

Interviewee: Marin, Rufus

Interview Date: August 1, 2002

HHA # 00286

Interviewee: Rufus Marin

Interviewer: David DiTucci and Steven Wiltz

Interview Date: August 1, 2002

Interview Site: New Iberia, LA

Interview Module & No.: MMS: DD006

Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling has not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. For the most part, repeated words have also been left out of the transcript. There is a lot of beeping in the recording which interferes with audibility; there is one seven minute break in the transcript where beeping overshadows the interview. There is a woman present, and although she is never directly identified, because of the way she talks to RM, I inferred she was his wife and have labeled her "MrsM."]

Ethnographic preface:

Rufus Marin was born in New Iberia, Louisiana, in 1921. His father worked as a ticket agent for the railroad before owning a grocery store and working as a salesman. His first job in the oil industry was in the Red Fox Machine and Supply Company office, where he worked for about a year; his sister also went to work there and was the assistant to the boss for 44 years. In 1955, he went to work for his cousin at Laperouse Abstract Company, where he learned how to abstract land titles. They worked together for four or five years in Vermillion Parish; for the next 30 years he stayed with the company, working all over south Louisiana. When work slowed down in 1991, he was laid off and went to work on his own. He retired in about 1999, but has continued to do some contract work during the summer. During the interview he provides detailed explanations and descriptions of the abstracting process and the way that land ownership, royalties, and minerals rights work in Louisiana.

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TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [DD] and [SW]

Interviewee initials: [RM]

RM: Marin. That's another Spanish pronunciation. With the accent on the second syllable.

DD: Interview with Rufus Marin, it is August first, 2002, two p.m. at his home. [Pause]

SW: As you may have, you may already know from us talkin' to you before, we're uh, we're interested in learnin' about your personal experience in the oilfield in south Louisiana. Are you from Louisiana?

RM: Well I was born here in New Iberia on Iberia Street. And uh, the doctor who delivered me forgot to record my birth, so I had to get a delayed certificate when I was an adult. [SW chuckles] So-

SW: What year was that?

RM: I was born in 1921. October the twenty-seventh, 1921.

SW: Oh so you were, that would make you old enough to remember the big flood.

RM: I was six or seven years old in 1927, during the flood. Mama took us away and uh, where we lived was right across from where the [common?] is on uh, Bridge Street. We just about a block from the bayou. And I saw pictures later where dad tied his canoe to our roof top. [SW chuckles] That's how high the water was at that area. And it's a good thing there was uh, and you know, the school was two, two or three story building. And so as a result everybody had to go upstairs. They moved the furniture and everything up there.

SW: Geez.

RM: Oh yeah. So uh, I don't have any personal recollection of it, but I have a recollection of what was told to me. Like my uncle who lived in Acadia Parish came over to help. He was [Inaudible]. And uh, he helped rescue people and bring 'em to camps where they would uh, house 'em and feed 'em. But uh, other than that, uh, the only other [Chuckling] experience that I can think of that might be a little uh, amusing is that my dad had a grocery store and we lived right next door to it. And at the time most of the can goods had paper labels on 'em. And of course the flood removed all the labels. So he had a sale after that and you'd buy just wondering what you gonna eat for dinner. [All laugh] So anyhow-

SW: That's a good story.

RM: That happened only time was ever 1927. Um.

SW: How did, what your family, your father, your father owned a grocery store?

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RM: Oh yeah, my father was a... was a salesman before. Back before that he worked for the railroad, that's how he met my mother. He was ticket agent in the little town of Morse in Acadia Parish. There's no tracks there anymore, they've been removed. But uh-

SW: So how did you end up getting into the oil industry?

RM: Oh I was uh, I wasn't employed at the time and a cousin of mine had an abstract business and he was overloaded and needed help. And so, since I wasn't workin' he said, "Would you mind comin' and help me out? I got about a six months of work that I can't handle by myself, would you help me?" So I said, "Sure, I don't know a thing about it." But he said, "Don't worry I'll teach you." And sure enough he taught me. Somebody taught him, and then he taught me, since then I've taught many other people as well how to do abstracting of land titles. But I, that was in 1955.

