

HHA # 00282
Interviewee: Rufin T. Lowry
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: February 27, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW044
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.]

Ethnographic preface:

Rufin Lowry was born on February 20, 1921 in Jackson, Mississippi. He graduated from University of Mississippi Law School, practiced law for a year, but left in 1947 when he got a job with Pan American Production Company in Lafayette. He mostly handled land issues for the company. In his interview, he discusses the Oil Center in Lafayette, Louisiana Mineral Law, and the impacts of the oil industry on Lafayette.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [RL]

SW: Interview with Mister Rufin T. Lowry. Lowry?

RL: L-O-W-R-Y.

SW: And this is February twenty-seventh, 2003, in his office. Like I said I like to get a little bit background info on you. You're from Lafayette?

RL: I'm from Jackson, Mississippi.

SW: Jackson, Mississippi. You were, what year were you born?

RL: Two, 20, '21.

SW: Nineteen twenty-one. Okay. [Slight pause] And what did your father do for a living?

RL: He was state treasurer in Mississippi and state insurance commissioner.

SW: Okay. Did he have anything to do with the oil industry at all?

RL: No.

SW: How did you get involved?

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: [Clears throat] I graduated from Ole' Miss law school and got a job with PanAmerican Production Company. And I came from Jackson, Mississippi, to Lafayette and have been here ever since.

SW: Oh okay. What year did you get, arrive here in Lafayette?

RL: About 1947.

SW: Oh okay, that's right when the offshore bit of it was starting up then, right?

RL: Right, it, wasn't any real offshore in those days.

SW: It was, yeah, it was within sight of land, huh?

RL: Yeah.

SW: Okay. So you have a law degree?

RL: Right.

SW: But chose not to practice law? You, how did you get on with PanAmerican or what was-

RL: Well I practiced law for a year in Mississippi and ran into somebody in the oil business and said, "You wanna go to work for an oil company?" And that sounded like a good idea, so I ended up down here in Lafayette.

SW: Oh, okay. What kind of work did they ask you to do?

RL: [Clears throat] I, land work and land leases, legal, hearing titles and that type of work.

SW: Runnin' title and stuff like that.

RL: Right.

SW: That's what you did. So you didn't do any roughneck work or anything like that?

RL: No.

SW: Okay. [Clears throat] What was Lafayette like when you got here in 1947?

RL: The oil companies were spread all across town in different locations. The main reason I guess for the Oil Center to get started was the fact there was inadequate office space up town. And all the companies were scattered all, and it was hard to find office space. So when Mister Heymann agreed to build some buildin's, office buildin's, the Oil Center, everybody moved out, a lot of people moved out.

SW: So they weren't in this area, they were downtown and some other places like that. So-

RL: The Oil Center was Heymann's nursery. Where they had plants and so forth.

SW: And when [Slight pause] what sort of gave Mister Heymann the idea that an Oil Center could work? Did, was that his own idea or did, were others pushing him to-

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: No, no. Five or six of us approached him, went by his office and pointed out that we, office space wasn't adequate downtown and they came right up with the idea that, "If y'all will sign seven year leases, we'll, I will provide you the office space. Build office space to your specification." And that story-

SW: There's five or six of you on this, was it a commission of some sort or you just got [Inaudible, overlapping speech] as a group?

RL: No, we just got together. Most of us had complaints. [SW chuckles] One of 'em was that they turned on the air condition in the summer at eight o'clock and it was sweat box until 10 o'clock before the air condition started takin' affect. And then turn it off in four-thirty in the evenin', and if you worked 'til eight, it was, it wasn't very pleasant, it was sweat box.

SW: Still too hot? [Chuckles]

RL: Right.

SW: And that was, you had an office downtown as well?

RL: Right.

SW: Oh okay, so it was sort of the same thing?

RL: Yeah.

