

HHA# 00124  
Interviewee: Charles de Gravelle  
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz and David DiTucci  
Interview Date: July 26, 2002  
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA  
Interview Module & No: MMS: SW012  
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.]

Ethnographic preface:

Mr. de Gravelle was born in Thibodaux, LA. His father was a doctor and graduated from Tulane University. In 1930 he began attending Louisiana State University, where he received his undergraduate and law degrees. While at the university he met his wife Virginia. He went to work for Stanolin Oil and Gas (later Pan American, then Amoco) in 1937 and was stationed at Lake Charles. In 1940 the company moved him to Lafayette to open an office; he worked in Anse La Butte buying leases. He continued to work land deals and was the first person to hire women landmen. At some point, he also got into the abstract business. He took early retirement in 1971; however several days later he was given a job and Cameron and continued working until about 2000. During this interview he discusses the corruption surrounding oil and gas leases, the influx of oil people into Lafayette, and making lease deals in Anse La Butte.

## TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW] and [DD]

Interviewee initials: [CD]

SW: This is the interview with Charles de Gravelle.

CD: de Gravelle.

SW: de Gravelle. At his home. The date is July 26, 2002.

CD: Alright fine. Uh, you want me to start or you wanna ask me-

DD: Well you can go ahead and start and just tell us, start, I want, we'd like you to start where you were born, um, your educational background, your family, what your father did, things like that.

CD: Okay, well my father was a doctor. And he finished Tulane. And uh, I went to uh, LSU for six years. My wife and I at the same time. And uh, she has, she has a master's degree. I had a uh, a degree in uh, law school.

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DD: Law degree, yeah.

CD: Law degree. And, but I, I never practiced. And so right after that I went over to Lake Charles, I had no connections over there except two, two or three of my good friends were practicing law there. And uh, they told me things were fine. Well [Chuckles] when I got there I said, one guy was named Bob Knox. I said, "Bob," I said, "how's things goin'?" He said, "Just great," he said uh, "you take last month," he said, "I made a 15 dollar fee and a few small ones." [All chuckle] So, but at any rate, I was lucky enough to get a job with an outfit called Stanolin Oil and Gas Company.

DD: Stano-, what year was this?

CD: That, this was 1937.

DD: Okay. Stan-, okay.

CD: This was in February of '37. And S-, S-T-A-N stood for Standard Oil, for oil and I-N-D for Indiana.

SW: Indiana.

CD: Standard Oil Indiana. Now they were... I got in on, I was lucky enough to get on an exciting part of it because they had been organized to 100 percent subsidiary of Standard Indiana, but they had been organized for the purpose of buyin' out the Yount-Lee Oil Company. That's Y-O-U-N-T, are you familiar with Yount-Lee?

DD: No. [To SW] You are?

SW: Yeah.

DD: Okay.

CD: Well, well, Yount-Lee was a company was made up of Frank Yount and T. P. Lee. Frank Yount was an automobile mechanic who had fooled around Spindletop. And so Frank Yount had the idea that if they worked the edges of, in [Inaudible] the outer rim of, of Spindletop that they could get some production. So he went to the bank of his [Cash Lequious?] was a friend of his banker T. P. Lee to find out if he put a, how you put, and so to make a long story short, T. P. Lee agree to put up enough money for four wells. The first two were dry. And when he got on the third one he said, "I want t-, my two wells now, the only thing is I want to put this together."

DD: Ah, okay.

CD: "We wanna go deeper." And that is when they made the discovery. Now you would've thought that the automobile mechanic would not be the brains of the firm [DD chuckles] but he was very much so. And Frank Yount was a very innovative guy. And uh, when he started expandin' he went to buy leases in Cameron Parish. And uh, they were buyin' in those days leases for a dollar a acre, two dollars an acre, stuff like that. But he got to nosin' around and found out that you could buy the fee for five dollars an acre. A lot of that stuff could be got, and this is the middle of the Depression, you see. So he started buyin'. Well by the time Stanolin got ready to buy 'em out, which was in 1935, uh, Frank Yount had died. And that was one of the reasons that he was real, ready for sellout. And, and T. P. Lee had tried to run it, but he had an disastrous term of office as the CEO of that company. So they put it up on the block. And that was the largest transaction, to show you have times have changed, that was the large, large cash transaction in history that year, which was 1935. It was for 47 million dollars. [All chuckle] And so there wasn't much, many prop-,

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properties changin' hands, but that one was. And uh, so that uh, when Stanolin took over, they took over lock, stock, and barrel. Everything that, that Yount-Lee owned. Including about 210,000 acres of land. Uh, down below Gueydan, there's one strip in there 70,000 acres all in one.