SW: That's when you started-

RM: That's when I started.

SW: You had had no previous experience-

RM: Well I had about a year I stayed with Red Fox Machine and Supply Company. They were located here on the Saint Martinville Highway. And uh, I got to know practically all of the material needed to drill a well. You know, like a rig, the draw works, and the... roustabouts, and the whole bit. Because we had to repair all that. And uh, I said, I was always a pencil pusher. I worked in the office. But we had to receive all of that, uh, we had to order all the stuff that was necessary, you know, to make the repairs. And uh-

SW: So you became familiar with all of the equipment-

RM: I became familiar with it and uh, I stayed there about a year or so, then my sister came over from uh, Morgan City, she was working in Morgan City during the war. Uh, both of us did. Right after the war, he, she came over and I didn't particularly care for the job that I had, so I was telling, I told her about it and she came over and she got a job there, too. And she stayed there 44 years. Can you imagine?

SW: At Red Fox?

RM: At Red Fox Machine and Supply Company, right. She was the bosses right-hand man. In fact she even signed the payroll checks.

SW: Right-hand woman. [Laughs]

RM: Right-hand woman. [Laughs] [Slight pause]

SW: You have to keep it that way these days, you know.

RM: Uh hm. [RM and SW chuckle]

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SW: But uh, well that's interesting. And then after that you went on and uh, and began abstractin' for your cousin. What was your cousin's business name?

RM: Uh, the name of the company was Laperouse Abstract Company. L-A-P-E-R-O-U-S-E.

SW: [To DD] Sounds familiar Dave?

RM: Laperouse Abstract Company.

SW: I heard that name yesterday in an interview.

RM: Really?

SW: William Q. Mouton.

RM: Oh, I know Bill. Yeah, and I know his father. Both of 'em are lawyers.

SW: Yeah, we interviewed him yesterday.

RM: Yeah. Bill, in fact, Bill did some abstract work. And of course he and his dad both did uh, examining of titles. The legal end of it.

SW: Right. That's what he-

RM: We had to know a little bit of the legal part of it, because it was necessary, you know. We had to know what to do to be able to satisfy the legal requirements. But uh, abstracting per se, in other words there was no place at the time where you could go to learn how to be an abstracter.

SW: [Writers?].

RM: Usually a lawyer, you know, knew more or less what had to be done, and gradually uh, taught people what to do. So, 'cause they didn't want to do that at all. And then I mean, it was highly specialized business. And so uh, I remember I saw the name Jerome... what was Jerome's last name? Might be Broussard, he was from Saint Martinville, a lawyer. He taught Laperouse's cousin how to abstract. His name was Li-, Lionel Laperouse. And I don't know what his business name was. But he's dead and so is uh, the man I worked for, he's dead also. But Jerome taught Lionel Laperouse how to abstract. Lionel taught brother, my boss, and he taught me. And we worked together for four or five years. And then he left me on my own over there, 'cause most of our work was in Vermillion Parish. I worked there approximately 30 years in Vermillion Parish. So I got to know the parish real well. I noticed [Chuckles] all the uh, young lawyers as they came in to practice law in Vermillion Parish, they didn't learn how to run the records in law school. So since I had already been there four or five years, they asked me a lot of questions. One of the questions was [Pause] in an abstract, you have to start from the beginning. All land comes out of the federal government. The federal government either sold it to somebody and that sale was called a pat-, patent. [Clears throat] Excuse me. And if they didn't sell it to someone, they gave it to someone, or they gave it to military personnel as a reward for military service in the war or out of the war. And so the federal government also gave a lot of land in Vermillion Parish to the state. Most of the uh... most of the swamp land was given to the state. Now, the state in turn would