SW: I've heard that, too, also that the offices down there, that you guys were so crowded that you could literally reach out and touch another building through the window of your building. Uh-

RL: Well it just, they [Clears throat] the office space available in Lafayette was just not adequate for the influx of various oil companies.

SW: And things were starting to get, to grow at that point and make things worse obviously.

RL: Right. Right.

SW: Oh okay. I think I've heard this, part of this story before. I interviewed Missus Gloria Knox. She said that she might've been one of the people that was also talking to Heymann, was she in that group with you guys? No, it was a different group? Okay. [Slight pause] So he, so Mister Heymann builds offices here and you guys moved in.

RL: Uh hm.

SW: What else, did that also draw other companies from outside of the city?

RL: Uh... not for that reason. If they moved to town then he would build additional buildin's to develop the Oil Center. Then we talked to him about Petroleum Club and he donated the land if we could get the Petroleum Club kicked off. And that's pretty much how it, just continued to grow every year.

SW: So the oil industry was going through a boom at this time?

RL: Uh-

SW: Nineteen fifties?

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: [Hesitates] Oh I guess, yes. New companies were movin' in and so forth.

SW: Why in your opinion was Lafayette a good place for offices?

RL: [Clears throat] Well... Lake Charles didn't give the oil people a very good reception. At one time there was talk [of?] goin' to Opelousas, which was really more convenient than Lafayette. But Opelousas, a lot of the people that had money and office space or could make office space available didn't want the oilfield people in their town.

SW: Why is that?

RL: I, they were used to the roughnecks I guess in the earlier days and uh, the roughnecks were kind of a rough crowd. So they judged everybody in the oil business as equivalent of a roughneck and they just rather not have those [Chuckling] kind of people in town.

SW: Even you, though, you were running title, but you were a roughneck, right? [Chuckles]

RL: Well, [wait?], anybody in the oil business they just, without knowin' any better, just assume that they were the same rough and rowdy people that worked out in the early oilfields and were sort of hell raisers, so to speak.

SW: And they had that kind of reputation.

RL: Yeah. And they earned it. [SW chuckles]

SW: But uh, so Opelousas was kind of afraid of that, but did Lafayette, did the people in Lafayette have any opinions of [Inaudible] oilfield workers?

RL: Uh... no, not that I really recall. Uh... the town's always, as far as I know, has been very receptive towards the people in the oil business. Uh...

SW: Yeah, I'm from here, so I understand. I'm from Lafayette, I was born and raised and I understand that. And from what I'm hearin' from a lot of people, even back then, it was the same that it was pretty much a welcoming kind of atmosphere to the oil people.

RL: Yeah. I never knew of any feeling against people in the oil business.

SW: Never had any problems or anything like that?

RL: No.

SW: So Lafayette becomes the center because these other two cities are not quite the sa-, not quite as receptive.

RL: Yeah. And Lake Charles was more than Lafayette at one time, but people in Lake Charles wasn't receptive to the oil business either. Just didn't care one way or another.

SW: I see. When you arrived here in 1947, was it difficult to, well we're talkin' about it was, the office space was not adequate, what about living space? Did, was it easy to find a place to stay? A place to live or was that difficult?

RL: No, that wasn't a very big problem. [Pause]

SW: Did you guys rent first and then build a house or?

RL: Right. Well-

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: That's how.

RL: A lot of people were single when they came over, so they didn't need anything but a room, small apartment or somethin'. No housing never was any big problem. [Slight pause]

SW: As you saw maybe more people moving into town as the industry was growing and growing, did it ever see-, did you ever see a point where it was difficult for some people to find a place to stay because of too many people comin' into town or?

RL: Oh, they had, used to have waitin' lists at certain apartment complexes and everything, but I guess everybody managed to find someplace.

SW: I see you're from Jackson, Mississippi, were there a lot of people from Mississippi comin' over or these people that were comin' into town, where were they comin' from?