DD: Yeah.

CD: And uh, you all seem to know about this anyway.

DD: A little bit, yeah.

SW: Yeah-

DD: We haven't gone back this far yet.

CD: Huh?

DD: We haven't gone back this far.

CD: You've never gone back this far?

DD: Um, well we, we haven't talked to anyone that could go back this far yet.

CD: Yeah. Well so, uh, among the, among the uh, goin' back further, goin' back to nineteen-one when Spindletop was discovered, same people came over here and made a discovery. Well, next was in Jennings and next was at Anse La Butte. And so, in 1937 Yount-Lee's leases were beginning to run out. So I had this long French name and nobody at Anse La Butte spoke English, very few. So they decided to send me here. And uh, so I bought all the leases at Anse La Butte and I spent about two or three years there. And uh, it finally, I finally got so involved over here that I was transferred here. I lived in Lake Charles from '37 to uh, 1940 and they transferred me here, in 1940. And-

SW: Where are you originally from?

CD: Thibodaux. And, but my mother died during the First World War, during the flu epidemic. And my aunt and uncle raised me in Thibodaux.

SW: That's, that's David's neck of the woods.

DD: Yeah. [SW chuckles]

CD: Huh?

DD: From Thibodaux myself.

CD: You're from Thibodaux?

DD: Yes. Born and raised.

CD: [Asks about his name; DD talks about his family background] Yeah, well you see I, I left, I never went back. My brother, my brother lived all over the world and he couldn't wait to get back to Thibodaux. [All chuckle] [Chuckling] I finished high school, I couldn't get ready to get out of there.

DD: Yeah, that, that's me. Couldn't wait to get out there.

CD: So-

SW: So you, you, you worked-

CD: [Asks SW about where he's from; SW says Lafayette]

SW: So you uh, you graduated, then you went to LSU and you worked for a little while in Lake Charles, and then they sent you to Anse La Butte.

CD: Yeah well, yeah, well I worked, I worked almost, all my entire life for, during the different name changes for Stanolin Oil and Gas Company, Pan American Petroleum, and Amoco, and all this stuff. And so I worked with them for uh, 35 years. And I took early retirement in 1971. And then... in retirement [Chuckles] uh, Virginia and I thought, we, we had, we had a daughter that lived in Mobile and another one lived in Washington, we were gonna take this long trip. And I went back to check in and uh, they said, "We got a job for you in Cameron Parish." I said, "I retired last night. You gave me a party, it was great party. You had [Dave Shrine?] here," that's my friend. Jerry [Gallinghouse?]. It was a big blowout. And so uh, "So go on ahead and visit the one in Mobile and go over to Washington," he said, "But come back, I got, we got a little, little work for you." So I came back and, and went to work in Cameron and I've been workin' ever since up until about two years ago.

DD: Oh wow.

SW: Oh okay. So you came out of retirement?

CD: Huh?

SW: You came out of retirement.

CD: I say, I was in retirement three days. [All laugh]

DD: Not much of a retirement, then.

CD: No it wasn't.

SW: I hope you had fun for those three days.

CD: Huh?

SW: I hope you had fun in those three days.

CD: Well we [Laughing] it was, it was okay. I, I, but I'll tell ya, Amoco was a great company to work for. And uh, I felt like I was in my mother's arms when I was [Laughs] [Inaudible]. And uh, I worked for a number of great people in there. Uh, Lloyd [Barrett?] and, he was original landman. There was a lot of different, all good guys and Landry. Oh a bunch. And uh, in those days of course most of the stuff was centered in Lake Charles, strange as it seems.

DD: Back in the '30s, yeah.

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CD: Yeah, and there was nothin' here. You had uh, you had Paul, uh, [Polo Mauvin?] who was the head of Tidewater. You had uh, Jack Francisco who was the head of Sun. You had Fred [Russey?] who was head of Amerada. And you had uh, Charlie [Edgeton?] became, [don't remember?] what company he worked for. And uh, but they were all pretty, pretty s-, uh, uh, it was slim pickings over here really. And uh, so I tried to root out, I think this was probably the first, directory, you can have this if you would like.

DD: Oh really? Wow.

CD: That you'd put out, and they had to put it out as a com-, out of '67, that's the fir-, first one I remember. We have subsequent-

SW: [To DD] Can make a copy of it.

CD: Subsequent ones and they were, this one is '97, but all of these were put together by combining geological and, you see, it's, [Inaudible] geological and uh, geophysical, as well as landmen. And so together they, they made a, a fair size book. And uh... now, uh... that brings us kind of up to where I was... uh, we did a lot of, if you look out the window, my real office is over there. It's on Sa-, it's on Saint Mary. I'm just about 50 steps away from my office. And uh, so uh, we operated out of here. Now I, I don't know that I did anything startling. [Chuckles]

DD: Well, when we last left off it was, you moved here in 1940. When you moved here in 1940 you did that because you were working here so much I'm sure, right?

