

HHA # 00248  
Interviewee: Altha Lee Kennedy  
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz  
Interview Date: May 1, 2003  
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA  
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW048  
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and "uhs" and "ums" have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. It is difficult to hear the interviewer's voice at times. The interviewee sometimes clips her words, especially at the end of sentences and often adds an "s" to words when they should not be plural. She mentions a lot of people's names and I was unsure of the spelling for most of them.]

Ethnographic preface:

Altha Lee Kennedy is a life-long resident of Lafayette and is the sister of J. C. Chargois. She was born in 1915 and began working for Sun Oil in 1942 as a stenographer. She worked for them, making her way up to personal secretary, until she retired in 1970, when Sun Oil merged with Sunray DX. Throughout the interview she stresses that Sun Oil was family oriented when she worked for them, but is no longer like that. She describes how oil business moved into Lafayette during the 1930s and the town, particularly the location of different things, during that time period. She provides a vivid description of the floods that inundated the area in the late 1920s.

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TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [AK]

SW: Is it recording? Yeah, it's recording. So this is an interview with Missus er-

AK: Altha, A-L-T-H-A, capital L-E-E, two words.

SW: Altha-

AK: Altha Lee.

SW: Altha Lee.

AK: Uh huh.

SW: I don't know, I was thinkin' [Traha?], for a minute there I messed up. [Chuckles] And we are in her home, the date is May first, 2003. You said, we were speakin' about Gloria Knox.

AK: Yeah.

SW: She did, she did give me a lot of information, 'cause she was instrumental in [Inaudible], as you, I'm sure you, they called her "The General."

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AK: [Chuckling] Oh yeah. In fact uh, Gloria, you know, she's always been a very uh, strong-willed person. She still is. She might have mellowed some, but she was great as tellin' you, "This is what you're going to do." And you did it. And I think I might be one of the only ones who ever told her, "I'm not doin' it." [Chuckling] She said, well they had the, they'd have the parties at the Petroleum Club and they were very risqué parties. And uh, I don't mind a risqué joke among friends. And they'd have uh, these girls, you know, well anyway, so she said uh, in other words she wanted me to be of a risqué character. And I said, "Well just look at me, I'm not doin' it." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll be like [Inaudible] mama, but I'm not bein' anything else." [Chuckling] So. That's how that happened.

SW: Okay, you're talkin' about the oil [drops?], they called 'em the oil drops.

AK: Yeah, but I wasn't gonna be an oil drop, oh no no, those are young girls, those are young girls. But uh, they had the entertainers for, always very risqué at the Petroleum Club, you know. [Laughs] But I said, "No, darlin', not doin' it."

SW: They had a lot of fun over there, they, they uh-

AK: Well uh, I really, the first year I went, but that's not my cup of tea, I don't care for that. Anything on the risqué line between mixed uh, sexes I don't care for. [Laughs]

SW: What, what year was that?

AK: Oh, that started in uh, let's see, I went to work in nineteen... forty-two and it was shortly after that, not too many years after. But actually the oil business really started comin' into Lafayette in the '30s, the early '30s. Because uh, before they had uh, offices, actually the offices oil companies settled here, they had these [dooter bug?] crews that would come, come in and uh, I had two good friends who married people who work. And uh, the mothers were not happy, but they turned out find. [Chuckles] They-

SW: Why, why were the mothers not happy?

AK: Because in those days the oil people had a terrible reputation. They really did. I mean, they thought they were the scum of the earth and, you know, uh, the people in Lafayette are old Cajuns, old French people, they didn't like all these intruders coming in and uh, those men, they didn't know who they were, they didn't know who their families were, and they just didn't approve of 'em. So [Chuckles] yeah.

SW: There was some good people in there don't you think? [Chuckles]

AK: Oh yeah, and listen, a lot of them uh, uh, as, as the different companies came in and Lyle uh, Alfred Lamson will always tell you a good story about that. Uh, he tried, they, people who had, had kind of a rental property, if they rented it for let's say 25 dollars a month, they rented it for 50 dollars a month. You know, they really took advantage.

SW: If it was a person in the oilfield?

AK: They would take advantage of the people for the oil company. They really did, I mean [Chuckles] they had nothing and they'd rent these little rooms out. And uh, I always uh, laugh with Alfred, he, he had, when he and his wife were first married, his first wife, they rented a room with kitchen privileges from a Missus Nugent, who was a teacher in the public school system. [Chuckles] And uh, he, he always says, let's say she rented it for 20 dollars a month and when he told her she was, he was with the oil company I think she doubled it. [Chuckling] He always laughed about.

SW: I think I remember him saying something when I interviewed him.

AK: Uh huh, yeah.

