

HHA # 00385
Interviewee: William W. Rucks, III
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: January 14, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
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Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of "uhs" and "ums", repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. There are some audio "blips" that affect audibility to a degree.]

Ethnographic preface:

William Rucks, III was born in Nashville, Tennessee but at an early age moved to Oklahoma City. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1952 with a Business Administration degree. He became interested in scouting and found a job shortly after graduation with Phillips Petroleum in Lafayette. After 2 years, he was promoted to District Land Manager. He then became an independent contractor after 8 years of working for Phillips. He discusses his relationship with Heymann and the development of the Oil Center in Lafayette. As an outsider, moving to Lafayette took a little cultural adjustment, but overall, he enjoyed working in the oil industry.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [WR]

SW: Interview with Mister William Rucks the third I believe-

WR: That's correct.

SW: It's January the fourteenth, 2003, in his office in the Oil Center. And I like to start out the interview by just asking some background questions, where are you from-

WR: Alright.

SW: Things like that. Are you originally from Lafayette?

WR: No, I'm from Oklahoma City. I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, but moved probably at age one to Oklahoma City. My father and my mother had met at Vanderbilt University, my father was a physician. And so after he finished his internship and residency, he came and joined my grandfather, who was a physician also in Oklahoma City. And they established Oklahoma City Clinic. And then I went to school, grade school there, and then I graduated high school from Pembroke Country Day School in Kansas City, Missouri, which was a day school, boarding school and a day school also. And then finished at the University of Oklahoma and came to, got a job in 1952 with Phillips Petroleum Company, that's Phillip's 66 group. And was hired as a scout, what they call an "oilfield scout," which is, you know, without a doubt the best job in the industry.

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SW: That's what Mister Frazell did as well.

WR: Yeah, that's right. And you're not really concerned so much with your own company as you are employed to... delve into information of what all these other companies are doin', where they're drillin' their wells, why they're drillin' 'em, what kind of discoveries they've made, and so you can gather enough information from, for your company to evaluate those areas. And that, I did that for about three years. And then went to, then I went into the land department and I subsequently became the district land man for the southwestern area. We have a southeastern area, which was divided by the Mississippi River and a southwestern area on this side. So we had two different areas in, but you worked 'em both. I mean, I just happened to be of that division.

SW: This is still with Phillips?

WR: That's correct. I was with them for eight, almost eight years.

SW: And just either as a scout or as a-

WR: A la-, as a petroleum land man, that's correct, uh hm.

SW: What did you, you said you went to the University of Oklahoma, what did you study?

WR: B-, business, business administration.

SW: It wasn't really oil-related.

WR: No.

SW: How did you get into the oil industry?

WR: Well, the, during the summer I had gotten a job with an outfit called Sojourner Drilling Company in Abilene, Texas. And I roughnecked for them and roustabout-roughneck. And just so happened that one of my fraternity brothers who was a year ahead of me, he finished law school and he'd gotten a job with Lyon Oil Company in Abilene. So I, I would go vis-, go around with him, visit, he was a scout. And so I saw what they were doin' and how they were doin' it, and I said, "Well you know, I think I'd like to do that." So, and in ni-, in 1952, when I got out of school, we were in a, you know, a pretty severe little recession. And nobody was hirin' at all, and so I had my application in with several companies, Phillips, City Service, Stanolin, which was later Amoco, and uh... Sinclair, several others. And I hadn't heard anything when ['bout any-?], my father was gettin' a little nervous and what have you, you know, when I'd come home and say, "Well anything today?" [Chuckling] "No," type thing. So a friend of mine was workin' for Halliburton in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. So I said, "Look, I've got my application in with these companies, I'm pretty sure I'm gonna hear somethin', but in the meantime you got anything I can do?" And he said, "Would you like to drive a cement truck?" And I said, "Well, yeah, I can, I'll do that." So I went down to Pauls Valley and sure enough within about six weeks I got a call from Phillips and Stanolin the same day. And Phillips said, "We have this job, this scouting job in Lafayette, Louisiana, if you'd be interested." And I said, "Well," I thought to myself, "Where in the world is Lafayette, Louisiana?" I'd never been there. And so, but my uncle, it was my father's brother, said, "Take the job." He said, "I, my wife and I went through," his wife, they were on their honeymoon. They went to New Orleans and then came back through the Evangeline country and came to Lafayette, spent the night in the old Evangeline Hotel, had such a good time, people were so friendly, they stayed a couple of nights. And so he said, "It's a great place." And so, he was right and it was. And so when I arrived here, well then I went to work, we, all the oil companies were downtown and the Oil Center wasn't even built.

SW: Right, 1952, it had another year or two before-

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WR: Yeah, that's right, in fifty-, I think it was '54, '55 before it was built, yeah. The initial phase of it anyway was, this building was second, in the second phase. It wasn't in the initial phase. And, so that's kind of how I-

SW: You worked downtown when you first got here?