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make sales to individuals, and they too were called patents. In other words a "patent" is the first sale out of the sovereign. Either the federal sovereign or the state sovereign. And this is how oil companies would order an abstract. "I wanna abstract from the sovereign to date." And from the beginning [Inaudible]. So what you did was you started with the federal government and [ran then?] [Inaudible] to see who they sold to. But prior to that, you see, if it was patented to somebody, well that, uh, you look at the land entry books. And they had federal land entry books and state land entry books. And so all land was described the same way: section, township, and range, with a meridian. And everything in Louisiana west of the Mississippi River is the Louisiana Meridian. Which is the line from the Gulf of Mexico to the northern border of the state. And uh, it's about, you know where Kaplan is? Well it's somewhere near Kaplan, I forgot whether it's east or west beside Kaplan. But it runs directly north and south. Now all along that line is every six miles you have a township. And you have a baseline which is a little bit south of [Venice?], which runs east and west, from border to border. So everything north of that baseline is Township One North, Township Two North, Township Three, and so forth. And coming south, One South, Two South, Three South, Four South. Like New Iberia's 13 South. That's how far from the baseline we are. And I'm not too sure about the range, but I think it's six. Now on the baseline is where your ranges comin'. Every six miles you have a range. And you have e-, eastern ranges and western ranges. So you have township and section and range. Or township, range, and section [Inaudible]. Now I've been retired for three years so some of the terminology might uh, might escape me. But we have a big map of Louisiana on the wall and wife was kind enough to draw a line where the baselines are. And uh, showing all the townships and so forth. Now, there's another on the we-, on the east side of Vermillion. Not Vermillion, the east side of the Mississippi, there's another baseline called the Saint Helena baseline. And this too is north and south, east and west. I don't think there's any northern townships. I don't think there's any northern townships on the Helena. They all southern townships. If they have east and west ranges. And so when you describe a piece of property that you're gonna [abatype?], the oil company usually buys a lease [Inaudible] from a landowner, not necessarily a farmer, but a land owner. The one who has all the [minerals?]. That's who'd they lease from the mineral owner. The minerals in the land and the royalty are all together as long as the farmer or the landowner doesn't sell any. So in oil well stock, well, this part might be [a little different?] but there's scouts that work for major oil companies that go from [Inaudible] and gather information. There are logging companies, like Slumberger, Halliburton, and so forth, that geologists study. There are seismograph crews that work the land for the major oil companies. The geologists put all this information together and make an educated guess as to just where the oil is located. Now that was before 3D seismic work came. So you had a lot of wildcat wells. You, lot of wells are not [produced?], [create a dry hole?].

SW: [Inaudible]

RM: Educated guesses, but [Inaudible]. In a lot of cases they didn't drill deep enough. That particular landowner uh, [Inaudible], "They didn't dig deep enough, I got oil under there," you know. [Laughs] So uh, [some will tell you?]. But anyhow, to get back to the description of land. Within a township, if it was a regular township, there's [Inaudible], six miles one way, six miles another way. And in each one of those sections are numbers. You start with the northeast corner and there's section one, two, three, four, five, six. Then you go to the next tier and they have seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12. All the way down to 36 [Inaudible] township. Thirty-six square miles. Now an irregular township is one that forms [Inaudible]. So say for instance the Vermillion

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River traverses Vermillion Parish. And all along the Vermillion River you have what is called [Inaudible]. The [unit?] of [Inaudible]

[From 15.07 to 22.09 beeping is almost continuous and audibility is low; transcript picks up when beeping subsides a bit]

RM: And he sold a piece of property to someone, I don't remember who he sold it to, but I remember [Inaudible]. And he sold oh quite a few acres. I think a fella named Mouton, but I really, I wouldn't be sure about that. And that was the only, that's the only [Inaudible] I ran across that uh, had anything to do with Indians in Vermillion Parish. So I thought that was a little odd and a little unique so to speak. Uh-

SW: What is a typical, can you describe a typical workday for you? And when I say just "typical day," I mean it can stretch over, I'm hopin' I can get from you the start of the project [Inaudible], how'd it go?