RL: Oklahoma, Texas, all over. They just, if a company decided to come to south Louisiana to prospect for oil, they'd open an office here and uh, they'd move some personnel in from, have a lot of people from Oklahoma there, and Texas, and some from Mississippi, all over, just to, just when they moved the office they'd move personnel with it.

SW: So they transferred the people in other words.

RL: Right.

SW: That's the way that kind of happened. I see. Um... well, workin' as a, would your title have been a, an abstractor or a landman?

RL: Yeah, title was district landman.

SW: District landman was what you did. What kind of hours did you work? Was it strictly eight to five or?

RL: Oh I just, whenever you had somethin' to do you did it. Uh... lot of the work was on the road, so it wasn't eigh-, eight to five, you were maybe down in Cameron Parish lookin' for people to get information or buy leases from 'em and things like that, so there wasn't any really uh... cut and dry schedule.

SW: You just kind of went where the work was.

RL: Yeah.

SW: And did what the work involved. So sometimes you had to be away from home overnight or anything like that?

RL: Oh yeah.

SW: That happened a lot?

RL: Uh hm.

SW: Okay. What, tell me about um, a typical day for you, what you would do if you had s-, if you had a job to work on. What was involved in what you did running the title and things like that?

RL: Well you would [Clears throat] the title work involved goin' to Saint Landry Parish Courthouse, Acadia Parish Courthouse, courthouse in Jennings or, to run the records and so forth. Goin' down to the land and gettin' various affidavits and uh, information that's needed to cure the title.

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: When you say "cure the title," what do you mean?

RL: [Clears throat] Curing the title is to, [you on?] the basis of a legal opinion that would pick out any defects to be cured, to be solved or whatever. To be sure you had all the proper to sign the lease and a-, [they'd ask?] affidavits and all kind of general. Possession of the land for purposes but to convince the lawyers that it was good title 'fore they drill a well and found out there was some legal problem.

SW: Oh okay. So you guys were tryin' to find out the history? Was it the history of the property and the owners?

RL: Right, well you had an abstract-

SW: And everything.

RL: Had all the courthouse work and then you, some of it you needed to do some [curaty?] work on.

SW: Okay. And you w-, you need to make sure you had everything right before they drilled so there were no problems.

RL: Right.

SW: And you mentioned tryin' to find owners, too. Is that because if they own the land or they lease it, do they need to get, you have to know who to pay royalties to?

RL: Right, you only have to know the ownership and percentages and whatever, so in order to be sure you got all the proper people sign the lease.

SW: So they all had to sign it to make sure you had everybody signing that lease before anything could be done on the property?

RL: Right. In other words, if there was seven, eight heirs [Clears throat] you'd be sure you had all the heirs. You knew who they were and had 'em all sign the lease.

SW: So, and you went and tracked these people down and had 'em sign? Is that part of your job-

RL: So to speak, yes.

SW: Okay. I guess sometimes you were runnin' all over the place. [Chuckles] Tryin' to get some different people to sign a piece of paper, right?

RL: Right.

SW: And doin' that sometimes. So you had direct dealing with the people.

RL: Exactly.

SW: You'd have to talk with them. You're sort of a mediator or maybe a middle man between the people in the oil company or?

RL: Kind of PR. If they had problems out in the field and the landowner was unhappy, you'd go down and talk to him to, so to speak, pacify him. Or see what it would take to pacify him. And that's about it.

SW: Who had the-

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: Lot of PR work, I guess you'd say.

SW: Did the, did you have any problems communicating with the people? Were there a lot of French-speaking people you had to deal with?

RL: Well, yes in certain areas. Well what you do [Clears throat] is get an interpreter and he'd ride around with you to introduce you to the French-speakin' people and uh, interpret for you.

SW: Where would, where do you guys get these interpreters? It was-

RL: Usually somebody who was well-known in the, that small community.

SW: You guys would just hire him and he'd work for you guys?

RL: Yeah.

SW: Okay, I see.