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SW: That was uh, did, did oil, oil people, this was in the 1930s you said-

AK: The, the o-, actually the oil people started comin', the, I think Bosco was the first oilfield. I, I really think so. And then uh... oh god, they were leasin' that property up for nothin', like maybe 25 cents an acre and all kind of stuff like that. And first thing you know things began to turn around. And then in the, when I went to work in '42, the boss started in '41, I went to work in '42. And uh, Sun Oil then, when Sun Oil fi-, I worked with Sun Oil. And when Sun Oil first came to Lafayette you know where the bank is downtown, it was a restaurant? It's closed now. But it was the Guarantee Bank for a long time. And uh, they had offices upstairs. Uh, there were other companies upstairs, but I don't remember them. And when Sun Oil left there, they went to the [Attackapor?] Building, which is across from The Advertiser. I don't know if they still call it, it belonged to a Mister [Sonje?]. And we had offices upstairs and uh, Gloria Knox had an office up their. And uh, Winn Hawkins and I think Continental, but there was, there other offices [were there/welfare?]. Sun Oil was in the front of the building. And uh, that was it. That's how it started. Then when Sun left that, that building, we went to the Elks Building, which is not anymore, it was back of the Gau-, where the Guarantee Bank was. That's now a parkin' lot. And uh, I always think that, that buildin' when they tore it down, they tore down part of my history because uh, when I was a young girl they had a swimmin' pool on the top and the Red Cross gave swimmin' lessons. And that's where I took swimmin' lessons. And then they also had uh, a dance hall and many of the young girls and boys, that's where they went to dance. Then in the '30s the welfare department had their office in the down part of the building, to the back. It faced Buchanan Street. And I worked in the welfare department. So there was my youth. Then my, starting my working and then I come back and I was in the top of the building.

SW: Movin' up. [Chuckles]

AK: Yeah, I, I moved up. [Chuckles]

SW: Literally. [Both chuckle]

AK: Yeah.

SW: You, you sayin' you came, you came back, you moved out of Lafayette and returned?

AK: No no no. I came back to the Elks Building.

SW: I see, I see.

AK: Oh no, I've never left Lafayette.

SW: So you were born here?

AK: Oh yes.

SW: That's excellent. And you started workin' for, for Sun Oil in 1942.

AK: I start workin' for Sun Oil, uh huh, in '42. [Phone ringing] In '42.

SW: I can stop it. [Inaudible].

AK: Okay.

SW: Yeah, 1942 was-

AK: Nineteen forty-two. I uh, I started out um, workin' for [Poxum?] Dupre. They had an insurance company here. Uh, right where... oh, uh, h-, it was right downtown. The First National Bank is at the co-, they still call, I still call it the

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First National Bank, it's at the corner of Jefferson and Vermillion. This uh, it's a marble buildin'. The Garden Hotel is across. Well goin' down Vermillion it was maybe the third building. And it was a large building. And Jimmy Parkerson uh, was in the insurance business. Then he at later became president of the First National Bank. But anyway, uh, I was there about a month or two and the lady who was really the one who did all the hirin', uh, Francisco called to ask if she knew of anybody who would uh, could be a secretary or stenographer. And I really didn't like the man I was workin' for. [Laughs] I really didn't like. And anyway it would, if my salary was so much, it doubled my salary to go to uh, to Sun Oil Company. So I was always indebted to Mildred Fisher who recommended me to Francisco. And I stayed there 'til I retired.

SW: You worked for Sun Oil the entire-

AK: Uh hm, all the time.

SW: What year did you retire?

AK: Huh?

SW: When did you retire?

AK: I retired in '70.

SW: Was a good uh, 38 years.

AK: Twenty-eight.

SW: Twenty-eight?

AK: Twenty-eight, almost 30 years. Twenty-eight.

SW: I guess you liked it if you stayed with the company [that long?].

AK: [Chuckling] Yeah. And the only reason why I left uh, Sun Oil merged with Sunray DX. And uh, it was really sad because the oil company, the oil companies at that time it was family-oriented. If you started with the oil company nine chances out of 10 you retired with that company and it's not like that anymore. And uh, I had worked myself up from uh, a stenographer to a personal secretary. And you get accustomed to those little uh, quirks in that respect. And so uh, when they merged with Sunray DX this man Keith [Lindley?] was the head of that. And for some reason or other I would've thought that Sun Oil Company would've been at the top, but it didn't happen that way. Those who didn't retire uh, lost their jobs, but I was one of the fortunate ones quote who was asked to stay. And uh, the only thing is if I'd stay I would be starting out at the way I first started out. I would be doing exactly what I did starting out plus I'd have to learn machines. And I thought, "Not gonna do it." I was lucky because I was eligible for early retirement. I had the, the age and I had the service. And uh, J. C., my brother's in the interior decorating department, and I had taken uh, courses in decorating, s-, and I had graduated, so I thought, "I'm not gonna work for people like that, I'm, I'm not, just not gonna do it." [Chuckles] I said, "If I'd, if I would have to stay, they'd fire me because I just wouldn't do it." So that was my end of the Sun Oil Company and it was sad. I, it was, lot of happy memories. But I'm glad it happened the way it did because the people I had gotten accustomed to workin' with, we were a very close knit family, we were family, and it's not like that anymore. So.

SW: You mentioned earlier that uh, for one thing you didn't care for the man you worked for before at the insurance agency.

AK: I didn't.

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SW: But also Sun Oil was going to double your salary.

AK: That's right.