WR: Yeah, well, we were in the old Guaranty Bank building, or next to the old Guaranty Bank building in what they call the Naomi Building, which was owned by an old fella by the name of [Saki?] Naomi. He's Paul Naomi, you know, Naomi Jewelry Store over there? Paul's Jewelry? His brother. And quite a character he was. And the buildings were just smack up close together, so you could look out the window and shake hands with the ne-, fella in the next building, it was that close. And, but everybody was very friendly and it was a great, it was an unusual experience for somebody just fresh out of school, 22 years old, and, to walk down the street and hear all these people talkin' French and you didn't have any earthly idea what they sayin', but they were very, real friendly. And-

SW: Downtown Lafayette, just walkin' down the street-

WR: Oh yeah, oh yeah, Blacks and Whites, both spoke French, fluent. And, so then the very first night that I got here, checked in the Evangeline Hotel, I got a call from this fella, said, "Bill, we understand you're comin' to town and a bunch of us are all gettin' together to, over at," well it was Ray [Habert's?] house, right across the street here as a matter of fact on Pinhook. "And we're gonna have a crawfish boil, and we'd live to have you. I'll pick you up down at the hotel." I said, "Well that'd be great," and I thought to myself, "Crawfish?" You know, in Oklahoma the only crawfish are, we call 'em "crayfish" I think, that [time?], you find 'em in little stream if you lifted up a rock. And they, that and if you had a pet crow or somethin' like that, you'd feed that, you wouldn't eat 'em at all, so I thought, "Well this is gonna be real unusual." So I got over there, just, started havin' this crawfish boil. I was sittin' next to this Cajun boy named, uh, he was with City Service, named Dubly Thibodeaux. And Dubly was a, you know, fast talker, fast m-, always talked with his hands. Well then he says, "Now I'm gonna show you how to peel one of these. And t hen you, from then on you're on your own." So he kind of showed me 'bout as fast as it could be. Well I almost starved to death, but I managed to get through the thing, you know, and what have you. And they were good, I couldn't get over how tasty it was at that particular time. And so-

SW: Is this something you eat everyday here or you eat often now too?

WR: Oh yeah, I do. But it's not somethin' that [you?] go to, they have, if their ha-, people have crawfish boils you go to that, but I don't, we don't do 'em at home for instance. That's right, it's mostly out, yeah. And-

SW: That was good exposure to the Cajun French culture right when you got here-

WR: Oh absolutely.

SW: [Listenin'?] to French people, people talkin' French and goin' to crawfish boil and everything.

WR: Oh that's right. That's exactly true. And mo-, and a lot of these people who were, see the oil business was secondary when, in early '50s. This community was agricultural, railroad, railroad and agri-, agriculture were the main things. There were very few apartments at all. I lived in the Evangeline Hotel for darn near three months. And then three, I got together with three other fellas and we rented this house and off, right off of south, off of... Abbeville Highway, down there by the university. And so that's, but they were, everybody was in the same [Inaudible], we were all from Texas, Oklahoma, that type of thing.

SW: Well how did the, when the company, when you took the job with the company and you got here, did anybody greet you? What did you, did you know where you were gonna live-

WR: No, I had no earthly idea where I was gonna live and-

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SW: Show up, when you arrived and-

WR: And it, well that's right, and I checked in the Evangeline Hotel, and the Evangeline Hotel was just two blocks from where the office was. So I walked down there the first day and they couldn't've been nicer and, you know, welcomed me, and we had fella by the name of Bill McBride who was the, he was the ma-, land man, manager of the land department and what have you. And I, that was my boss and I worked for him. And he, matter of fact, he died about oh... I guess three, four years ago. He, subsequently he had retired and lived in... some little town in Texas, I can't, I'm not sure exactly what it was. [Slight pause]

SW: So you guys got together and tried to get a house or something?

WR: Oh yeah, that's, yeah. That's, yeah, what we did. And we would, wasn't really much to do, a lo-, I mean, there were a lot of things to do, but at night and when, several people se-, there were several employees from the Sun Oil Company, they were in the hotel. We all got here at the same time. So at night, you know, we'd have dinner together. So we started goin' to the Lafayette Bulls [play, that's?] baseball. They were, we had Evangeline League baseball, you had Lafayette, New Iberia, Saint Martinville, Crowley, wha-, and it was good baseball. It was like tri-, double A baseball. This, they were a farm club of the Brooklyn Dodgers I'm pretty sure. And so we'd go out and it was out at the old Scott Highway, Carencro Highway, and, so we'd go out there at night and watch the ballgames and just good baseball. And so there'd be things like that you'd do. And then we all, then we started playin' slow-pitch softball in a league and you do things like that.

SW: How big was the town at the time?

WR: Oh gosh... Lafayette at that time was probably 20,000 maybe, n-, maybe not that big. Maybe fifteen, twenty, somethin' like that.

SW: [Corpland?] was pretty close.

WR: Yeah.

SW: 'Bout as far as it is today, right, I'm sure.

WR: That's right.