RL: You'd pay him so much a day to ride around with ya uh, interpret. And also it was a great help because he knew where all the people lived. So in addition to interpreting he'd, the people you wanted to see, he'd know where they were and uh, things like that.

SW: I guess I'm, I'm guessin' it made it a little easier, too, that he was so familiar with the people, he could introduce you and kind of smooth things over maybe?

RL: Exactly.

SW: Okay. Did you ever deal with any people who were suspicious of the oil companies because of what they were trying to do? [Chuckles]

RL: [Certainly?] that small percent. [Clears throat] But you had people you absolutely couldn't deal with. Period.

SW: What did, what would y'all do in those cases?

RL: There's just, there's not much you can do.

SW: Couldn't do anything?

RL: [Inaudible] leases and not gonna lease it, that was it.

SW: Even if they knew they could make some money off of it, they still wouldn't lease it?

RL: Uh hm. For whatever reason.

SW: But I guess you had plenty of other people who were willing to lease the land.

RL: Oh yeah, sure.

SW: Who had, in your opinion, who had the advantage in negotiations? Was it the landowner or the oil company?

RL: [Clears throat] Oh I don't know that there's any advantage. They could tell what uh, they wanted for their lease, how much, how many dollars per acre, how much royalty. And you might try to negotiate and you just, to make a deal

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

you had to arrive at somethin' that the landowner would accept and you were willing to pay. It's that simple. When you got to that point then you can go ahead and draw up the lease and get it settled.

SW: How long was a typical lease?

RL: Typical lease I guess was five years.

SW: Five years. So if he signed, if the landowner signed that lease that means the oil company had five years to do somethin'.

RL: Well, not exactly. You paid a bonus when the landowner signed it, which covered the first year. Then the lease specified rentals every year. So in order to perpetuate it pass the first year, you had to pay a rental for the next year and the next year.

SW: Okay. And so the landowner got some money upfront.

RL: Right.

SW: Right then and there.

RL: Cover the first year. Then you had the option of payin' for each [Inaudible] year or not payin' it and let the lease expire.

SW: Okay. What happens um, or what happened if... I'm askin' the wrong question. You paid the landowner to lease the land from him, that was the first thing, right?

RL: Right, bonus they called it.

SW: Then you drilled and you found some oil. So you also had to pay him royalties at that point, too.

RL: Correct.

SW: How did, how do you figure out the royalties?

RL: Well if the lease provides an eighth royalty, that's twelve and a half percent, so whatever comes out of the ground, he gets twelve and a half percent.

SW: Okay. Just-

RL: Or an eighth. So um-

SW: That was pretty standard, that eighth or did they try to negotiate and get more?

RL: Well, it was an eighth back in the early days. But it was [less?], developed into a sixth or sometimes a fifth or sometimes a quarter. It just subject to negotiation with the landowner.

SW: Did you ever have to talk with somebody and you uh, try to negotiate a certain price and then you give him that price and he says, "Oh no, so and so got more than me, so I want that." Was that ever a problem for you?

RL: Well it's... lot of 'em would want, normally they'd want to get paid the same price as the other people in that particular neighborhood.

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: So they kind of all talked with each other and-

RL: Oh they pretty well knew what [Chuckling] the goin' price was.

SW: They maybe seemed uneducated, but they knew what was goin' on. [Chuckles]

RL: Oh yeah, they... their neighbors would tell 'em, "Somebody's buyin' leases and they paid me so much an acre and so forth."

SW: Once you did one in the area, you pretty-

RL: So by the time you start makin' the rounds, people knew you were comin'. They were expectin' ya and they knew you were buyin' leases. As a rule the company would put a whole block together. To drill a well you'd need a certain amount of acres.

SW: When you... you were buyin' leases in blocks? [Slight pause] Is that what you're sayin'?