RM: Well, I, I'll go with Vermillion Parish, 'cause that's the one that I worked in the longest. You'd get an order, let's say for instance from uh, at the time it was uh... I don't quite remember the, but anyhow, regardless it was a major oil company. They ordered an abstract from sovereign to date. In Vermillion Parish the first thing we did was to check to see if it was segregated. It had to come out of the federal government before you checked anything, because if it didn't come out the federal government, than the kind of lease that the oil company [pulled?] was no good. 'Cause the land owner, thinking he owns the minerals, didn't. So the first thing you checked was to see if it was released from the sovereign. In other words they had to have a patent; it had to come out of the sovereign government. Once it became uh, an individual's property, then you could trace it. And you trace it by name. So in Vermillion Parish we started with today instead of starting with the federal government. Instead of starting at the beginning and coming to the end, we start at the end and go back as far as we could. So what you did was let's say for instance uh, James Smith owned a piece of property that he leased to a major oil company who wanted to drill on his property, so they wanted an abstract, otherwise they wouldn't even order an abstract, 'cause they had to be sure that the landowner has the [total?] amount of minerals, of 100 percent minerals. If he didn't own it all, then they had to go find out from, you know, other people. From other people who owned the uh, the rest of the minerals. So what you did was like if Jim Smith owned the property, he may have bought it today, he may have bought it 40 years ago, but you check in [Vendi?], which is, which shows all of these buyers. Vendi, you take the Vendi index to see where Joe, uh, Jim Smith purchased the property. Now when you found out that he bought it from say so and so, you write up a receipt on that, the seller, the buyer, the type of instrument, whether it was a cash deed or credit deed or a donation, then you put the date, [Inaudible] down, and what page number that it's on, so that you can make a copy of it later. So you can compile your abstract to present to an examining attorney. The next thing you did was when you got the first [Inaudible], you go back and see who he bought it from. And you go back from he bought it from. And you're checking the Vendi all this time on the various names of the property owners at the time. And so you finally get to the end and when you do, if you have no missing links, you have a chain of title. From beginning to end. So once you got the chain-

SW: Was that common that you'd find no missing links?

RM: Well... that wasn't uh, it was common that you found one with no missing links. Once in a

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great while you would find one that uh, would be difficult to find for this lease. In irregular sections, in uh, you know like a regular section is a square mile, that's 640 acres. Now if you're in a large grant, like say for instance a Marin grant you, Vermillion Parish was uh... something like twenty-five hundred acres. It was a big grant, you see. And so when you bought, when somebody bought something within that grant, all they could tell you was north, bounded north by so and so, south by so and so. So you'd have to identify by bounding only. Whereas, ordinarily, if you have section township [Marin?], it's simple. If it's described that way. But in Vermillion, the farther back you go, the worse the description. Especially in those larger grants. And that's where the difficulty came in. I mean, if you, otherwise you'd have a missing link and you'd have to just keep diggin' until you found it. Now sometimes... if you uh, had a spot there in the middle, you'd have to get, you'd have to locate people until you get to a known boundary, like a section. And then you'd have to satisfy the attorney that that particular piece of ground is where it is. That so and so owns it, you see. So that was, once you get a complete chain of title, that's the backbone of your abstract. Then you take individual owner, if you start with the current owner or any owner, in other words, three of four people that worked on it. You take this name and you take that name. And run that particular name, like the current owner, you run all records. You run in Vendi, [Vendal?], you run mortgages, you run suits, you run successions. In other words, all and miscellaneous [Inaudible]. Different parishes have different indices. Anyhow, you run 'em all records. Then you have to pull all the books, in other words everything the man did with that piece of property has, you have to show in your abstract. So if he gave a right away for a road, you'd have to write that up and include that in your abstract. If he sold a portion of his minerals, you have to write that up and show that-

SW: You photo copy this or you hand wrote it?

RM: Oh, you just make notes, a little sheet on each one. In fact uh, [To an MrsM] I don't know if we ha-, do we have any here? We could show 'em, how we have the worksheets.

MrsM: Yeah.

RM: You just put the uh, on each transaction you have to write up a worksh-, at least I do. And that's the way the man taught me, you have to write up a worksheet so that you know where you are. You can't just remember it and make a note saying, "So and so bought so and so." I would make out a worksheet on each lead that's gonna be included in the abstract. Because prior to Xeroxing instruments, all of that had to be [Inaudible]. So you give your worksheet to the typist and the typist would type it up. The whole deed, you see. And then somebody'd have to proofread it.