CD: Yeah, uh, that was true. And the company decided they wanted a man here anyway. And so they made me, but I was, I had nobody over me and nobody under me.

DD: So it was you by yourself?

CD: Me alone.

SW: They, they opened an office here in Lafayette?

CD: This was the office.

SW: This was-

CD: Well no, I've been here 50 years, but uh, I built a house out in [Obalotta?] area, right next to Southwestern. And uh, that's where my office was then. But all my work during those early years, in the '30s and some into the '40s, was Anse La Butte.

SW: I'd like to hear about that. You uh, you speak French?

CD: Not really, but I, I, I speak French better than anybody workin' for Amoco. [All laugh]

SW: Uh-

CD: No, I, my father uh, my father spoke French. He learned it after he was a grown man. But my grandparents didn't speak French. You see I was, I'm half, half English, a quarter German, and a quarter French. So that uh, I didn't, when I went to LSU I took a conversational French, which I didn't learn too damn much about. But it was enough to get me over the rough spots with these people. I could, I could even, I could even, you know, go introduce myself, tell 'em I was with, and what I wanted, and so forth. And

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there was always somebody in the house, some younger person who could speak English. And they would bring, bring them in. And that kept me from usin' a birddog. Uh, I didn't need a, I didn't need a, uh, and, you know, I bought a, an area over in Saint Landry Parish in which most of the people there, this too was in about, in the '30s. Uh, all the people there supposedly all spoke French. And so I didn't go, I didn't use a, a birddog, I didn't have a, a translator for me. So I, you know, I go and see [Inaudible] [the guy who had the field?] [the company and so forth?] [Inaudible]. And that would, it would always, if I got stuck, well they'd always, but 'bout half of those people say, "You know," said, "you the first person we lease to. We've never, there was a fella here about six months ago and he had somebody with him. He was a guy that lived in this area. And you know what, that guy was gettin' all kind of kickbacks and all kind of royalty and everything else." That's suspicious thing, you see.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

CD: Now [them is/lemonade?] suspicious. And so I had a very good deal on in that particular time. But uh... now where are we now?

SW: What, what happened in Anse La Butte, when you worked there?

CD: Huh?

SW: When, in Anse La Butte.

CD: Yeah, Anse La Butte.

SW: What did you do there?

CD: I bought all the leases.

SW: Bought all the leases. And then, and then what?

CD: Well, I bought all the leases and [Chuckles] and I practiced a little law, too, on the side, because as those p-, as I was buyin' leases from those people uh, er, every now and then one of 'em would die and, and they'd ask me to settle the succession for 'em, you know. [DD chuckles] And uh, I wasn't, I wasn't able to practice. I never even taken the bar exam, you see. I just went over to Lake Charles and hopin' I'd pick up a good job, which I did. And so uh, there wasn't much law to be practiced in the '30s. So I, I was doin' some stuff for them, but I, I made many, many good friends uh, in Anse La Butte. And also 'course in, in Breaux Bridge where I spent a lot of time. And of course in Saint Martinville we, that's where the company had their attorney, his name was Jerome Broussard. And he, Jerome Broussard worked for Amerada and... two or three other companies. And uh, he uh, he was a good attorney and so I had a, I had a nice ride over here. It was just exactly great for me. Uh, I never really had a bad day in my life I suppose. [Oil business concerned?] or at the office.

DD: What were the people like over at Anse La Butte when you got here?

CD: Well, they were, th-, I, I, I'll tell you a story. There was a woman there that... that went off of her rocker. [Inaudible] she, I don't know if you, if she ever went to the insane asylum or somethin', but she went off of her rocker. And the word was around she had too much education. She finished high school. [DD chuckles] So that gives you about the idea of what it was like.

DD: Yeah. People were wary of the educated.

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CD: That's right. And unlike, unlike Thibodaux, you see, I never heard a word of French in Thibodaux. I played basketball up and down the bayou, now if you get out, you get to Lockport and-

DD: Galliano and all that, yeah.

CD: Cutoff and, yeah, and all those knew nothing but French.

DD: Oh yeah.

CD: But Thibodaux seems to have had an English, English people settle it and uh, you never heard any French at all.

DD: [Used to be?], just go right down the road to Choctaw or somethin' and people still only speak French, but not in Thibodaux.