SW: Did, when you guys came in, you guys were from out of town workin' for oil companies, did ever, townspeople were friendly and welcoming to you guys or?

WR: Not at first. People were a little bit w-, well, I won't say they were "wary," but they, no, we kind of found that the French people, now once they got to know you and took to you, I mean you were, you're gonna be bosom buddies for the rest of your life. But at first they were a little bit arm's length off, 'cause they didn't know that much about the oil business and they were, we were foreigners type situation. But that ended pretty quickly because the business kept growin' and growin', and gettin' bigger and bigger, and more people were comin' in.

SW: And they could see that money was bein' brought into the town.

WR: That's exactly right, uh huh.

SW: As the Oil Center was built, did you see a tremendous explosion and more companies comin' in?

WR: Oh absolutely. Oh there's no question about it. Yeah, I've forgotten what that final figure, the largest figure at the time that it was at its maximum growth period, but it was like... several hundred companies, big and small. And I've

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forgotten how many employees that there were out here. And this is long before they ever moved, started movin' across the river to start in all those offices that they have over there.

SW: Yeah, Schlumberger down the street.

WR: Oh that's, yeah, but, well, even past that, like little buildings that are, if you go down past the bridge and turn left and go over the, all those companies-

SW: On Rue [de France?], yeah.

WR: Exactly, right.

SW: And you guys were happy to, I guess y'all were kind of crowded down in the downtown area-

WR: Oh very much.

SW: It was nice to [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

WR: And they were old buildings. The heat, the heating and the cooling wasn't as much as you'd like to have it. And so we were delighted that, when Mister Heymann, this was an old nursery out here. It was about 160-acre nursery. And they came and convinced him that we needed office space and what have you, and he didn't have many, I don't think he had long-range plans to stay in the nursery business, so he was delighted to be able to develop this plot of land. He did a great job. He hired [Hayes Town?], it was an old recognized architect who matter of fact designed my house too. And we got to be great friends. And he... so it really worked out well. And... it's been written up in, the Oil Center's been written up in many magazines and articles and periodicals about how many companies it housed, how many employees, and that type of thing.

SW: Did you know Mister Heymann personally?

WR: Very well. I was a pall bearer at his funeral. We got to, we would, we'd play gin rummy every Sunday morning together. And I got, we got to be good, he would, but he would advise me on real estate and I could, kind of got interested a little bit in, you know, in small tracts and that type of thing. Yeah, I sure, I got to know him very well.

SW: What kind of man was he?

WR: Oh he was a very proud man. Very, 'course extremely interested in Lafayette. Because he had come as a pioneer here and he did so much for so many people. And really wasn't lookin' for a lot of recognition as such, but he provided the land for the hospital, Municipal Auditorium, big supporter of USL, that's, or ULL now, and was it was SLI when I got here. [Chuckles] And, but he, just not enough tribute can be paid to him and his son Herbert. When he became, really kind of managing the properties after his father died, what have you, he did an awful lot for the city. A lot.

SW: Both of these guys were sort of philanthropists.

WR: I, absolutely. True.

SW: The idea of makin' this city grow and-

WR: Oh sure. And they had that little store downtown, some of those employees had worked for them for 40 to 50 years. And then they finally closed that store down and moved out here in the Oil Center, where that Heymann's Department is.

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SW: I have read that he always [wound up?] taking care of his employees and they were loyal to him.

WR: Oh he does. Oh that's extremely so, yeah. [Slight pause]

SW: Was it his idea to build these offices or was there-

WR: Well, yeah. Well, they had, these, once these, I guess there was four or five people that went to see him. People like Rufin Lowry and, who lives next door to me by the way, and, oh, and a fella by the name of Stein, [B.?] Stein, he was with Tennessee, Tenneco. And uh... Rufin was with Pa-, Pan American that time. And then, I'm tryin' to think of the two or three others that told him, that they were all downtown, like we were, in some small building and... and then had the old Sona-, the [Sonnier?] Building was downtown. Lot of companies in that and they were just tight, crowded conditions. So he, once he got the commitment of those companies, well then he started, he was underway, construction in less than six months, [I don't know?]. 'Cause he had the land to do it with and, so that was a big plus.

SW: What about... just makin' sure it was on. [Chuckles] I heard a noise. [Chuckles] Um, what about the Petroleum Club? When did that come in?

WR: The Petroleum Club got started in, I was a charter member of the Petroleum Club. And it got started I'm gonna say in... '56 maybe, '55, '56, somewhere in that neighborhood, right after the Oil Center got up and established, and they finally formed that. And they had some, one group that, I think we started off with maybe 175 or 200 members and, charter members. And it's grown, grown, grown. And, you know, you, the membership increases or decreases, it's pretty cyclical by the business. When the oil business gets slack, well then you're gonna have some drop-off in members. And then when it gets, increasing and it's goin' full-blast, then you're gonna have a lot more people movin' in, you'll have more companies.