SW: Make sure there was no mistakes.

RM: Make sure there was no mistakes. And prior to uh, the computer, you used carbon paper and every time you made a mistake, you have six and seven mistakes to correct.

SW: Copies of mistakes.

RM: Correct, yeah. [Chuckles] So anyhow-

SW: But that was a job for somebody who the computer got rid of that.

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RM: Right, correct. So the deal was each name in the chain of ownership have to run, have to be run all records to be sure what they did with it. The reason why, the reason for that is... the reason for that is because the examining attorney will determine legally whether or not the title is good. And that's the whole point of having it examined. Not only do they, the examining attorneys, not only do they look at all of the deeds involved, they look at within the deed to see if, whether it was [legal?] within. Like for instance was it property witnessed. In some cases you need two witnesses, other cases maybe you just need one. But anyhow, you would need witnesses. So that's one of the many things that uh-

MrsM: Here's a [grant deed?]. [Pause]

SW: Oh okay. [Inaudible] [Pause as they look at the paper]

RM: But anyhow, you have to make a little worksheet and-

SW: Compile everything.

RM: And you compile that on every owner. You check the owner of each, you check the property owner all records to determine what they did with the property when they had it. They either sold it, you know like when you chain, your chain will tell you whether they sold it or whether they died with it, if the heirs acquired it. And whether they kept it, what they did with it, all the heirs have to be run on. Everybody who had an ownership in the property had to be run all records. The reasons for that was it was the only way you could compile to see what they did. So you can imagine a very active man who has say a property about six or eight parts of the parish. I mean, you have to look at deed that uh, you have to look at everything he did in every piece of property that he owned, you see. And so uh, it was tedious.

SW: The object was to compile a meticulous ownership record.

RM: Ah, there's a-

SW: Every piece of land-

RM: A meticulous ownership record is a good way to put it.

SW: And then you give that to the examining attorney.

RM: And once you get it typed or uh, use whatever way you reproduce it, Xerox it, nowadays it's just copying, you just a copy machine. But anyhow, you compile all that into an abstract, usually about 300 pages each. And some-

SW: For each piece of land?

RM: Each, yeah. Well, the instruments are related to that particular piece of land. So the definition of an abstract to be the history of a piece of property from beginning to end. In other words, everybody that owned it has to be checked out so the examining attorney can see that it is a good title. Now chances are that 99 times out of 100 it's gonna be a good title. Sometimes it's not. I remember one case, I don't remember the name, uh, I don't remember the names involved,

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but an abstract was compiled and delivered to the oil company. And was placed on the oil company's land man's desk. Sometimes you give it directly to the examining attorney, the abstract, would bring it directly to the examining attorney's office. In this particular case it was brought to the land [company?], the major oil company and placed on the land man's desk. And he was busy, so the story goes. On the first page of the abstract, "Your leaser does not own the property." In other words, the man who they got the lease from that they gonna drill an oil well on didn't even own the property and that's the only lease they had. And so you can imagine what happened to that land owner. [RM and DD laugh] He was reprimanded at the, I think he was fired. But anyhow, I don't remember the names of the companies and the land man. But they went ahead and they drilled a well on that abstract because he, the land man, forgot to give it to the attorney in time. And then they were started on another thing. And the man who owned the property, who didn't have a lease from any oil company, went to see a lawyer about it, and said, "How come these people are drilling on my land?" And the oil company lawyer said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "Well," he said, "they're drilling on my land." He said, "I didn't lease anything. So what you think we ought to do?" "Well," he said, "let's let 'em drill. If they hit oil, we're gonna be on easy street." [All laugh] Now I don't remember how it ended, but I do remember that that story made the rounds in the abstracters. It was in the oil patch. So anyhow-

SW: You had to be careful when you did your job.

RM: Right.