CD: Yeah, right. And my u-, my uncle who raised me owned a drug store and when they would come in from Chackbay and that area down the bayou, see the doctor, whatever. And uh, they all, we heard French then, you know. And uh... so I was workin' behind the soda fountain. [Inaudible, something in French about de crème]. [SW and DD chuckle] And that's about all I knew at that time. But uh, yeah, I, I liked that and I, and I liked uh, I liked Thibodaux. And my brother just loves Thibodaux and he's still there. He's, he's 85. I'm gonna go see him tomorrow as a matter fact.

DD: Um-

SW: Did you uh, did you ever do any work offshore or had any dealings [Audio breaks off for five seconds] offshore?

CD: Offshore, no. They don't. You have no land problems offshore. The only, the only land problem is the uh, uh, applies is now I've, I've bid on offshore. I bid on that. But uh, I've never, there's no title, because either the federal government owns or the state owns it.

DD: Right. So, so no personal pro-

CD: [Inaudible, all three talking at once] no, no problem.

DD: Right, um-

SW: So that's kind of what you did, [To DD] sorry, kind of what you did as a, you were the, you were the land guy for Amoco.

CD: Yeah.

SW: And you bought leases and determined who owned, well you had to determine who owned the land first and then buy the lease from them.

CD: That's right. Well, actually you run a superficial, to buy up a lease, you run a superficial check of the records, you just check your assessment rolls. And then if the guy has seemingly a good title, and of course you have to ask him if it's mortgaged, anything like that, and people, very, very few people ever lie to you, you know. I never had any of that happen to me. And uh, so after we get that straightened out, then I, I sign 'em up on the lease. And uh, now one thing you all ought to really know, a lot of people do not understand exactly how bad this state was as far as le-, as far as land work was concerned. See until Sam Jones was

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elected in 1940 Amoco did not put in one bid on any state property. And the reason was it was a well-known fact that if [you were gonna hit?] one of your, one of your fellow townsmen, because if you bought a lease [maistry?] was a conservation commission, and you had to buy through Harvey Peltier. And no one, on-, the only way you got a lease in those days was if Harvey Peltier would buy from maistry. [Chuckles] And then he would turn around and sell it to Texaco for an override and a slight-

SW: Markup.

CD: Right. And that's how they got so terribly rich. Now Texaco was just as involved. They were, they were bad as anybody else. They, they lived for that crank off that they were gettin' on every, every lease. So that uh, they uh, and when Sam Jones came in in 1940, I had a classmate of mine at law school named Red Wood, and he became the tiger on, on that trail. And uh... I don't want to digress, but you don't mind if I digress?

DD: No, go ahead.

SW: Go right ahead.

CD: Alright. Uh... Perez, Leander Perez, I was buyin', I was sent down to, to uh... to uh, Pointe A la Hache to buy a lease on a big tract of land, it was known as the Grand [Perry Levee Board?]. And all of those tracts, you know, were carved out and were publicly owned. So that uh, I was to go out and check it, see what was the deal goin'. What [Inaudible] it was around 70,000 acres in that thing. So I go down the courthouse and I check the records and I found out that the property had been owned by Gulf Oil, but as, but had been released because Sam Jones was in. And of course they passed an act that you, you had to uh, there could be no overrides. So anybody that leased during the Sam Jones and beyond could not on public property, could not grant an override or get an override.

DD: Okay, so they couldn't just buy up all the leases and sell 'em off, yeah.

CD: Right, there's no way, no way for it to do it. So I asked the clerk of the court, I said uh, "I wanna see about the Grand Perry Levee Board." He said, "You have to see Mister Perez." And I said, "Well alright." I went over and checked the records and found out that the head of Grand Perry Levee Board was a man that lived in Pointe A la Hache. So I went to see him and he said, "You have to see Mister Perez." So I took hat in hand and I went to New Orleans and went to Mister Perez's office. [Pause] And I said, "Mister Perez, I wanna see you about a lease on Grand Perry Levee Board." He said, "Property's already leased." I said, "I just came from there and I found release." "We don't recognize that release." [DD chuckles] I said, "What, what do you mean?" He said, "You get the hell out of my office that's what I mean." So I went back, I was stayin' at the [Inaudible] Hotel there. I went back to the hotel and got to thinking, "Why would anybody contest a release?" So the next mornin' I went to Gulf Oil and the guy startin' laughin'. And uh, he said, "You oughta know about this, your friend Red Wood is the guy that negotiated all this stuff." He said, "They came to us and told us that, 'If you wanted to operate on the old lease,' which was given prior to Sam Jones, 'then you go on ahead and do it, but we give you, you pick your three spots or four spots if you want, but we want a time table within which your gonna drill those.'" So they, they had the geologist go over, beside they had, they had three fields on the area, and they decided they wasn't gonna. So they, so they mailed in a release as per my friend Red Wood's request. Well it was returned to him uh, by the clerk of the court that, "We don't uh, we don't recognize this release." So I said to the guy, "Well how'd you get it down there?" "Well," he said, "it was quite a trick." He said, "We had a, we sent a landman down there and we found out, 'cause that clerk of the court goes to lunch at around noon and there's about a 15 minute period there which his, his daughter, his oldest daughter, takes over. So," he said, "we went in with the release all prepared, the certified copy all prepared, and we filed it and got it. And boy they were furious." [All laugh] When they got