SW: Was this uh, was that a normal thing, people make a lot of money in oil-

AK: Well uh, yeah. They were paying better in the oil business, because uh, when I went, are you familiar, you hear the name [Julo?] a lot. It was her father, Jimmy Parkerson, and he was a tyrant. [Chuckles] He was, he was a tyrant. And uh, uh, the desk, and you know Dwight Andrews [insurance?], well Dwight was uh, one of the little insurance salesmen. One of the little one. And the desks were lined up and Parkerson he had a [Johnny?] way of wearin' his hat. And he'd walk in and everybody said, "Good mornin' Mister Parkerson." And every time he got to my desk I always had a coughin' spell, I had to [Coughs] I was coughing. Never would say, I said, "I am not mired down to that man." [Laughs] I'm a terrible person. [Laughs] So anyway, uh, I was very happy to leave and go with Sun Oil.

SW: Would you say that lots of people were uh, were going to, into the oil industry because it was good employment or there was money or-

AK: Yeah, uh huh, now of, of the group that I worked with uh, I don't know of anybody else, but it was soon after... after I left that Dwight started, left and he started buying up property. And because of his connection in the insurance business he knew a lot of thing. He made a fortune, you know. He did. So.

SW: You said all of those companies, that the industry actually got started in the 1930s [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

AK: Oh they came in the '30s. Yeah, Sun Oil was first, I think they came here in '32. I think. And I think this is interesting um, Tidewater came and uh, [Polo Marva?] was the secretary for Sun Oil Company. And he got to be the head of Tidewater in Lafayette. Uh huh.

SW: Where were these companies comin' from?

AK: Well uh, Sun Oil came from Beaumont, our home t-, our home base was Beaumont. And Sun Oil was owned by the family of Pews, P-E-W. And they were from Philadelphia. And uh, this is interesting, just the day before yesterday uh, after Francisco retired uh, one of the landmen uh, who had worked himself up took over, Billy [Starvon?]. And he, he stayed with Sun Oil even after they merged with not only Sunray DX, they changed many times. And I think Kerr-McGee now has taken them over, I'm not sure. But anyway, he asked me uh, he said, "Do you happen to have Kerr-McGee's 800 number?" I said, "Why would I have Kerr-McGee's 800 number?" He says, "Well, I'm tryin' to get in touch with 'em, because I have a question about my retirement check." I said, "I don't get a retirement check from Kerr-McGee, I get it from Sun Oil Company." He said, "Well you got to be kidding me?" I said, "No. I get mine from Sun Oil Company." That's how far it went, but then after that, the Pews, I'm sure they had stock, but they had no more control over the Sun Oil Company. But it was a family owned business.

SW: And much better than when they-

AK: Oh, it's not, I, you know, Steve, uh, I feel fortunate in that when I needed to work it was at that period, because Lafayette was small uh, everything was downtown, I surely didn't have a car, I could walk to work, and um, I had two little children uh, we were livin' with my parents in uh, you know, we could manage. And of course during the war everything was rationed and uh, it, you know, it was something else, but.

SW: Was your, did your husband go overseas during the war?

AK: My husband died.

AK: He's, he's been dead since '48. So anyway. So it was very necessary that I went to work.

SW: It sounds, sounds like you did okay, though.

AK: I did okay.

SW: More than okay. [AK chuckles] Did you guys buy this house [then?]?

AK: Uh, it, since I, well I was about uh, the people who owned this property were the [Damanatys?]. They owned from the cemetery-

SW: North [Daman?] and South Daman-

AK: They, they owned all this property from the cemetery to maybe Tesh Drive or back to the bayou. Oh they owned all this property, it was gorgeous. And this p-, Missus Damanity was, oh she loved the trees. She loved everything. An environmentalist she was. And uh, in the back, in this section that [formed?] the bayou, Oakwood I believe, she had a special spot there that every spring she had picnics out there for the families and all. And every autumn in this area she had uh, a big bonfire and a weenie roast for the kids. And I said, "You know, I'm gonna get this property one day, I'm gonna buy this property. I don't know how I'm gonna do it." I was about 13 years old. And uh, shortly after we were married we were g-, I-, Pinhook was not like it was now. It was a little road, they had a little gravel on it, but big ditches on each side. And we were drivin' past here and next door was actually the pecan grove. And we noticed that they were cutting some trees. And of course the Damanitys uh, and my family were very close friends, they lived only a block apart. So, and my husband had just started practicin' [law?], [Chuckling] he made 10 dollars a month, he made flat. So I said, "We gonna go talk to Mister Damanity." And he said uh, he was selling the property in acres, one acre front, you know. And I said, "Did they, did anyone buy this pro-," he said, "No, they bought, [Gagne?] bought the pecan grove." And I said, "Is this property for sale?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Ooh, don't sell it to anybody." [Chuckles] "Let me go talk to my dad." [Laughs] He thought I was crazy, he was selling it for a 1,000 dollars an acre. A 1,000, in those days that was a lot of money. So uh, I said, "Oh well," he said, uh, I said, "I really would like to have an acre and a half. And maybe an acre and a half and 10 more feet." I wanted to get in this oak tree. So that's how we got the property. [Laughs]

SW: When was that?

AK: That was in uh, we got married in thiry-s-, that was in '38.

SW: A 1,000 dollars an acre.

AK: A 1,000 dollars an acre.

SW: Hard to come by that, that uh-

AK: And then to be able to build uh, we had to have title to the property. So uh, when I, when I spoke to my father, I said, "Pop, you think you could loan us 500 dollars so we can get a clear title?" And the house we, was b-, way in back. And that's how we got it. Yeah.