SW: You had to-

RM: And [getting?] right to the leases. An oil company would buy a lease from the mineral owner. Now I say that because the land also had, the landowner also owns all the minerals and all the royalties unless he sells them. Now the first time I saw it written up in a deed, said, "What in the world is that?" One hun-, uh, it was a royalty deed and they called it "pure royalty." I said, "Is anything impure about royalty?" [All chuckle] So anyhow, I came to find out that uh, pure royalty is royalty separated from the landowner. Like if I own the land and you buy all of my royalty, I don't have my royalty anymore.

SW: Even if you own the land?

RM: Even though I own the land. And that, when, if there's production, you get all the production. I don't get anything. That's the chances that some landowners take in Louisiana, because of the way minerals and royalty operate.

SW: They want the upfront money to pay for the royalty to put money in their pocket right now.

RM: Right now.

SW: Versus takin' a chance that there's-

RM: See, during hard times if you have somethin' to sell, you sell it. And you take a chance, because the people who uh, who own the minerals they're the ones that you get the lease from. Now if the man sold part of his minerals, then they'd have to get the lease from the man who owns the rest of the minerals. In other words they have to have 100 percent minerals before they

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start drilling. 'Cause they wanna be sure they're dealing with the right people and they don't wanna have that uh, castas-, that happened during the, could've happened if they didn't have all of the interest. Because somebody could slap a lien against it. Somebody who owns the minerals, you know.

DD: I have a question. Um, if someone owns the minerals but not the land, do they have to agree also with the landowner in order to build the rig on the lin-, the land?

RM: Uh-

DD: Or have you never dealt with that?

RM: I don't think so, but uh, I mean, I've never dealt, I never had to deal with that because that isn't part of the records.

DD: Okay.

RM: You see, my deal is strictly with the records and what I know is-

SW: Pass it to the attorneys after that.

RM: Right. But uh... if you owned minerals, they're yours like you own anything else. You don't have to have the landowner's permission to do anything with it. You can resell it and the beauty part about royalties and minerals in Louisiana is they act just like a right away. They have a 10-year prescription. The landowner gives a right away and it's not used as a road for 10 years, then it reverts back to the landowner. Same thing with the royalty and the minerals. If you sell any of your minerals, like a lot of people did during Depression, lot of landowners, lot of farmers were hard up. So they sold a portion, not all of 'em, just a portion of their minerals, a portion of the royalty. Just to put food on the table, you see. So with royalty if you don't have production, you get the minerals back in 10 years. You gotta have production for the royalty to be [operative?]. On minerals, they're prescribin' 10 years. Whoever owns the minerals, if you don't lease it in 10 years times, it goes back to the. And the only prescription is drilling. If there's drilling, if they are drilling then it renews the deeds. Same thing-

SW: For a further 10 years.

RM: Another 10 years, yeah. So that's what's nice about royalty and minerals in Louisiana. Whereas other states like Mississippi, minerals are forever. They're [in perpetually?]. Same thing with royalty. I never worked in Mississippi, never work-, I never worked anywhere but Louisiana, south Louisiana. I guess I worked in about 26 different parishes through the years.

SW: Mostly Vermillion.

RM: Mostly Vermillion.

SW: This typical work day where you compile the records and everything, I know that doesn't happen in a day right?

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RM: Oh no.

SW: How long does that usually take?

RM: Oh no, you see like, for instance if you have a land, a piece of land that's in a regular section and uh, it, there's no uh, you know, controversy there or anything, uh, if you don't run into any problems, you take a piece of land, say like a quarter section, 160 acres, uh, to abstract that depending on the number of landowners will determine how long it takes to do the abstract. Now when you have to check each landowner all records and pull all those books, read all those deeds, [Coughs] eliminate some that don't affect your property, retain those that do. I would say that it takes two, three weeks sometimes. [Coughs]

SW: Two, two to four weeks with no problems?

RM: With no problems. But it shouldn't take, even with problems, it didn't, shouldn't take any more than three or four weeks. Where you have problems is uh... we have heirs that are missing and uh-

SW: Track somebody down.