RL: N-, I don't know what you mean by blocks. Uh, you buyin' leases in a section. If it's, somebody owns the whole section, you get one signature. The sections all cut up or you got a lot of people to lease, just like that map up there, you can see how the tracks are all split up in some sections. Some sections one guy might own the whole section, so we'd lease that section from him. But if you got a number of people in there, you got to go back at each one 'til you get all the, whole section leased up.

SW: Oh okay. So sometimes that can present some problems if there was one person sort of holding out or-

RL: Right.

SW: Wasn't happy. Especially if he maybe had the entry to the spot where you needed to drill or something like that.

RL: Right.

SW: Um, I understand that Louisiana mineral law is a little bit different than some other places.

RL: Exactly.

SW: Could you explain that a little bit to me?

RL: Well one of the things is that [Clears throat] in Mississippi and Texas you buy a royalty from a landowner, it's perpetual. And Louisiana it's good for 10 years unless you drill a well, establish production, and then it's good for as long as it produces. But in absence of production then you buy royalty of minerals, it goes back to the landowner in 10 years.

SW: Ten years.

RL: Right.

SW: So if you lease the land, you've got to do something within those 10 years or everything reverts back to the landowner anyway.

RL: No. When you lease from the landowner, he owns it. They, a lease and buyin' royalty is two different things. In other words it's, he owns the minerals and if he don't sell the minerals, his royalty, then it remains his property. So when you buy a lease, you agree to pay him some money for the right to drill a well and if you're successful to pay

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

him royalty. But his royalty, his royalty minerals stay intact unless he sells to a third party. That's when the 10 years comes in play.

SW: So it sounds a little bit more complicated then say Texas or somethin' like that. There's a lot more involved in mineral leasing here in Louisiana.

RL: It's a little different, yeah.

SW: A little bit different.

RL: Uh hm.

SW: So um, if you have a landman from Texas and he moves to Louisiana, he'd have to learn some different tricks, right? [Chuckles]

RL: Right, but it's basically it wouldn't take much for him to learn.

SW: Okay. Just sort of moving from a different state, different system and whatnot.

RL: Yeah.

SW: Okay. Did you work, you worked for PanAmerican for a long time or?

RL: Hm, almost 10 years.

SW: Ten years. And then what happened?

RL: Then I decided to go independent and do things I want.

SW: Okay. Why did you uh, what, why was being an independent attractive to you? Versus working for somebody?

RL: For gamblin' uh, if you buy a lease, make a deal with somebody, and it turns out good, you could make a lot of money. And conversely, if it doesn't turn out good, you don't make any money. So it's just, I found it an interesting... situation to do some of that.

SW: Versus if you work for a company and you buy a lease and it makes big, a lot of that money goes to the company right?

RL: All of it goes to the company.

SW: And you get paid-

RL: Get paid a salary, right.

SW: So it's riskier to be an independent, but it's more rewarding financially if you-

RL: [If you're?] successful or lucky. [SW chuckles] [Or either one?].

SW: What percentage of luck is involved?

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: Uh, quite a bit. You do these things on your best information. And not [Inaudible]. It was a gamble. They used to say that one out of 10 wells was, makes a well of some kind. So the odds against you buying leases, drilling a well, and making a well. So you playin' odds and that's a question of luck.

SW: That's where the gamble comes in.

RL: That's where the gamblin' comes in.

SW: I see. Okay. Where, well you sayin' you'd buy a lease and workin' on information, where would you get this information? How would you decide that you think you might wanna buy a lease here and do somethin' with that?

RL: Well you talked to Bill Craig I think you told me. Well Bill's a geologist, we worked on things together. And he had maps and where wells have been drilled and all that information, so he [shuffles?] the logs, as you call it, to see what he, well he comes up with an idea and usually you have to have some information from a geologist in order to know where you wanna buy leases and put a deal together to sell to a third party.

SW: So you, the geologist mainly are the guys that are looking for what could be potential wells.

RL: Right.

SW: And they pass that, they've done their job and they pass that info onto you or to other land people.