SW: What uh, you had mentioned that uh, if somebody was comin' in to work for an oil company from like Texas or wherever, they would have problems renting a place or if they did they really, the landowners-

AK: They did, they went up in the rent.

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SW: Well did they have any other kind of problems? How did the people of Lafayette receive these, these outsiders?

AK: Oh, very uh, with a very watchful eye. Yeah. Because like I tell ya, uh, the parents did not favor their daughters going out with the oil men. They didn't. But gradually, you know, things change. And actually Lafayette owes a lot to the oil business. Because in those days Lafayette was strictly dependent upon the railroad, that was the source of income. Because there, there were very few people who didn't work for the railroad. So then when the oil business came in uh, it, it began to change. [Slight pause]

SW: Do you think it did good things or bad things?

AK: Uh, no, I think uh, I think they did a lot of good for Lafayette. Uh, I think we've paid a price. Uh, Lafayette grew too fast too, too quickly. Uh, we didn't have uh, the facilities for the expansion, 'cause like Dwight Andrews, well he started opening all these subdivisions, but they didn't have the water, the gas, the electricity. It was a problem. And then they didn't lay out those streets correctly. Lafayette, the original Lafayette was laid out in a crooked way because you go down Jefferson Street and it curves. Everything tried, the way they laid out the streets was going to the railroad. So instead of a straight road to the railroad, we have a curve right where the uh, it used to, well I think it's still the Building and Loan. It's just before you get to Tesh Road. After you leave uh, Jefferson Towers. I'm not that familiar with the businesses anymore downtown.

SW: That is a uh, what is that? It's a Home Savings Bank.

AK: Home Savings, that's where the curve is.

SW: Yeah and because across the street they have [Inaudible] [Park?].

AK: Yeah, uh huh. Uh huh.

SW: So all the roads curve to-

AK: Well, all the streets were headed for the railroad. And as a result their I-, there's no such thing as tellin' a person go down let's say x street until you come to y and you think this is it, no. [Chuckling] You gotta do all kind of zigzag. And one of the first subdivisions that they uh, laid out was White Subdivision. And it's crooked. Holden Heights, crooked. Uh, Doctor [Clock?] opened up [Albalotta?] which is right, well they have these little streets, that's right. But Doctor Clock never thought it would be a trap. You know, it's a trap after you get into Albalotta. They have two exits. Mendel Gardens, two entrances, two exits. The same, you know. They didn't have the foresight to, to, to really do all kind of things.

SW: That's, incidentally that's where Doctor Baker lives now. [Inaudible] Baker.

AK: Yeah, well they live in his, his, [her parent's home?].

SW: I was a student, I lived down the street from him.

AK: Oh you did?

SW: But not in the neighborhood, I wish. [Chuckles]

AK: Now listen, uh, are you familiar with Doctor Gilmore who is in the Music Department? Because he lived across from the uh, where [Van?] lives. He's dead and-

SW: Uh, no.



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AK: Doctor Robert Gilmore?

SW: No.

AK: And uh, I think his, I don't think his wife livin', but they lived right across the street.

SW: [Inaudible].

AK: No.

SW: But, so they all, these people that were comin' to the town, you's, you're, you're tellin' me it was the '30s is when it started?

AK: Uh huh.

SW: The business started. And then you had the war and you started during the war.

AK: Uh huh.

SW: So maybe things slowed down. What, what happened after the war? Did the business pick up more after the war was over or-

AK: Well, I'll tell ya uh, Steve, uh... I can't remember new businesses opening, because there was a scarcity of everything. For instance if you had a car and a part was needed, you were in a heck of a fix. And it wasn't until after the war that, when things began to get available, that things began to pick up. And that's when the expansion started, was after the war.

SW: The town you mean? The town-

AK: Now uh, I think the first... if you'd call that a mall, at the corner of South College and Johnston. Uh, Saint Landry Bank is on the corner and they have a Albertsons. I think that might've been one of the first shopping centers. I think. And my god they have 'em all over now. And everything in Lafayette, all the businesses were downtown. And we often, I, not we, I, I used to hear my parents say the owners of the businesses down, most of 'em were rented. They didn't improve their buildings. So as a result the tenants were lookin' for places that were up-to-date and first thing you knew, downtown was dead.

SW: Things moved out.

AK: Every-, the business people moved out. And now they, they're trying to get the business places and I'm not too sure what's happening. It seems like uh, instead of getting businesses they're getting more eating places and clubs and bars. And now they're having a problem. They, they, they really thought, they have a beautiful set up with the parks, now that's wonderful. But uh, they really thought they would get businesses downtown. They're not there yet. So. [Pause]

SW: I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought. [Laughs] I was uh, but uh, speaking about downtown, did you, what can you tell me 'bout Heymann's Department Store from that time?

AK: Well uh-

SW: In the '30s and '40s.



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AK: When I was, when I was growin' up Heymann's Department Store [Clears throat] was not where it is now. It was across the street. I think Tommy [Gilbo?] has his law offices there now. And uh, then he moved across and Wednesday was dollar day. That's when people really came to town. And ice cream cones for I think a penny. And uh, or a nickel maybe. And that was a big deal. And then uh, in the back of his building in later years he had a grocery store, he opened a little grocery store there. Uh, that's uh, now all that is the museum, that whole building is the Lafayette mu-. Then he closed that grocery store and built where the children's museum, that was the grocery store. And I only lived a block down from the grocery store. So, you know, we walked to the grocery store for groceries. We did.