RM: You gotta track 'em down and you gotta, sometimes, an abstracter doesn't have to leave the courthouse, he just tracks the records. And sometimes, like in Vermillion Parish, we were abstracting in the town of [Andrew?], which is a little settlement, you know, in the country. And they had lots, they were buying lots and everything. We couldn't, we just couldn't locate 'em with the information we had. Two of 'em [weren't on the ground/were underground?]. And asked, "Who lives here? Who lives there? Who lives here?" And we finally got it to where we could tell the examiner, "This is where this goes and this is where that goes." That might take a little longer, you know. [Coughs]

SW: Yeah. What uh-

RM: But let's see if I left anything out that I wanted to tell you about. [Pause as he looks at papers] No, we talked about grants, that came out of the so-, that came out of the Cajun [queens?]. And uh [Slight pause] everything is section, township, and range. Even in the irregular section. Sections are regular in, if there's no water courses. Water courses traversing a township would break it up. And that's where your grants would come in. So many up, on the waterfront [Inaudible]. If you look at a map, if you look at a township [plaque?] we call 'em. You see what looks like a fan. [Chuckles] All for, you know, it'll be property on both sides of the uh, of the watercourse. [Chuckling] And it's a funny thing about when you're abstracting water bottoms, the water bottoms usually belong to the state. And uh, the way that was determined was if it's navigable then it belongs to the state, the minerals below it, you know, belongs to the state. So another story that used to trickle around the abstracters were, if it could float a toothpick, it was navigable. [All laugh] That made it, and so yes, the state would own the minerals. [Chuckles] Another thing was we had a peculiar case in Vermillion Parish. We had a lot of rice farmers in Vermillion Parish and they all bought water from the water company. And the water company was called Acadian-Vermillion Rice Irrigating Company. Now, they bought strips of land to make their canals so that rice farmers could get the water that they needed for their rice crop. For about 30 years or so the uh, the water company bought all these strips little by little by little,

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expanding here and there. And then for about 30 years there was no problem. But after that, when the water company dissolved, what was a true deed and what was a right away. Did they get a right away for the canal or did they sell the strip of land. And that made a big difference with [Inaudible], but who owned the minerals? See. If it was a right away then as soon as the right away was extinguished, then the landowners would. If it was a sale, now if it was a sale, the landowner would own it. But if it was a right away, it would revert to the land. So there was a big, there a lot of controversy and [Inaudible] about something sold in nineteen three, was it was a right away or was it [Chuckles] you could hardly tell by the deeds. They were very sloppy as far as legality was concerned. They just sold these strips. They didn't, they weren't precise as to whether it was a right away or a sale. So there was some controversy there. How do you iron that out, it wasn't my department at all. I just, all I did was uncover it. [Chuckles] But that was interesting because at one time in our abstracting company we charged the oil companies by the page. By the type-written page. We paid the type, the typist 25 cents a page and we charged the oil companies, at the time we pa-, for a page we charged the oil companies a dollar and a quarter a page. And as, you know, as the economy got worse and worse and things cost more and more, though, the pages went up. When we stopped charging by, when I was working for this company, and we stopped charging by the page, it was up to three and a half a page. But nowadays we don't charge by the page, we charge by the day. If it takes you 10 days, you charge so much a day and that's it.

SW: Yeah, per diem for the copies and all that.

RM: And it's, the last few jobs I had uh, incidentally, I left this company in nine-, 1991. He just ran out of work, he had no more work, so he laid us all off. And uh, in 1991 I started on my own.

SW: I see that.

RM: And I finished, I, I retired about 1999. But I've done some work since then. Two summers, last summer and the summer before. But not this summer.

SW: Just sort of contract work?

RM: Just a little work, just a little work out of company in Baton Rouge. I do some work in [Crowley?]. I worked all summer, three months in fact. We had an area we had about six, six or eight abstracts to do. [Slight pause] But uh-

SW: What uh, what, you just, you always kept just a regular office schedule?

RM: Uh, when I worked for this company, I used to, we had an office on Iberia Street, uh, on [Hacker?] Street. And uh, my sister lived on Iberia. [Chuckles] Uh-

SW: It wasn't like offshore or anything, seven and seven-

RM: Oh no, no no.