RL: Right.

SW: And you go-, you decide if you think this is a good opportunity.

RL: Yeah. Whether it's worth spendin' some money on, right.

SW: Yeah, yeah. Where would you get the money to buy a lease from? Would you have to borrow it from the bank?

RL: Well [my/Mike?] Willy Sutton. You get, you, [he held?] up banks because that's where the money is. We didn't hold 'em up, but the banks put up the money.

SW: Okay. So you'd get a loan from the bank.

RL: Uh hm.

SW: A short-term loan or a long-term loan or?

RL: Whatever.

SW: However-

RL: Yeah, usually short-term.

SW: They wanted their money back pretty quick, huh? [Chuckles]

RL: Well, uh, different banks have different requirement. And they wanted to be sure they got the money back and got paid the interest on you borrowin' the money.

SW: So you had to borrow the money from the bank to buy the lease from the landowner.

SW: And then you rented out your lease to the third party, the oil company.

RL: Right.

SW: Is that how that worked? They come in, they drill, and then [Slight pause] okay. Then they pay, let's say-

RL: If you bought the lease for so much, then you deliver to them for so much of some extra, so you could, if you sold the lease then you got enough money to go pay off the bank and have some left over.

SW: And that's what you kept.

RL: Right.

SW: Okay. And then the oil company paid the royalties to the landowner.

RL: Right.

SW: But you had your, you had your cut of it outside of that.

RL: Right.

SW: Okay. I see how that works. So it's still a little confusing to me, but you got, you've been doing it for so long, I'm sure it's second nature, right? [Chuckles]

RL: Right.

SW: As the, you dealt mostly with the land-based rigs.

RL: Right, right.

SW: Yeah, you can't as a abstractor there's not really any work offshore, right?

RL: No. Uh-

SW: 'Cause-

RL: S-, at offshore it's either owned by State of Louisiana after a certain distance from land and then past that it belongs to the government.

SW: Federal government so-

RL: Federal government.

SW: Can't use you guys, right. So what happened as the, I know that there's a lot of production offshore, as that started to increase did that hurt you guys at all workin' on land?

RL: No, I wouldn't say so. If you have a good deal on land you could always sell it. Get a well drilled. And lot of the people that [Clears throat] operate on land uh, don't operate offshore because it's very expensive out there. You have to bid on the leases, and it's expensive to drill a well, and just a different ballgame. [Coughs]

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: Lot more involved it sounds like.

RL: Right. [Pause]

SW: How many guys like you here in the, in Lafayette would you say were independent landmen? How many of you guys were there?

RL: Oh it's varies over the years. It depended on how busy things were. If there was a boom goin' on or, there were a lot of landmen around. [Coughs] If things quieted down to where they couldn't utilize but 25 percent of 'em, then obviously they, lot 'em had to do somethin' else. Get a job and quit bein' an independent landman. So that varies. Oil business always chicken and feather. Chicken one day and feathers the next.

SW: What did uh, I mean you're still here, so what did you do during those down times? I guess it didn't hurt you as much?

RL: Uh, I guess not. Just survived during the, a lot of it had to do with the price of oil. When the price of oil gets real low uh, it's very difficult to make money. Very difficult to sell a deal. So the price of oil is high you, things were very prosperous. But gets real low, it's just the opposite.

SW: You're always playing that game depending on-

RL: Well, average guy like me didn't have much to do about the, settin' the rules of the game. It was whatever the game was, that's the only game in town and so that's the way you played it.

SW: So who controls those oil prices? How does that work?

RL: Oh, I guess supply and demand.

SW: There's no real gov-, there's no real body of people controlling that, it's just-

RL: No.

SW: The economic laws, right?

RL: Right. And of course the country never, federal government's never had a legitimate energy program that I know anything about. Uh... some bureaucrats that... you put, only way you put up with it is because there's no other way to do it. So, but it's mostly, just like most things, supply and demand.