SW: What could you get on dollar day?

AK: Oh, d-, well most anything uh [Slight pause] no not this one. But one uh, a costume that I have, I don't use this anymore, the costume that I used I got it from Heymann's, a dollar. Uh, a dollar.

SW: Dollar for a pair of pants or a shirt or-

AK: Yeah. Uh hm. And, you know, they'd have a bargain table. And uh, children's shoes a dollar. Uh, different things. But then uh, then Heymann uh, had a, a wonderful milliner's department, had a wonderful dry goods department. In fact, Heymann's was the place to shop. [Slight pause] Then [Apgalas?] came along and uh, we had a number of shoe stores and uh, uh, dry good stores. It, it was really a, a quality merchandising selling, not like it is now.

SW: So the store, the store was very popular-

AK: Yeah.

SW: And everyone was a customer, they had a big clientele.

AK: Yeah.

SW: Well, base.

AK: Uh, Saturday was the time that people from the country came into town. Saturday was shopping day for the people who came from the country.

SW: One day a week, right?

AK: Huh?

SW: One day a week.

AK: One day a week.

SW: Did you know Mister, Mister Maurice Heymann?

AK: Yeah. Uh, Herbert, his son, and J. C. grew up together. He was uh, he did a lot for Lafayette and uh, I don't know, I always thought everything he did for Lafayette there was somethin' in it for him. Uh, he and my mother worked closely together, because mama was a civic worker and she started recreation and they, they needed help, financial, but he was always very, very generous in helping uh, uh, causes. And he was also uh, for Christmas we had the orphanage which we've sa-, they've saved one building. That's uh, connected with [Lourds?] on Saint Mary. The middle building was the only building. It was three buildings. We just, the neighbors there were outraged that they tore those buildings down, but they saved one. But every Christmas Heymann outfitted those children. And this Mister Dave Church who was Lewis Mann's father-in-law, he would walk those little children to Heymann's, they were

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outfitted with clothes, the little girls, the little boys, and then they had a meal and they all had a gift. No, he was a very generous man. Very.

SW: What did uh, what about when he opened up this Oil Center-

AK: Well that was very interesting. Francisco, who was my boss, was one of the people who uh, negotiated and we were supposed to have our building in the Oil Center. But uh [Laughs] Francisco had a temperament comparable to Heymann's and [Chuckles] there was a controversy about the parking. Mister Heymann wanted maybe not parallel parkin' or maybe not diagonal, but ever, whatever the parking was that did not u-, that's what not, Francisco didn't want that. So he made a deal with uh, General [Duran?] to build Sun Oil Company an office, it's now where hospice is next to Albertsons, on Johnston Street. So we didn't, we didn't stay in the Oil C-, we never did come to the Oil Center. We were one of the few oil companies [Chuckling] that didn't.

SW: And that was because of-

AK: Oh yeah.

SW: Francisco was uh-

AK: Francisco, but he was one of the negotiators to get Heymann to uh, to open up this Oil Center. [Chuckling] And then we didn't go.

SW: And you said it was him along with uh-

AK: Now, uh-

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

AK: There, there were many of them and right off hand, Steve, I, I can't name them to you. Um-

SW: [Ruffin T. Lowry?].

AK: But they were all people already connected in, in uh, managerial positions with the different oil companies. So.

SW: They saw the need and they-

AK: Yeah.

SW: Pushed-

AK: And of course it started out it was the, they didn't have a Petroleum Club, they had a few building, then all this belonged to the Girards. This, across from me was uh, a cabbage field and they finally put out the, and South College didn't exist. So then they build South, developed South College and extended Heymann Boulevard to South College and it just, it just expanded. And then they got him to put in uh, the Petroleum Club. And in those days it was strictly for peop-, membership was strictly for people with the oil business. But now uh, when the oil business took a downward fall the memberships were gone, so then they, it opened it up to the public.

SW: Started openin' up to more people just to keep it going.

AK: Correct. [Slight pause]

SW: What uh, what about job security all the years that you, you were workin', did you ever worry at all?

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AK: Well that's it, uh, uh, you know, I feel sorry for young people starting out now, because they'll never stay with a job. I'll bet you a person starting out like you, you'll change jobs six to seven times in your lifetime. There were, in those days, especially with the railroad people, if you started out with the railroad, you died with the railroad. They had uh, you know, a railroad p-, man and his family had [pasts?]. They were always assured of their job and they could work themselves up. Uh, people who opened up a business uh, their employees, many people died with Heymann's Department Store that went to work there. Uh... yeah, it, it just was, nobody thought about changing jobs when they first started working.

SW: You, you mentioned Maurice Heymann, I heard that if you worked for him, he took care of you.

AK: Yeah, that's true. Because man-, many of the ladies, and listen they worked hard hours, uh, they had to work on Saturdays 'til nine o'clock on Satur-. And uh... he was a hard boss. [Chuckles] He was a strict boss. And his mother was living in those days and she would not allow those clerks to sit down. She'd walk those [halls?] and they could not sit down. There wasn't a stool for them to sit down. That couldn't go today. The civil rights people would get after that.