SW: What, it seems like you've weathered all those storms [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

WR: [Chuckling] Well, well a lot of 'em-

SW: How did that happen? [Chuckles]

WR: A lot of 'em. I, you know, you just have to, just make up your mind that you're gonna work hard during those periods of time, because if you don't, it'll kind of get by you. And so you have to ho-, hope that you are doin' the right things at the right time. And lo-, and uh, the most success and most good things in business that have happened to me have, in this business, have happened by bein' at the right place for th-, at the right time. But I happen just to find out about somethin' else by bein' at that particular place. So I, it wasn't the initial thing I went there for, but found out about somethin' else and then put that together. So as long as you're doin' your job the way you should be, and what you're doin', well than that's gonna- [Audio breaks off for a few seconds] and there to your benefit.

SW: It wasn't just that luck, but you had to work at it.

WR: Oh absolutely. Yeah, sure.

SW: But those breaks come along and [Inaudible]. [Chuckles]

WR: Hm, right. That's right.

SW: Did you ever, do you or other people that you know full-, fully aware that, you know, next year might be a down year, did you guys save money this year just to be able to, just in case or was that how things operated?

WR: Yeah, that's right, but you had to, well you budget. You know, if you don't have any, your, you have working interest, you're gonna have wells, the wells are never gonna, the best day of the well is the first day you put it on.

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From then on it's gonna start decrease and what have you, then you're gonna have, start havin' mechanical problems, and then you're gonna get into workovers for those particular wells and that's not fun at all. It's a v-, often runs double or triple what you thought it was gonna be to correct the problem of the well and get back on production. So you kind of got to plan for that. And then, but it's a funny thing. When the, a lot of people depend on people who in this business to, for financial support, well they're, that's what they call "risk dollars." Now, when you have market conditions like we've had the past three years, which have been terrible, those people are few and far between because they've lost so much money in the stock market, what have you, that they kind of pulled in their oars and they're gonna stay in a cash position, but they don't know at this stage of the game what they future por-, holds out there. Right now we're in a terrible situation in foreign affairs and could be in war, what have you, that's a big uncertainty. The oil business has just not cracked up what it was be-, the prices fluctuate so bad you can't predict what it's gonna be next year, three years, five years out. And so it's a gamble. And, so it's uh, so we find that we're... investin' with each other you might say. [Some?] [Inaudible] say, "I got so much interest in this thing." And I'll say, "Well maybe I can, I think I can sell that, I'll take half of it," and that type of thing.

SW: And it's some speculation-

WR: Oh absolutely, oh sure it is. Anything that looks like a run [and cinch?] often is as dry as it can be, dry hole, so you just never no.

SW: As a land man for Phillips, what did you do? What was your job position-

WR: Well my job was to coordinate the land activities. We [have/had?] several geologists, geophysicist, paleontologists, what have you. They would come up with these prospects and develop these particular prospects and then I, the land department would go out and put the prospects together by leasin', leasing the lands and gettin' that together, and workin' with the other companies who might already have some leases in the area and encourage them to farm out their properties to you so you could get the prospect together, and then drill that particular prospect. And lots of times you'd have partners [out there?] 'cause lot of these companies had a lot of holdings themselves in the area.

SW: So you deal directly with the landowners?

WR: I did. Absolutely. Still do somewhat.

SW: Did, bein' that you're not from around here, I'm sure you came across some of 'em that were older landowners and maybe French was their primary language.

WR: Oh no question about it, but-

SW: Did you have problems?

WR: But, we'd have some problems in communication, but they knew what money was. They knew how to count money and what it was. And in those days, gosh, you could lease land for five, 10 dollars an acre, you know, in a lot of areas. So, and they've done that, they, these people have done that for years. Way back, long before I got here. So it, but they had, you really, a land man is kind of a coordinator, you know, of gettin' everything together.

SW: You worked between the landowner and the oil company that needs t hat lease?

WR: That's correct.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech?] where it is?

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WR: That's correct. Now then when I went on my own, I became a lease broker as such, and companies would employ me to check on these various areas and put their lease blocks together for 'em. Just a general exploration type thing. Pipeline rightaways, you name it, we did it all.

SW: At what point did y'all turn things over to the attorneys-

WR: Uh, well, they, once you got all the leases together and then you wanna have the title examined, if you picked out a drill site. Well first off you'd have to go to, get an abstractor. An abstractor would go back to day one when the patent came and work forward, and run all the records and what have you. And then an attorney's gonna examine that and render you a title opinion of which then they will give you, what you do is you cure the opinion if he has certain requirements, title requirements, that need addressing, well then that's, you do that. Which is a lot of fun by the way, workin' titles.

SW: Get it all together.

WR: Yeah.

SW: What, in the dealing with the people, they were okay, you were able to-

WR: Yeah-

SW: The relationship?

WR: They are, you, lots of landowners, you'd have a gre-, good relationship with. As a matter of fact, I represent, still represent three or four landowners, good size landowners, who we had a good relationship with and if they have various companies that come into to lease their lands, what have you, they send 'em to me. And I, you know, work, representin' the landowner to work out some type of deal with these people. And it works well.