SW: Hm. [Slight pause] What um... mo-, I guess moving here from Mississippi or, and m-, landing here in Lafayette, if you weren't in the nineteen-, late 1940s and 1950s, if you weren't an abstractor, if you weren't a landman at that time, what other kind of opportunities did you see around here? Op-, employment opportunities, what else could you have-

RL: Outside of the oil business?

SW: Outside of the oil business.

RL: Well I, you sell shoes or ha-, you know, the same opportunities that anybody else had at the time. Um-

SW: Was the oilfield attractive to some people because it was exciting or good money or-

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: Probably so, yes. And it was just, there were a lot of jobs in the oil business that were related to exploration and uh, drillin', development, workovers, rental tools, and all that. Tremendous amount of people, numbers of people workin' various other parts of the oil business.

SW: So-

RL: Surveyin' or doin' seismic work, or all kind of work.

SW: The oil patch employed a lot of people it sounds like.

RL: It does even today.

SW: Today, just all these different subsections.

RL: Right.

SW: Well I notice too that um, you drive down I-90 right there towards New Iberia you see all these companies.

RL: Yeah.

SW: And-

RL: Service companies.

SW: Service companies, yeah, it's not oil companies, it's service companies.

RL: Right.

SW: So that must've just ballooned.

RL: Right, and some people sell pipe, some people had pumps, or they have little, [all?] companies is, a lot of services go into drillin' wells, and completin' wells, and settin' up the facilities, tank batteries, uh, various other parts of equipment and everything that's there to get the oil from the, oil and gas from the wells itself to pipelines and so forth.

SW: So all of these industries are dependent on oil.

RL: Right.

SW: The main oil companies. So what happens when, well, I mean everybody knows what happens when we're in an oil boom, everybody's got money and everything's good, but what happens to those support industries when the oil comes crashin' down?

RL: Well some of 'em just cut way back, wait for things to change, get better. Some of 'em go out of business. Uh... it's just, it just depends. [Pause] It's like we had a grocery store and WalMart moves in a block away, chances are you gonna go out of business.

SW: Yeah. I just, that's the economics of it, right?

RL: Yeah.

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: I see. Um, what do you think, just by livin' here since 1947, how have you seen this city of Lafayette change because of the oil patch? What changes have you seen and what progression have you seen?

RL: Well the main thing they've gotten a lot of people that moved in from all over. Lot of 'em were college graduates and uh, and they formed the country clubs and Petroleum Club and things like that, just they moved here with their families and whatever. It's changed the whole complexion of Lafayette. When I first came down here it was a small town. And it's changed greatly. Much larger. It was kind of a sleepy town and wasn't much traffic. And just quiet town. It just grew, got bigger and most sophisticated and more traffic on the street and so forth.

SW: Not always a good thing there, huh? [Chuckles]

RL: Traffic is terrible.

SW: Yeah. Town's growing too fast.

RL: Right.

SW: Well back then what about, were the roads paved or were they gravel roads?

RL: Some of 'em gravel. Out where Ambassador Caffery is there wasn't any road. Wasn't any bridge. [Slight pause] And a lot of 'em, Johnston Street, when you got down to uh, where [Mel's Diner?] is from then on down south is gravel road. [Pause]

SW: Yeah, I had heard that over there off of Johnston the Judice Inn, the hamburger place.

RL: Uh hm.

SW: I heard for awhile that was the edge of town.

RL: Just about.

SW: Yeah. That you couldn't get city services beyond that point.

RL: You know where the Promenade Mall is?

SW: Yeah.

RL: That's where I lived. So you're right, it's not far from-

SW: Not far from there at all.

RL: From Judice. But that was gravel. Judice was gravel, yeah. From uh, Judice to town pretty much there wasn't anything.

SW: Was, it was two lane road at that time, Johnston Street? It was only two lanes?