SW: I'd heard though that as long as you worked hard for him that he would take care of you.

AK: Yeah. Well, I, I'll tell you-

SW: [At least there?] was loyalty.

AK: That's right. Uh, and he was a very strict person. Well, he knew how to make money. He knew how to make money and he knew how to make his money work for him. He did.

SW: I've heard that too. [Chuckles]

AK: There was always somethin' in it for Maurice Heymann. [Chuckles] But you can't fault him for that. He did a lots for Lafayette. [Yes?].

SW: But, but you yourself with Sun Oil, you, you-

AK: I would have never thought about leaving. I was very uh, we had a very happy group of people. Uh, we'd come to work in the morning it was, this is ridiculous to say that, but there was always somebody playing a joke on somebody else. [Chuckles] And especially when the boss wasn't around. [Chuckles] We just, we had a good time. Yeah.

SW: Uh, I, I didn't ask you at the beginning what year you were born.

AK: I was born in 1915. [Pause]

SW: Were you old enough to remember the big flood?

AK: Oh, well of course. It was a horrible thing. Horrible. Uh, we had uh, my family had uh, a property at the end of Surrey, they called it Chargois Springs, they still refer to it Chargois Spring. And uh, many people in the outlying areas brought their cattle in to try to save them. We had relatives from Breaux Bridge who came uh, to Lafayette and where the park is now at the corner of Polk and Vermillion, well that was a two-story wooden building. And they had apartments upstairs and downstairs uh, at one time I had an uncle who had a drug store there, that was before the flood. And then they had a [Escaday?] Plumbin'. But many people, we had relatives who came from Breaux Bridge who lived upstairs. And the water, the water came up so far on Pinhook and stopped, and on the Breaux Bridge highway after you pass the uh, the [Carma?] lights, that wat-, I remember my daddy taking me to that place, that's where the water ended because it was high up. And it was horrible. You know, the, you could see the animals floating, they were so bloated. And uh, it was a terrible situa-, and then they had uh, let's see... if you go down

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Jefferson and they call it the Four Corners where uh, Lafayette I-, uh, Louisiana [Motor?], across from that is Winn-Dixie. That was an open field and they had tents there, that's where they, those refugees were. And uh, it was a terrible thing.

SW: [Inaudible].

AK: It was, it was terrible. [Slight pause]

SW: You mentioned that your mother, I've seen, I've actually seen her picture several times, that she was involved in the city parks.

AK: Oh yeah.

SW: And recreation.

AK: Mama was known as the mother of recreation. She uh, she and uh, Inez Neyland, who was a teacher, and Missus Frank Debaillon, uh, they decided that uh, during the uh, the Depression that the kids had no place in the summer. And Coach Whitman and uh, they call 'em the [Bouchet?] twins, Alice Bouchet married Francis Delong, who has Delong's Funeral Home. And they volunteered their services and they'd go where uh, where Postal Square is now, the south, Southern Pacific owned that. And they'd use that as a park. And uh, that's how recreation started in Lafayette. They deserved a lot of credit. Lot of credit. Those women worked hard. And uh, uh, Maurice Heymann helped a lot, Paul [Blanchet?] ha-, helped a lot, Mike Donlon, uh, Miss Neyland has a park named after her, Missus Debaillon has a park. Uh, George Thomas came in and uh, I don't remember him doing that much for the recreation, but there's a park named after him. And uh, I was always very disappointed because uh, there's a Chargois Park on Guilbeau Road and it's so pitiful. And there was a friction with that mayor at that time, I don't know why, and I always thought, "What an insult to mama. That little piece of pitiful ground." And she actually is due the credit for starting recreation in Lafayette. But that's neither here nor there. She, she, she did it. You know.

SW: And like I said I've seen her picture-

AK: Oh yeah.

SW: I was lookin' through some books.

AK: Mama, mama was a go getter. She also was instrumental in getting the tuberculosis hospital built, which now has been torn down. And uh, she'd be very unhappy about that, you know. But there were very few things that mama's fingers were not in in [Chuckling] Laf-.

SW: What about your father?

AK: My father was in uh, uh, he was in law enforcement. He was a city marshal for many years and then he was sheriff. And uh... he and mama canceled out their votes many times. [Laughs] He would be for somethin' and she would be for somebody else and they, they didn't mind cancelin' out each other's votes. [Laughs] They were great. I loved them.

SW: How many uh, besides J. C. did you have any-

AK: I had an older broth-, I had not an older brother, I'm the oldest. And my brother who passed away is, was four and a half years younger than I am. And J. C. is four and a half years younger. And he died, he was in the, he didn't die in the service, but he went into the service. He was with uh, Patton's Third Army. And uh, he was uh, he was really a person who enjoyed life. [Chuckling] He just had a good time all the time. And uh, he opened up what they call, they called it Shags, it was at the end of Surrey. Surrey had yet not spanned [the bayou?], it was on Chargois

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property. And uh, if you talk to the older generation, that was where they went to have a good time at Shags. [Chuckles]

SW: Oh, dancin' and drinking or?