SW: What happens after you, well, when you arrange that lease how long's that lease last?

WR: Generally three, not more than five years. And you have to, in order to keep the lease effective you have to make rental payments every year. Have you ever sit down and read one of the lease forms?

SW: No.

WR: As such. [Hear him get out of his chair; extended pause] There's three or four different forms and what have you, but this is pretty plain vanilla. [Showing SW some documents] And that's, now that's what the land-, that's the landowner grants to the company or to the individual. And it tells just exactly what they expect of you and what they can expect from you. And that's, and then there's a lot of modifications of that and a lot of landowners want to go to their lawyer, and, which is fine [problems?]. And then you, if he has certain requirements, you work that out with them.

SW: See it says, "Oil, gas, and mineral lease," so it's what you're takin' out of the ground, too, is also, you have to pay them royalties on it?

WR: Oh absolutely. Yeah, but the basic lease has one one-eighth royalty, but that's, most of it now is leased a fifth, gen-, 20 percent, up to a quarter.

SW: So you lease some land, put a well on it, they pump all of this stuff out, after the well runs dry or if it does run dry, what happens?

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WR: Well you're expected then to do the proper plug and abandonment of the well, and to adhere to the precautions for any kind of... problems that might affect the surface and to clean that up and try to get it back to, restore it to its original condition, if possible.

SW: Hm. Try to make sure it basically look the same when the guys came in.

WR: You have to hope you can do that, right.

SW: [Chuckles] Not always possible, though.

WR: No, and a lot of times you'll be able to make a deal, rather than have to hire third parties to come in and do that, which can get [all?] expensive, you can make a deal with the landowner to say, he's got big equipment and big tractors and what have you, "We'll pay you x amount of dollars and you get it the way you want." That works out alright.

SW: Just pay him to do it himself?

WR: That's right. And then you get a release from him as such.

SW: So you did all this for Exxon and after about eight years you went on, off on your own.

WR: Phillips.

SW: Phillips, I'm sorry.

WR: Phil-, yeah, that's right.

SW: Phillips.

WR: I've done a lot work for Exxon [Chuckling] as a matter of fact, yeah.

SW: Oh okay. And you became a lease broker on your own, sort of like what Mister Jack McCord was doing.

WR: Oh exactly, yeah, we do the same thing.

SW: And so you guys, just like him, you contract out to anybody, any oil company that is willing-

WR: Uh hm.

SW: And you continue the same type of work-

WR: That's right.

SW: Did you prefer to wor-, having your own firm?

WR: Uh... you mean after I left Phillips wh-, oh yeah, very much so. There's a certain amount of satisfaction of workin' for yourself and what have y-, it would get somewhat distressing at some times. It would have, be kind of like chicken one day and feathers the next, but you never, but it was, there's a lot of satisfaction in being able to work for yourself.

SW: A little more risky, but-

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WR: Oh yeah, [as such?], but once you got established and people knew that you could do [the mechanical work?] and then they would come b-, you'd have repeaters, lots of people, companies would, I worked for Sun Oil Company for years and [Sohio?] and these type, and Humble, which later became Exxon.

SW: What k-, when you were still with Phillips and sort of workin' for them, what kind of work hours did you guys, what kind of schedule did you guys work on?

WR: Well, you didn't really have, naturally the office opened at seven-thirty or eight o'clock in the morning, but when you're a scout, you weren't in the office very much. You were out on the road makin' your, what you were, the district that you were assigned by the scout association. You were there to cover the w-, those wells that were drillin' that district, the geophysical crews, find out where they were workin', and plot that on a map and report on that, and then go to the courthouse that was in your district and ta-, do a lease takeoff of all the current oil and gas leases that have been filed for r-, and assignments that have been filed for record that week. So, then you would take all that information and you would go to your scout check, which was generally on a Wednesday, and we used to meet, first, when I first got here we met in Baton Rouge at the old Heidelberg Hotel and they had both the, you'd have the west side and the east side and offshore. And you'd cover all that in one day. That was a job, 'cause you're carrying all those wells and, see, you had three or four majors like Texaco, Humble, Stanolin, and Magnolia, if you would, and that made up the bulk of the wells. And so those books were that thick and you would take all that information, one well after another, and then the independents and the smaller wells that were in your district, you had to go try to get that information out of either the toolpusher or the driller or call somebody that you knew that was associated with that company because you were responsible for reportin' on that well. So it was very good. It's the best job in the industry if they would've paid you enough to do it. But, you're your own boss more or less.

SW: You just out of the office, movin' around a lot.

WR: Oh yeah, absolutely. And meet, meetin', you get to meet a world of people doin' that.

SW: So you enjoyed doin' that?

WR: Oh sure, it's, like I say, it's the best job. But-

SW: But it wasn't the highest paid part. [Chuckles]

WR: No, oh no, these [Inaudible], although there are a lot of professional scouts and they stay with the company and keep doin' the same thing for years and years. But I wanted to be a land man, I wanted to learn the land business and so I welcomed the promotion at that time.