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the release, you see. Now I never knew, I never knew how that proper-, how, I never knew from then on I never, never followed, I don't know how it turned out. Of course in the meantime Leander Perez died and other things. But that shows you how corrupt the whole system was. You just couldn't believe that it was, it was that corrupt. And uh, so uh, that was my only encounter with the fabulous Leander Perez who was a king fisher [Inaudible].

DD: Yeah. Um, back on track with the, when you were Anse La Butte. What about all these stories about how the Anse La Butte people were hard fighters and uh, really rough kind of people. Did you ever experience any of that?

CD: Oh no.

DD: Really?

CD: No.

DD: Did, did you even hear about that kind of things or?

CD: No.

DD: Hm.

CD: [Inaudible] and then, I always assume everybody likes me.

DD: Yeah. [DD and SW laugh] But you didn't see anybody else getting into it or anything?

CD: No. No. Uh... the uh, you had the [Basherons?] and uh, uh, they were the principle owners of, they're the big owners. Now of course you, you had some stuff like Jim Martin who's an attorney in Saint Martinville who owned property in there. And so I had to do, deal with, with different people, but the ones in Anse La Butte were very, very nice to me. And uh, I coulda, I can go back there any time. And uh, as a matter of fact a funny thing was that uh, a number of years ago they asked me to go back and, and see a woman about, about uh, gettin' a renewal of a lease, uh, getting a, a 60-day [Inaudible]. They wanted, they wanted to rework the well and they were afraid they wouldn't get it back in time. So I, she, she was nice, nice to me and we had been friends. And, and she signed it, no questions asked and I sent it back to the company. So I never had anything but pleasant experiences out there.

DD: That's great. Uh, when you moved to Lafayette in 1940, w-, you were still doin' land deals, the same thing or-

CD: Same thing.

DD: How long did you continue to do that?

CD: 'Til '37.

DD: 'Til, 'til '37?

CD: I mean '71.

DD: Seventy-one, okay, so you continued to do land deals out of Lafayette.

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SW: You were uh, you were here before Mister Heymann set up his, his Oil Center.

CD: Before he, before he started the Oil Center?

DD: Right.

SW: Yeah. You were here.

CD: Long, long before that.

SW: So can you tell us the difference between Lafayette before the Oil Center and Lafayette after the Oil Center?

CD: Well, there was a geologist here... whose name I can't remember, but who was an independent geologist. And uh, he got to talkin' to Mister Heymann one day and he told him, he said, you see Heymann owned everything from Saint Mary on down below the hospital and all that stuff. And it was all-

DD: Pinhook, yeah.

CD: Yeah. And it was all in, in... in roses and all this stuff he raised. So this guy finally convinced him that maybe he oughta go ahead and, and uh, build a couple office out there, see how they went. And I'll tell you a sad thing, at that time there's a gravel road, which is Saint Mary, it was through the campus. You know out toward Pinhook. That was all gravel. And uh, it was hard to believe that uh, you know, it just was, now to tell you the, the oil people, the oil people gave this town a shot in the arm in my opinion. And the reason is that, that uh, the local people accepted them immediately and took them in, and it, you could belong, anybody came in here if he hadn't been convicted of a felony [DD chuckles] could belong to anybody club that there was, you know. Petroleum Club, uh, and so uh... there was a, a, a really an influx of people that came in as a result of that. And uh, the [Chuckles] well like the fella from Shreveport came down, the story was at that time, before there was any influx people, up in Shreveport came down and, and he went back to Shreveport and his friend said, "How'd you like Lafayette?" "Oh," he says, "it's a nice little French town. But," he said, "it's the funniest thing, everybody there's named [Boodraux?], Thibodaux, and [Comosevar?]." [All laugh] Now, what else, that, that was, that was, that was a big change.

DD: The people comin' in?

CD: Yeah, people comin' in.

DD: The money comin' in?