AK: Dancing, he had a bar, then he opened a restaurant. And I think one of, it was the first smorgasbord, mama was the one who did the cooking. She [Laughs] she was a great cook. Papa was too, they helped Paul a lot.

SW: I think I've, I've heard of Shags.

AK: Oh yeah.

SW: Now that you mention-

AK: And anybody who uh, is in their uh, 60s, Shags was part of their life. They had a good time at Shag.

SW: That was the place.

AK: Uh huh. He has uh, three sons and they tell me uh, every now and then, not as much as it used to be, they'd bring up the name Paul, that was the place to go to have a good time. Boy, Paul had a good time. [Chuckling] He and [Charles DeLong?]. He did.

SW: Is the building still there?

AK: Huh?

SW: Is the building still there?

AK: Oh no. It, it's gone, it, it, it burned, but uh-

SW: 'Cause I was thinkin' of uh, right before you cross the bridge there's a, there's a little bar there, but it doesn't look old enough.

AK: Oh no, oh no, it, it wa-, it was a restaurant. And where the uh, veteran's have their place, that was where Chargois Springs, that was the pool.

SW: Oh.

AK: That's where they had the pool. And when you're going down Surrey to go into River, River Bend or River, there's a triangle and there are apartments there.

SW: Yeah.

AK: Well that's where the three springs was, that's, that's how it got the name Chargois Springs. And there were three springs that fed the... uh, swimmin' pool. Then the swimmin' pool drained into the bayou. And it was wonderful. That was the place to go. That was really the beginning of recreation. That was the first swimmin' pool.

SW: Chargois Springs.

AK: Uh huh. And we had the property uh, up until about five years ago and we sold it to the city. But they did name a street going into the uh, Heymann Park, they, from Surrey they did, they did name that street Chargois Springs. Chargois Springs Street. Yeah.

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SW: Sounds like you family has a rich history in this town.

AK: Well uh, you know, we were natives. And uh... it's uh, I always think I was very fortunate in uh, livin' when I did because we had such a good time. And where the federal building is, well it's vacated now, that was old Southside School. So I lived here, there was a school here, and I just had to go a half a block. And then uh, Miss [Email?] had, she started this what they called soup, soup kitchen, and she had soup for the children who'd come in from the country and uh, sometimes they just came with a sweet potato, that's all they had.

SW: Oh, for lunch?

AK: For lunch. So she would, in that buildin' she would cook that soup, different merchants would give her the ingredients, and uh, I remember it was wonderful to smell that aroma of, of soup while we were in class. And when it was rainin' uh, we, I begged mama, "Let me stay and eat." For a nickel I could have a bowl of soup. [Chuckles] And I only li-

SW: [They'd?] charge you a nickel?

AK: And I only lived a half a block away. So.

SW: And it smelled good? Now that was, that must've been in the '20s.

AK: Oh yeah. Correct.

SW: Because uh, was it around the 1930 that uh, Huey Long put the school lunch program into effect?

AK: Yeah. But actually Miss Email, you, she gets the credit. She was Judge [Dale?] Francis sister-in-law. And uh, at the corner of the uh, of the school on, at the corner of Jefferson and uh, East uh, East Main, [Dubanais?] had a meat market. They gave Miss Email the meat. Then uh, there were uh, Italians who had uh, produce stores. They'd give her the vegetables. And that was every morning. Every morning Miss Email. And she was a teacher.

SW: She cooked-

AK: As she cooked-

SW: Is that why she, she took that interest in the students-

AK: That's right.

SW: Is because she saw her students were comin' [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

AK: Correct. That's cor-, yeah.

SW: And they were kind of maybe more poor than the children from the city?

AK: Oh listen, you know, that was. They came in uh, by wagons. That was the bus system: wagons drawn by mules. No uh, it's, it's, I think it's, you're makin' me think about things I hadn't thought about in years and uh, when we went to class we went to class and we said the pledge of allegiance. And uh, we had a teacher who believed in teaching children different songs of different countries. It was wonderful. And there was no discipline problems. No problems with discipline and surely no drugs. [Chuckles] Yeah. And this is interesting, in the old Southside School they had an auditorium, I, I was always in the plays, I loved to take part in the plays. And they had uh, a little balcony, but they had this huge light fixture. I thought it was huge. And, as a little child being on stage and you'd look up. And you know

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that J. C. has that light fixture in his home? It's wonderful. He has that light fixture in his dining room. It just happened, he had an eye for things from a young boy and they were gonna discard it.

SW: So he grabbed it.

AK: And he has it. With the original uh, uh, what do you call the? I wanna say light bulbs. That, anyway. It's-

SW: The glass?

AK: Yeah, the little cylinders. Beautiful. He got that from that old school.

SW: That was quick thinkin'.

AK: And the reason why they had to tear down that sch-, it was sinking. It was sinking terribly. Uh, what used to be a room above the ground it was, you could only see the top of the uh, it. So they had to tear it down.

SW: What, where was that located?

AK: Right where the federal building is now.

SW: [Inaudible].

AK: The old felder-, federal building at the corner of uh, East Main and Jefferson. Yeah. [Slight pause]

SW: That's interesting. Do you have anything else you wanted to add? I've asked you all the questions I had to ask you.