SW: So as a land man you worked more in the office than you did as a scout or-

WR: Both, both in and out.

SW: Weekends, nights?

WR: If it, if that's what it took. Now when I went on my own as a... as an independent broker, well there were a lot of days, we'd be on these big lease plays uh, mostly in like in Mississippi, occasionally in Texas, where they were, you'd work 18 hours a day, just grab a candy bar on the run and, because you were drivin', it was very competitive and you'd have other companies in the same area vying for those leases. They would have, they'd have for instance one company would make some kind of discovery over in northern Mississippi, which they thought would run all the way down into Louisiana and so we would start over there in Mississippi and you, we were buyin' those leases for a dollar an acre. And my two friends, another two friends of mine we had a, this [divine?] order for, from Shell in Mississippi. We leased 80,000 acres, the three of us did, in three weeks. And of course, you know, you were totally exhausted by

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that time, you had, I, you had, you'd almost ruin an automobile, you know, you were livin' on candy bars and coca colas and uh, but it was a, it was somethin' you'd always remember.

SW: That was your own vehicle, was there company-

WR: Oh yeah, it was all your own.

SW: You had to take care of the expenses-

WR: These people paid you, on those kind of plays they'd pay you on a per acre basis, sometimes 50 cents or a dollar an acre. And you would, but everything else, but you're [Inaudible]... you're responsible for everything. All your supplies, housing, hotels and motels, expense for meals, your lease forms, and everything. [Slight pause]

SW: Sounds risky, though, huh.

WR: Well [SW chuckles] yeah. It was, was a lot. [They'd be?], right now the buil-, the business is kind of slow. I guess on average I have three or four young people come by the office pres-, uh, do I have any work or could I recommend where they could go to find some. That type of thing.

SW: That's, yeah, I heard from someone else today that the, that it's kind of down right now.

WR: Uh hm.

SW: Pos-

WR: Who all, what other people have you interviewed? I know you, well say McCord and you did Frazell.

SW: Frazell, um... Alfred Lambson.

WR: Okay, that's a good one.

SW: Al George. Gloria Knox.

WR: Yeah, I was gonna suggest her if you hadn't.

SW: We've got a lot of people we talked to. And-

WR: I rented, I had an apartment, I rented from Gloria. Right over by the, you know where the big Baptist Church is bein' built downtown? Well right across from that. She owned a little gara-, she lived on the corner and she and Milton, who was her husband, had this garage apartment in the back and I rented that for a little while.

SW: So you guys knew each other too?

WR: Oh, well we did after that, yeah, we, her husband, see, he was an old broker. And, a land man, and he, matter of fact, I, he officed right down the hall from my wife's uncle, who was in, probably, you've probably heard of Winn Hawkins, W. W. Hawkins. Well that's him right there on the wall, that picture right there. That's Winn Hawkins and he uh, he was a... he was really somethin'. He, I was lookin', I'll give you an example, I was lookin', I was the executor of his estate and he was married to my wife's aunt. And Winn was born in... 1890 in Greenville, Alabama. And so when he died he was ninety... 96 I think it was. And what a great career he had. And so Gloria Knox's husband, Milton, and Winn would by a lot of royalty and leases and what have you together. And they all, and they officed in that building right there by the Petroleum Club. First, Winn Hawkins had the very fir-, he was very friendly with

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Maurice Heymann and that's how I got to be friendly, and he had the first office that was ever, Winn's was number one. And I don't even know if he paid any rent to tell you the truth.

SW: I've heard his name quite a few times from different people. Um, you met your wife here in town?

WR: I sure did. I met her at the [Puttytat?] Restaurant. [SW chuckles] And, which was right across the street, over there across the street from the Petroleum Club on Saint Mary Boulevard. And that was where a lot of college students, she was at U-, she was at SLI at that time. And a lot of college students would go down there at lunch time. And we would go over there and have lunch. And so I met her there and subsequently we [turned?], we went out got courtin', I guess maybe a year and a half later got married.

SW: How many children did you guys have?

WR: We have three.

SW: Any of those gu-, uh, entered the oilfield?

WR: Oh yeah, my son, Billy, he's, I'm William Rucks the Third, he's the Fourth. And he... upon graduatin' from LSU, went to work for the Union Oil of California in their land department. And they had a big office out here in the Oil Center. And he worked for them five years I think it was. And then he and his boyhood friend, who was in Baton Rouge, by the name of Jim Flores, James Flores, well they formed a company called Flores and Rucks. And they, well they've gotten very, very fortunate. Put together two or three tremendous, big, big deals and offshore and onshore, and later became Ocean Energy, which is a big company here. They, well Flore-, uh, Flores and Rucks founded Ocean Energy. My son was president and Jim Flores was chairman of it. And so that's how they, that's how that got started.

SW: I believe your son sold his interest.

WR: He did. He did. And Jim later left 'em also and he's now running Plains Resources in Houston.