CD: Now I went to see, Amoco was thinkin' about movin' in here and they sent me to see Mister Heymann. And Mister Heymann said he would build us a buildin', any kind of buildin' we wanted anywhere. And he was anxious to make a deal, but the company got to foolin' around and didn't make the move. He did finally build a buildin' for 'em, but it was way, way late in the game. So they didn't move their production over here until much later. And uh... but people, people that came in here during that period really like it, you know. And we had a guy here, for example, this was, this is a story, this guy's a geologist. And he was one of the most unpopular guys I ever knew. [DD chuckles] And he said uh, he, I ran into him one day and he said uh, "I'm quittin'." I said, "What, what you gonna do?" He said, "I'm gonna stay right here in Lafayette." He said, "They wanna send me off to Tulsa." And uh, I said, "Well why you stay here?" "Cause I have so many friends here." [All laugh] I said, "What you gonna do?" He said, "I'm gonna sell insurance." I thought, "Man, you gonna starve to death." But he did sell insurance and he stayed which is pretty remarkable. But lot of those people got fascinated with us, it's an easy style of living.

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SW: And the people here didn't mind the others comin' in?

CD: Well, oh no no, no. It was never anything like that. And uh, they were accepted immediately. And uh, 'course I was kind of a local boy, there was no problem acceptin' me. But uh, but the people would come in from Oklahoma and Texas and so forth, they, they were all, all new, but, and they were all very well received. And so it, it meshed right away. There was no problem with that.

DD: How do you think all those people and all that money comin' in affected Lafayette?

CD: Well I don't know if there was that much, there was that much money. Uh, I'm tryin' to think who the big players were. [Slight pause] But, [Philips?] had a big office here at that time and Amoco later had an office here. We had that buildin' out on Pinhook. And uh, we stayed here for about three years. And [Inaudible] let me stay here. And uh, but I can't remember uh, anybody throwin' their weight around or anybody [Inaudible] money. And it's still that way, I don't know anybody [Chuckles] notice anybody throwin' their weight around.

DD: Well it's been, it's been said often that um-

CD: Huh?

DD: It's been often said that the Oil Center brought in a lot of money into Lafayette just-

CD: Well it di-

DD: Just, just by sheer number of people coming in.

CD: Right.

DD: And the ri-, executives coming in, they were able to spend more money and it kind of helped the city grow. And-

CD: Well that was true, but, but what they brought in were, were geophysicists and, and people go to find their oil, they moved them in here. And uh, it went, it, it grew rapidly. You see when we came here, we came in 1940, the, the population of Lafayette at that time was 19,600. [Slight pause] So we really watched it explode. And uh... and of course things here were pretty reasonable. We built a house out in Obalotta, which is a real nice section. And we built it for fifty-seven hundred dollars. [SW and DD chuckle] We lived there a few years and then we bought this place, 50 years ago we sold that one for 21,000.

DD: It's a good investment.

CD: So we've watched things go up, prices go up. And, and I, I hate to admit this, but we have so many places I haven't even been in, all these River Ranch stuff and all that stuff below. But I kind of live in this little orbit here. [CD and DD chuckle] Now can you think of anything, and one of the, one of the things I did, which I thought was, was good, I was the first guy to hire women land-, landmen. A lot of women have worked in, in land departments and kept records and so forth. But I talked with Claudia this mornin', whose been my secretary for about 20 years, 25 years I suppose. And she started counting up and she pulled the cards on these people. And I had ni-, I had 19 women, not all at the same time, but var-, various times.

DD: Doin' land deals.

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CD: Well, yeah. And so many people thought that, and I couldn't see it that way 'cause I'm an optimist. Uh, so many people thought send a woman out in Cajun country here that that would, they couldn't make a deal, you know.

DD: Hm, oh.

CD: Huh?

DD: I don't see where they would get that, I mean...

CD: Well a I never could, I never could either. 'Course my first was Cody Douglas, and she was the best lookin' woman I think I've ever seen. [DD and SW chuckle] And my wife won't deny that either. [All chuckle] And, but she was, she was real good. And uh, her hus-, I mean her father was in the business. And matter of fact, we worked her brother as a landman. And so she was good and we hired people like she and Mary Logan and all these people.

DD: So you eventually got your own staff out here for Amoco.

CD: Well, not really. Was sort of a, you couldn't, you couldn't hire anybody, at least we never hired anybody on a permanent basis except secretaries because you never knew how long it was gonna last or how long the job was gonna last. Now the, the top number of people we ever worked was 19. And uh, but we had pretty much a steady staff of about eight or nine every day. Now uh, one of the guys that we worked for, one of the men we worked for, was Stone. And Stone Oil, you see Stone Oil operated originally out of Cincinnati. And we worked, I did work for 'em when they were in Cincinnati because [Inaudible] was real good for 'em and he gave me all the work for them when they came in. So in those days I, I had at least two or three men workin' for Stone Oil every day. And of course since they've become very, very successful, you know. It, I think they're traded on New York Stock Exchange now. And uh, they're doin' very well offshore. But uh... I can't uh, what else do you wanna know?