RL: Two lanes, yeah, yeah. That's correct. Gravel.

SW: And now it's four lanes or five if you count that middle one. But it's crazy to drive on that road right now. [Chuckles]

RL: Yeah.

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

SW: You mentioned the mall, it's not there any more either, they tore it down, didn't they?

RL: Well it burned and, yeah. They finished tearin' it down.

SW: Yeah, so it seemed to me Lafayette was starting to grow sort of in that direction. More people were-

RL: Yeah.

SW: Were goin' out.

RL: Movin' south of town. But when I first moved out there it was out in the country. Wasn't many people, wasn't any where close except Judice Inn was there and not much else.

SW: So you guys built out there, out in the countryside.

RL: Right.

SW: Was it, I guess it was less expensive to get a plot of land out there and build out there than it was here in town?

RL: Oh I, it's a long time ago.

SW: Oh. [Chuckles] I know a fella who was over there off of, just past the Judice Inn and he said that, he gave me the numbers and I can't remember 'em, but if it was 18,000 to build the house and buy the land, the whole thing would cost 150,000 right now. So, just to see that progression. I think that was in the 1960s. But that's pretty much normal for every-, everywhere. You know, the prices go up and everything.

RL: Uh hm.

SW: But uh [Slight pause] it was a different time back then, huh? [Chuckles]

RL: Different time altogether.

SW: What about Saint Mary right here? Was that paved or was that gravel?

RL: Uh, it was probably paved. I, I don't remember specifically what was paved and what wasn't or when it got paved.

SW: I had heard also that Mister Heymann himself built the two streets right here through the Oil Center. The, was it Coolidge, is it Coolidge Avenue and-

RL: Coolidge and Heymann.

SW: And Heymann. I had heard he had built those himself-

RL: He probably did.

SW: The city didn't have money.

RL: Well, well I'm sure that when he converted this from a nursery, all this was camellias and azaleas, that to build these buildings he had to have [hard surface?] just like creatin' a subdivision. Whoever created the subdivision had to put in roads and sewage before he could do anything else. [Slight pause]

SW: Did you know Mister Heymann personally?

SW: Did you know him fairly well?

RL: Yeah.

SW: What kind of man was he? I've heard he was very generous.

RL: Very generous. Very intelligent guy and very nice person. Very civic-minded.

SW: Yeah, he's donated a lot to the city.

RL: Right.

SW: I guess we can sort of look at him and see that he really helped the city a lot out by not only giving money but also bringin' a lot of business in.

RL: Right.

SW: With his Oil Center idea.

RL: And of course he, they had the store and the nursery for many years before that. But he sold food and he also sold clothes and other things. Toys. A lot of people traded with Heymann downtown in the stores.

SW: So he was a very prominent member of the community I guess you could say.

RL: Exactly.

SW: I think his family still is now, even still to this point. Hm.

RL: Well most of his family's gone. Herbert died.

SW: Yeah, that's right.

RL: So there's not much of the family left here in town.

SW: So. [Pause] I guess just one more question, you have any regrets at all about your career?

RL: Yeah I regret that I didn't drill more good wells and dry holes, I regret that. [SW chuckles] I don't know how you could've done it any different, but I would've preferred to have more wells that were good.

SW: Yeah. 'Course that's what you were tryin' for anyway in the first place.

RL: No, it's been a great life. Lot of great people, you have a lot of friends in the same business you're in. No, I, very interesting life.

SW: And I see you still keep in touch with Bill Craig and other people that you used to work with.

RL: Oh yeah.

SW: A lot, of course he's still workin' and so are you, so you guys ever still do business together a little bit or-

Interviewee: Lowry, Rufin T.

Interview Date February 27, 2003

RL: Oh yeah. Bill's a good guy, they're high class.

SW: Okay, well do you have anything you wanted to I? I've asked my questions.

RL: [Clears throat] Not that I can reckon.

SW: Okay.

[END OF RECORDING]