SW: Texas, yeah.

WR: Yeah, sure he is, that's correct.

SW: Mister McCord mentioned that. That he was out there. Your son still lives here in town?

WR: Yes he does. [Slight pause]

SW: We'd like to try to talk to Mister Flores too if we can get in touch with him, although I think he lives in Houston now.

WR: Yeah, but I, would you like to talk to his father?

SW: Sure.

WR: Well, you got time to do it this afternoon? [Slight pause]

SW: Maybe not. [Chuckles]

WR: Okay.

SW: We're goin' to New Orleans tomorrow for a meeting.

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WR: Alright, well you call me when you get back and what have you, I'll set you up with him. [Mentions something about Mister Flores' being hard of hearing and being an old geologist.] He's been all over, he worked on wells in Michigan and North Carolina and all over.

SW: And so he's seen all, seen it all here?

WR: Oh yeah, a lot of it.

SW: Speakin' of that, what kind of, just comparatively speaking, when you were here in the '50s and up 'til now, what kind of changes did you see this town go through?

WR: [Chuckling] Oh, it's been tremendous. Actually South College Road, see South College right here, was gravel when I got here. And the uh... Judice Inn, you know, Judice Inn?

SW: Very well.

WR: That was about as far as it stretched out there on the Abbeville Highway. So that's been there a long time and that, so you really kind of out in the country then. And oh, it's changed tremendously. It's, I, you know, cities have a way of developing in one direction or such, and look like Lafayette was always gonna go south and not north. And, which was kind of a shame in a way because some of the prettiest country, countryside that we have is north and north of Lafayette. And that's the o-, what they call a [coto?] ridge that stretches through there and that's, I've got a little farm out there that I really like and, but it's just everything moved south. I think you'll probably, you'll see uh... places like Caren-, I mean, not Car-, well, maybe even Carencro, that's a little bit north, but Scott, Maurice, Car-, uh, right down here...

SW: Youngsville, Broussard.

WR: Yeah, they'll all be incorporated in the Lafayette area at some time. I don't know how long it's gonna take, but it'll happen. Right now the very geographical hot center of Lafayette is the corner of Ambassador Caffery and Kaliste Saloom Road. That's where it's all goin' on.

SW: And I'm old enough to remember when the only thing out there was Women's and Children's Hospital.

WR: [Chuckling] Oh yeah. Yeah, that's right. And then later on Saint Thomas [Moore?], you know, and uh, that's right. Are, uh, what are you gonna do when you get out of graduate school? [Discuss SW's future plans for about 30 seconds]

SW: What is your religious preference?

WR: I'm a Presbyterian.

SW: Presbyterian. Were there many Presbyterians when you got here?

WR: Not many. Not many. I'll never forget, I was, when we, I was down in o- [Chuckling] when we were all downtown and sometimes the air conditioners would work and sometimes they wouldn't. And the window was kind of open. I was lookin' out the window and I seen this fella pull up in a ope-, it was hot as Hades. Pull up in bi-, yellow convertible and, with the top down. He jumps out. Turned out it was the Presbyterian minister who'd gotten my name from somehow that you, if you, when you came to town, if you filled out somethin' and say your religious preference. And he found, so he came and encouraged me to go Presbyterian church and so on and so forth. And I uh, I didn't go as much as I should have. Later, although, I did go a lot, became an elder in that First Presbyterian church and I need to go of-, more often than I do. And my wife's Catholic and all three of our kids are Catholics. And-

WR: And they [Chuckling] they uh, and I go with them particularly on the holidays and that type of thing.

SW: But you guys were ones of the few, though, here in town. It's was mainly Catholic when you showed up.

WR: Oh! In, the locals, the local people, absolutely. Right, oh yeah, it still is.

SW: But I guess when I drive around I see there's a few more Presbyterian churches and there's a Methodist church and-

WR: Yeah, that's right. Well, there's a First Presbyterian downtown, Grace Presbyterian off of West Bayou Parkway, and one out in, near... Broussard, someplace, I'm not sure where, I never have been to that one, but I've heard about it.

SW: What do you think or perhaps you have a better idea of all the guys comin' from Texas and Oklahoma and whatnot. What religious faith were they? Were they also Presbyterian?

WR: Mixed. Mixed. They had, lot of 'em Baptist, Methodist, some Presbyterians, and, did you talk to Bill Craig?

SW: Yes we did.

WR: Okay, well he's kind of the pillar of the Presbyterian church here. He's a deacon.

SW: Oh okay.

WR: Yeah.

SW: Would you say the influx of all you guys comin' in from out of town and workin' in Lafayette, did that kind of change the religious make-up of the town a little bit?

WR: Not really. No, because, but the town was broad enough and receptive enough that you could get in on initial ground floor of building a new church if you wanted to or join, and it wasn't so closed to the Catholic religion. Catholics are very li-, uh, very liberal I think. And they encourage and they love to see you come to their church and they'll come to yours, that type of thing. But it wasn't, but I think Lafayette and this area, well, south Louisiana, Acadiana if you will, is predominantly Catholic. And probably always will be.