DD: Uh-

SW: Did you notice that uh, as the oil industry, as, as the Heymann Oil Center opened and more oil companies were comin' in here, did that push or, or give encouragement to any more businesses to grow in this area or people to move in, bring their families?

CD: Well Mister Heymann when he opened the Oil Center, well he [Inaudible] Heymann Boulevard, he call it the Miracle Walk, Miracle Mile. [Chuckles]

DD: Yeah, yeah. [All chuckle]

CD: [Chuckling] You've heard that story?

DD: Yeah, I've, I've heard the Miracle Mile before.

CD: Yeah, well he, he uh, and he always envisioned that, he, he was an enthusiastic guy, he [let?] everybody. But what, as it was initially, he didn't have anything oil-related people in there. That was a big change came after the oil went, oil went bust in '85. Then that's when Herbert came in and started fillin' offices with every-, everybody else that wanted to come in. And uh, so... I can't think of...

SW: Speakin' of uh, speakin' of downturns, or the bust cycles, how did that affect your, your business?

CD: During what now?

SW: The, the bust cycles. How did that affect you?

CD: The bust cycle?

SW: Yeah. How did-

CD: Well-

SW: Any, any of the bust cycling and all.

CD: Well the bust cycle hurt me pretty bad because when you uh, when you're a success in the oil business, you know you're a paper millionaire. When you're broke, you're broke in real dollars. And that's what happened to me was that I had, I had reserves and... if, on paper I was worth a lot of money. But when oil went from 30 dollars to 10 dollars, it wasn't worth anything. As a matter of fact I had, we were drillin' a well, I was, I was in partnership drillin' a well at that time. And I was in debt to the First National Bank, rather the Guarantee Bank. And uh, I didn't have any damn assets, you know. And uh, I told him he could take a mortgage on my house. And [i?] said, [Inaudible] is incumbent, you can take a mortgage. He said, "Oh you can't, you're too old," he said, "we can't a mortgage from you at your age." [DD chuckles] I was [Chuckling] I was, I was only about ei-, about 75, I mean, 80-somethin'. [All chuckle] But at any rate, I worked my way out of that. And uh, so it all, it all came back. And uh... I, I'll tell you one of the things uh, let me see, what else do you wanna a-, ask me?

DD: Oh, was there anything that really stands out about your experience in the oil industry?

CD: Huh?

DD: Is there anything that really stands out about your experience in oil?

CD: No, I, I, I'd like to make it romantic, but [Chuckling] everyday was about the same. [DD chuckles]

DD: But, but it was overall a good experience and-

CD: Oh, hell, I, I... you see, I had a, people thought that I had a member of my family was on the board of directors of Standard of Indiana, 'cause he let me live in one place, we lived in the same place for 40 years or so. But what happened was that I went to work for 'em at such a young age, I was about 22, and uh, in those days a land-, a person got to be a landman by first workin' for example as a, a, on a, on a uh, seismic, gettin' permits. And then they moved him in maybe to do scour work and finally he moved when he was about 31, 32 became a landman. Well, I jumped the gun by 10 years. So I figured, and I said, "Hell, man, by the time I'm 31 I'm gonna be on my way up." Well it turned out that about three years after that my boss got sick and I became landman. I discovered and I missed my little [Inaudible] and I missed goin' out and the money didn't mean that much to me, so I makin' a good salary. And at that time I worked for uh, my head man was uh, [Curtis Gamble?]. And he, and he, I started workin' 'bout the same time he did, but he, he [Inaudible] up. And uh, we made a handshake deal that as long as I didn't, as long as I wanted to stay here and I knew what to do, I could stay here. And I did. And so that was why I stayed here all them years. I didn't wanna promotion, nobody was mad at me, you know. [Chuckles]

DD: Right. [Chuckles]

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CD: And then I never knew, I never knew in my office who was mad at who, things like that. So it never did surface. Uh... but it was uh, no, nothin' outstanding happened.

DD: Um, how did you used to make deals back in the th-

CD: Huh?

DD: Back in the early days, how did you, how did you make deals with uh, the local people, like in Anse La Butte and around here?