AK: [Chuckles] I uh, I don't know. I was thinking... when they put this uh, [San Suisi?] Park up how that whole block, but I'm so glad that they kept that little building because my great-grandfather was the one who put up that building. At that time it was a little inn, they called it The Inn. He had uh, he, his name was Richard, he had a brother named Sebastian and one named Hubert, they were three brothers who came from France. And he put up that building and uh, when my, that was my great-grandfather and when he died, when my grandfather died, Albert Chargois, in '40 my dad was the administrator. And he sold that building to Missus [Nervas?] and with Missus Dupre, Dupre Library, she named it San Suisi and they opened up a bookstore. But before when I, I remember it as being uh, many things, but I also remember it was a shoe shop at one time, a shoe repair shop. And it was a, uh, a Jewish family who lived there, Max Levine. And they were so poor, they, they were pitifully poor. And uh, they had a bunch of kids, he had his business in the front and they lived in the back. And then next to that was um, next to that building was uh, a uh, family of [Primeauxs?] and they had uh, it was like a warehouse, then they had uh, uh, a Chinese laundry, the Fongs. They still have some of the relatives liv-, uh, the Fongs living in town. One of the children lives right here off of uh, Taft Drive. And then there was a bakery and then there was this big wooden building that had a, a plumbing shop downstairs, downstairs. And they had apartments upstairs. And then next to that they had uh, houses, they had uh, uh, a Missus Carter, who was step-mother of Mike Donlon. Then they had a colored family and a Baptist church and then a printing shop. Then Heymanns came with the department store. And next to us, by the way where I was born, my son has that as his law offices now. And next to us when I was growin' up there was a Method-, colored Methodist church. And their family lived in the back and faced the little Jewish temple. And my brothers and I, we were always very friendly with those children, especially uh, J. C. Uh, at one time, I can't think of the name, but the moth-, the wife's name, the pastor's na-, wife's name was Clara. She loved J. C. and J. C. loved her. [Chuckles] So many times mama started calling for dinner and J. C. was at Clara's havin' meals with Clara. [Chuckles] So it was nice. So that church, the church now face Lee Avenue acro-. And I don't know what's in that building. For awhile the pastor, it's a brick building, the pastor lived there, but he's not there now, so I don't know who's there.



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SW: When, when would you say the San Suisi was built? [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

AK: Oh that built in the, in the middle of 1800s. Yeah. I, I can't give you the exact date, but it was in the 18-, early 1800s, or middle 1800s.

SW: And it was your great-grandfather-

AK: That was my great-grandfather. He was, they were bricklayers. And uh, where they had the brickyard was on [Convent?] Street. Are you familiar with Elizabeth [Dunville?] Montgomery's name? They've recently moved her house. Well across, in that vicinity was where Chargois had his brickyard. And they built, he built his daughter's home, which was on Buchanan Street, brick. But weather boarding all around and J. C., the last ones who lived there in the family, J. C. took that little house and it's on Penbrook, just off of East Bayou Parkway, down from where he lives. And he turned it into a little, it was beautiful, he used it as a, he would rent it out as, for reception. And he kept one side, one wall open to show how the [boosalage?], how the wall was made with boosalage and all. And he had many beautiful parties there. And then it was too much, he sold it, but I think he regrets it. Yeah.

SW: I've heard that story before.

AK: You have?

SW: Someone selling something and regretting it.

AK: Oh he regretted that. And the last one who owned it, he still owns it, is Wilton Mouton. And it's just gone down, too. It's in disrepair. But uh, yeah, our great-grandfather built that house. [Pause]

SW: Well I thank you.

AK: Well I, listen uh-

SW: And you said you didn't have anything to say, but I think you did. [Chuckles] You said you couldn't add on what Gloria Knox said, but I really think you did.

AK: Did she give you the names of the different uh, oil companies who were here, that were here? You know uh, eh, where the First National Bank is now, in the back, there was what they call the Master's Building. She told you that? Because Tidewater was in that building, they had doctors in that building, and, and then where Tesh Drugs [Clears throat] at the corner. That's the Levy Building, the still have Le- [Clears throat] I think Gloria Knox was in that building, upstairs. Downstairs was uh, not [LaPrision?]. ... it was LaPrision? No. The ostrich had LaParisian. But anyway, it was a, a lady's uh, dress shop downstairs. And they had uh, oil companies up there. But in the Master's Building, because they didn't have many places for the oil companies to come.

SW: This is what I'm hearing. [Laughs]

AK: Did you, did they also tell you about the [Buchan/Buck Horn?] Bar, was a hangout for the oil men?

SW: Uh uh. The Buck Horn Bar?

AK: The Buck Horn Bar was uh, you know where the Garden Hotel is?

SW: Uh hm.

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AK: They still call it Gar-, I think they call it Garden Square. Well um, the pa-, on the part downstairs that face Jefferson Street they had the Buck Horn Bar, Mister [Derasell?] ran that. Well Alfred Lamson can tell you some great stories about the Buck Horn Bar.

SW: I might have to go back and talk to him.

AK: Yeah. Tell him I sent you. [Chuckles]

SW: Okay.

AK: Oh, he has some stories.

SW: Well that's, that's about all-

AK: Listen [do?], turn that off.

SW: You want me to turn it off? Okay.

[END OF RECORDING]