SW: But at least, well I guess you could say now that there's a few more non-Catholics here.

WR: Oh no question about it, sure.

SW: Due maybe to the oil industry-

WR: Yeah, I think so.

SW: Bringin' some people from the outside.

WR: And because you came here from other places. In Oklahoma City I didn't know, I could count five Catholics that I even knew, because it was just very, there weren't many.

SW: [Didn't have that at all?].

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WR: D-, anyone that I knew anyway.

SW: So, but as you said, there's no problem if you come in, doin' what you wanted.

WR: On no.

SW: It's very liberal-

WR: Oh no.

SW: Speakin' of those kind of things, politics. People were down here, here in Lafayette when you arrived were they predominantly Democrat or predominantly Republican?

WR: Oh Democrat, Democrats. You didn't know many Republicans at all. People didn't wanna register as a Republican because they couldn't vote in the primaries. They only had Democratic primaries, you see, and they could only vote one time. So they wouldn't be able to vote for any of the local police juries, mayors, that type of thing. They could only vote in a national election if you were a registered Republican.

SW: And-

WR: As a matter of fact I didn't become a registered Republican until about three years ago. Of course then it all changed over. But I maintained, I voted Republican most of the time and thought Republican, but I never did change my registration until, well... durin' the Clinton years I, you know, I just had enough. [Chuckles]

SW: Would you say a lot of people in the oil industry are more conservative and Republican? [Slight pause]

WR: Oh, definitely. Absolutely, yeah, sure.

SW: That, that's kind of like the way most people think about it. Sort of a industry mindset, conservatism.

WR: Uh hm, well, I think most professional people are a-, the majority of professional people are Republican. And particularly in south Lafayette. South Lafayette's predominantly that, Republican.

SW: I've noticed the, as you say, it was Democrat when you got here, but you can find a lot of Republicans now. Do you think that the oil industry bringin' people in had any affect on that all, changin' the political make-up?

WR: Oh, I don't think there's any question about that. Yeah, sure it was, sure it did. Because they had, and then a lot of things that helped was... first off, Dwight Eisenhower, when he was elected president that kind of kicked off the Republican era. Then Richard Nixon, then Ronald Regan, and, those were the Republican years. And then you had Democrats intertwined and some great presidents also, but the m-, I'd have to say the majority of the people who are in oil and gas exploration business as such and those related companies and related there too, are Republicans. Or they think Republican.

SW: Yeah, yeah. Speakin' of, we did interview Charles de Gravelle, so-

WR: Oh, well yeah, that's Mister Republican.

SW: I was about to say that. [Both chuckle]

WR: Of this area, sure.

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SW: Showed us all of his pictures. The guys and he said he was, we had a long interview with him about that, he said he was in the minority of course when he first got here.

WR: Are you gonna, is this thing, are you gonna render some type of a paper or report on all this? Or it's just gonna be information that's stored in the library?

SW: That, I'm writin' my thesis on all this.

WR: Oh okay.

SW: So it'll be in a book form.

WR: Okay. I'd like to read it.

SW: Okay. Well I can get a copy of this for you, too, if you want a copy of the interview.

WR: Okay, that'd be great.

SW: And I'll give you some more information when we're finished. Um... comin' up on an hour, I don't wanna take too much more of your time.

WR: Well I appreciate it. If you need any more, just let me know and I'll be a-, I'll probably think of a dozen things-

SW: Well that was my next question. I mean, do you have any stories you wanna just spout off on or you, if you can think of some other stuff later, we could do some follow-up interviews.

WR: Yeah. I'll, we'll do that. And I do have be someplace in a little bit. But I... there's a lot of stories about the oil business. And of course lot of these, lot of people that you've interviewed, you talk about, or, lot older than I am, so they've been here a lot longer.

SW: Been here awhile.

WR: And, not necessarily they've been here longer. I was one of the kind of original, you know, came here early on. But they, they've been other, they worked other places. I never worked any other place except here. As far as, except Abilene where I roughnecked and that type of thing.

SW: Uh hm. Where basically every body started out at one point or another, OJT, right?

WR: Yeah, that's right.

SW: I just had one other question before we shut it down. If you were a young man today, if you were 20 years old right now, would you get into the oil industry?

WR: Sure.

SW: No regrets or anything-

WR: No, not at all. Not at all. I liked it the first day, I liked it more every day that I've done. It's gonna be a little more difficult now than it was when I did. 'Cause it was kind of limited type thing, but there is gonna be, it's... the high-tech end of it has changed the business an awful lot. And, so you really need to get prepared for that. Because there's so many third party services now that you didn't have in those days. And, but it all works to the betterment of the business overall.

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SW: Yeah, well it's, they're gonna change regardless because of, that's any business that'll change.

WR: Yeah.

SW: Okay. Well appreciate it.

WR: Alright, my pleasure.

[END OF RECORDING]