CD: Well now for example what was different about Anse La Butte is, you have to remember those people had been, they might not have been, they might, their English might not have been perfect, but they'd been makin' oil deals since 1900s, you see, the early 1900s. So they knew what they wanted. And Yount-Lee never did argue with 'em. So when I came back to renew their leases, that was where my work was, to renew all the leases Yount-Lee had. We had different ideas of what was in them, what they wanted. And so uh, they... there was no big, really big landholders, you see. You're talkin' about 60, 70 acres and a lot of it 20 and 30 acres. So that, those people, I've forgotten what the bonus was, but we gave 'em pretty good bonus. Had a pretty good [Inaudible]. And uh, so it was very pleasant, I didn't have to argue with anybody. And uh, because we were, when they, when Am-, when, when Stanolin bought out Yount-Lee, they knew exactly what those leases contained, 'cause it was on the trading table. So they ar-, they authorized me to do exactly what, what it, Yount-Lee would've done, which was goin' back and renewin' at the same price.

DD: Okay. Uh, were these deals like kind of handshake type deals or were they a little more formal than that or?

CD: No. Uh, first of all, no, I didn't fool with handshake deals. I went in and prepared lease before I went out there. And uh, I knew I [Inaudible] and if we didn't, we didn't make the deal, we didn't make the deal, but uh, initially I'd already run the records and I knew who owned it and so forth. And so we didn't uh, I don't think we had any big problems then.

DD: Okay. 'Cause I've heard stories about people just makin' a handshake kind of deal, slap the money down an oil barrel and that was it. But you had it more formal, kind of, you had the deal written out-

CD: Oh yeah, I, I never, I never of any good handshake deals.

DD: Yeah. Um, was, was it any different at Anse La Butte than anywhere else or pretty much the same?

CD: Oh no, no. All, all along, oh, all the way through.

DD: But, but at Anse La Butte you said the people knew what they wanted because they had been, had experienced it. Was it different for other places or?

CD: Well no, they had, you see... there was a salt mine on Anse La Butte. And it was like all early finds, they went on the theory that, that salt was impenetrable and that's where the oil would stop and it would trap it. And so uh, those people, they knew that from 1910 on, you see. And they also knew what they wanted. And I, and I knew more, more or less than I'm talkin' now, but I didn't want [Inaudible] do a lot more listenin' than I do talkin'. And uh, so uh, I had, I had kind of ingratiated myself with a number of people in Breaux Bridge who were, who were well-liked and so forth. And I'm always droppin' in, you know. Uh, [Todd, Todd Duke?] is one of my good friends. [Inaudible]. So, and, and that was, that was uh, uh, that was enough of a remark, you know. To get you in.

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DD: [Droppin' the name?], yeah.

CD: And so, no, I didn't have any problems like that.

DD: [To SW] Have any? [Pause] So basically you did the same thing until your semi-retirement in '71 and basically did land deals all the way through until you retired a few years ago.

CD: Yeah. Yeah. And one reason I retired them was I had a bad fall and I lost my sense of balance, I don't [Inaudible] too well. But now I'm in great physical shape.

DD: Has anything chan-, what, I know things have changed, but what stands out that has changed over the years in the oil industry that you've seen?

CD: Well you know, let me tell what we, what we did. We branched out into the abstract business. And we're still operatin' the abstract business right over there. And if you're interested I'll take you over there and introduce you to Claudia, [it's been around?] a long time. And uh, we, I, but I kept only 20 percent interest myself. 'Course I own the building and all in there. And they, they stay there. Now what we did when, when the oil boom went bust, then that's what, that's the only people we, we made abstracts for. Well right away we started courtin' all the attorneys in the building and loans, and anybody else who needed title work. And that's where all our, that's where our clients are now, we don't, I don't think we work any, maybe one or two oil companies occasionally. But work mostly for uh, mortgage loans and things like that. But that oil s-, we call it Oil Center Abstract. It was, we, Doug Taylor [handled?] the operations very, very easily. And uh, because we had some good people in there would either work titles or buy leases, you see. [He/Even?] your backup. Real good backup. And uh... let me see if I had anything if you-

DD: What about the oil industry itself, what changes have you seen that really had a big impact on the industry and Lafayette? [Slight pause]

CD: I don't know of anything spectacular.

DD: Yeah, it's just kind of a gradual evolution.

CD: Yeah. And uh, 'course a lot of people made money that, that never had it before. And that's, that's great news, you know. And. Uh [Extended pause] now, uh, I put, this is, I thought y'all might like to see how it looked. This is at Breaux Bridge. And that's John Breaux, but not, that's John Breaux and the other guy in the pirogue, I've forgotten what his name is. We gonna b-, we were buyin' a lease from him and the guy started writing a-

DD: Can I see that? [Pause]

SW: I can take a photo of it.

DD: Yeah, take a picture of a picture. Got it?

SW: Yeah.

CD: The guy-

[END OF RECORDING]