letters, there are two letters to him from former McIlhenny employees who had moved to Illinois or some far fluent place that say "Hey I went to the movies the other day, and I saw that little short movie about duck hunting on the island and it was great to hear your voice." I went what is this? So I did some more research and there was a film made by Pathé Frères and not Sports Illustrated, Field and Stream they all teamed up to make this series called Sports Scope, just like the guy in Lafayette, Jim Allen does a series called Sports Scope in the '60s and '70s. This was the original Sports Scope and it was shown in movie theaters you know before the main feature and in the '50s you could rent this film on 16mm from Field and Stream and watch it in your house. Well, I've been

(jump in tape)

S: copy came up for sale yesterday on eBay under the name Sky Game. It had also been released under the name Ducks, Dogs, Decoys which is a common phrase and you get a lot of hits on eBay that have nothing to do with that film. You know I found the script for it because the state of New York, if you released a film in the state of New York you had to go through the censor board there in the '30s and provide a copy of the film and a script and the films were usually returned to the movie company but the state of New York kept the scripts. So I have the script and I have the little promotional booklet that Field and Streams sent out to people, subscribers to the magazine in the '50s, I've got reviews of the film from like Hollywood Reporter and things like that, but not the actual film. And yesterday I got an alert from eBay because I have it programmed to tell me any time Sky Game comes up for auction. The film was there with 16mm with sound so I alerted the McIlhennys and we bid on it and hopefully we'll have it next week and we can dub it. I forget the point of that, point of that its a hunting film and it's got E.A. in it and it looks like one of his daughters too in it. And um

C: How long is it based on the?

S: 10 - 12 minutes or so, something like that. 12 minutes I think.

D: Do you have any of the records of the Avoca Island?

S: No

D: Okay.

S: I only have the records for the hunting club that E.A. proposed was called the Gulf Coast Club.

D: Yes

S: and I have a lot of stuff about that.

D: Do you have anything that is just a letter head, maybe just the letterhead of the

S: Yeah, in fact there is a little scrapbook that E.A.'s secretary put together that has a sample of each envelope, each piece of letterhead, each different sizes, each membership renewal form. It's sort of a little scrapbook of every sort of form that they generated and it's got envelopes and all sorts of stuff in there. Mr. McIlhenny mentioned another hunting club because of this film, I was talking to him this morning, he mentioned the Avoca Club and that his grandfather, Dr. Paul Avery McIlhenny was in Avoca. I don't know about any of the other McIlhennys but he mentioned another hunting club and I can look on my desk if you want I wrote the name down.

D: No, it's just that at that time period

S: Oh it was at the mouth of Mississippi River, D: Delta Hunting Club

S: Yes, Delta

D: Yes

S: Dr. Paul Avery McIlhenny was in Delta, now whether E.A. was also I don't know. Now E.A. owned literally tens of thousands of acres personally in Vermilion Parish that included a lot of Cheniere au Tigre Cheniere au Tigre and the McIlhennys still own a lot of Cheniere au Tigre today. So you've got that land plus Bayou Club is right next door. So and this land that they own personally has nothing to do with Bayou club so E.A. could always go hunting there. He also had the shooting ponds just north of Avery Island by maybe a half mile that they still hunt on today that he could go duck hunting there. So he really didn't need to travel. Paul Avery McIlhenny lived in New Orleans so it was easier for him to go to Delta, Avoca took a train ride or something like that, but he still belonged to that.

D: Did the McIlhennys ever raise cattle on Cheniere au Tigre?

S: They raised cattle here and right off the island. I don't know if they raised cattle over there. D: Okay

S: You know E.A. let a scholar go to his land on Cheniere au Tigre in the '20s or '30s and write a biology paper about that he published it. What's interesting is he mentions cactus growing on it. Is that, I've heard its still there today.

C: Yeah it is, in fact we saw it a few weeks ago

D: Cactus is quite common on the Cheniers because it's bird feces spread the

C: the migratory birds bring the seeds back

D: Yeah, it's bizarre but common.

C: But yeah you're right it is strange as hell to see them as you're driving by.

S: I bought, off of eBay I bought a copy of this article that this scholar wrote. He says, "Thanks to E.A. for letting me go to his land and letting me study it." And some of the photographs show

this cactus, I'm like they must have printed the wrong pictures. This looks like Bandera, Texas or something you know.

D: We need to do a field trip over to Chenier with you and you'll see it. S: Well I've never actually been but we can ask the McIlhennys

D: You've never been?!

S: No, I mean

D: You've NEVER been?!

S: they can put us on a boat and bring us over there, yeah

C: We'll well put you on the land barge and take you.

D: We need to take you to the Cheniers. We can do that. It's getting to that time of year, you will find it enlightening. It's an all day adventure.

S: Now we have a lot of Indian artifacts from Pecan Island here and it's the bones of the animals the Indians were eating but that was dug up in the '70s with something called the Pecedonse Project when the McIlhennys paid to have Harvard send Dr. Ian Brown down here. And he lived on the island for a couple years, excavated on and off the island and Jim Delahoussaye has come out here a couple of times this year to study these bones and he repackaged them while doing it. But it's what the Indians were eating, that's what Jim's studying, even found a wolf tooth or bear tooth with a hole drilled through it in one of these that the original archeologist didn't catch.

D: Well because of his concern about fire arms being discharged on the island, were there any bears or bear cubs or bear nests?

S: E.A. would go hunt bears in the marsh surrounding the island and several times during his life he, I say several, at least three times during his life he adopted baby you know cubs. He never said "Oh I killed the mother bear and then I took the cub." I don't know if that was the situation or not. In Roosevelt's article, what's it called, In Louisiana Canebrakes he relates a story about J.A. McIlhenny being dressed, and the McIlhennys up until WWII dressed in formal wear for dinner every day and J.A. had on his tuxedo or whatever and went out because one of the workers on the island said you know Mr. McIlhenny there is a bear eating the corn right now so J.A. excused himself from the dinner, went out in his evening wear and shot the bear, and came back and finished eating and Roosevelt himself relates that in this article which is public domain and on the internet in a lot of places. Today we have I'm told 20

or 30 bears still on island. I've been here over 19 years, I've only seen 3 bears on the island, of course I'm not really looking for them either but I saw one right in front of this building and then two maybe a half mile that way. But all three were just in the past 2 years or so. But yeah there have been bear on the island that have been hunted since the 19th century. You see the McIlhennys refer to eating bear at dinner. Tonight we will have bear claws, and they don't mean the streusel thing, they literally mean bear claws and so but now they are very much into conserving the bears. We don't even relocate them, we may tag them, they may trap one and

then shoot off air horns to make it scared of people and then let it go, but we just leave them alone and if you go into our deli here, you'll see an orange poster here that says this is a silhouette of a wild boar this is a bear, don't confuse them. And occasionally we get a corporate memo that says don't feed the bears! Which I keep because it is such an unusual thing but you know we have a lot of workers who live here on the island, they don't want them leaving food out for the deer because the bear will come eat it and they'll get too tame and they just want. So we are heavily involved with this bear, black bear group out of Baton Rouge.

D: Sure.

S: The Davidsons, I forget their first names, Do you know them?

D: mm hm

S: And one of the McIlhennys has been heavily involved in the black bear festival in Franklin.

C: Do you know if Edmund or E.A. ever compiled a list of the fauna that they saw here on the island?

S: Not a list but you can figure it out just by reading the different sources. For example in Alligator's Life History, he talks not only about alligators but the other species that he ran into from the time he was a child until what the mid-thirties when he published that book. The same goes with Bird City where he talks not only just about egrets in there but you know ibises and everything else that was on the island at the time. Now when it comes to plant species he did compile a list but the problem is that they weren't really indigenous or the indigenous plants were mixed in with all of these other varieties that he actively imported from Japan, from France, from England, you know he was very big into bringing in camellias from Europe, very big into bringing in, what was it from Japan, I don't remember, and then all of this bamboo from China. At one time we had over 60 varieties of bamboo on the island and lately one of the, a few of the McIlhennys have just recently in the past 5 or 10 years become interested in that subject again and host a Bamboo Society get together annually every February that brings people as far as China to the island and their, they call themselves

END OF TAPE