SW: Regular office-

RM: We would go to the office every morning and we'd uh, we'd get our assignments and go to

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the various parishes that you had orders for and we worked there. And uh, fella named Buddy [LaSalle?] and I worked together for about five years. We went all up and down the river parishes, all up and down, I mean, Acadia Parish, Jefferson Davis, the whole bit. But uh, other than that, we uh... when I was on my own, well then they would just call me up and say, "I need an abstract for so and so." And we used to go do it. Wherever they went. I hated to go to Cameron, but [Chuckles]

SW: You did sometimes.

RM: Cameron's records are easy to work, but it's getting to and from Cameron, you see. Like when I worked Cameron I lived in Bat-, Lake Charles and that's 50 miles away. But uh, but mostly you just go back and forth each day.

SW: But uh, but this kind of abstract work, did it pay fairly well?

RM: Oh it paid uh, it paid, let me see. The last job I made uh, I got 175 dollars a day. [Pause] And-

[Unknown person]: Expenses.

RM: Uh, expenses was just mileage.

SW: We're doin' the wrong thing right here, huh.

RM: Uh hm. [Laughs]

SW: In the wrong business.

RM: Yeah well I've worked for less than that. I worked for 100 dollars a day, I worked for 140 a day, 150 a day. Some companies won't pay 175.

MrsM: But there's no other, there's no other t-, abstracts [left?].

DD: Oh yeah?

SW: Okay. [Chuckles]

RM: No uh-

MrsM: [At least in?].

RM: Billy [Shin?], he lived in Franklin, was the abstract par excellence. He, he was also a fast typist. In fact, he was so fast that when he finished high school the Royal Typewriter Company gave him a typewriter to be sure that he used there's. [RM and DD chuckle] Wherever, 'cause he, he'd bring the typewriter with him and he'd type in the courthouse. Man, it was hummin', gee whiz. Anyhow, he was an abstractor for us. The guy I worked for, Laperouse, was a perfectionist. He was a workaholic. He worked seven days a week practically. And when I first started workin' for him, I rarely got home before eight or nine o'clock at night. We would check the records in

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the courthouse in the daytime, then we'd work at night putting it together. And so uh, when I got married in 1975 he said, "Well I guess you wanna see your wife and children once in awhile." So I didn't work late anymore. I got off, the courthouses closed at four-thirty, I just came home. Now when you work out of town, most of your work's out of town, 'cause I lived here in New Iberia, was very, very little jobs here in New Iberia. But Vermillion was fairly active, Acadia was active. You go where the work is. And so they pay, maybe pay your mileage, the company that hired you. And I think I got...

MrsM: Mileage and meal.

RM: Yeah, mileage and meal.

MrsM: You forgot the section of the school board, honey.

RM: Oh yeah. In Vermillion Parish, like in other parishes [that are rural?], I think our, I'm not sure about all of Louisiana, but in Vermillion for sure every sixteenth section belonged to school board.

SW: Really?

RM: They were given them. Every sixteenth section. Now there's a lot of sections, there's a lot of townships in each county, in each parish. And so every sixteenth section belonged to the school board. They could do with it what they want. Lot of 'em, in Vermillion Parish especially, lease their property and got that extra money. Got that extra money for uh, you know, for their budgets. So they could hire teachers and pay 'em a little bit better than other parishes.

MrsM: They always did.

RM: They always did, right.

SW: What kind of uh, being in the oil industry does [number?] all the time. What kind of job security existed in the abstracting section?

RM: Job security? [Slight pause]

SW: Was it just like the rest of the industry, sometimes you might get laid off or-

RM: Well, listen, I mean as far as uh, most of us were contract men. Even when I, well, when I worked for Laperouse Abstract Company uh, the last few years I worked for him I was on a salary, so much a month. But prior to that we, he used to hire you so to speak and uh, he didn't have to pay you uh... social security, you had to pay your own.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

RM: You were just a contractor. And that, 'fact when they laid me off I had to do all that myself, you see. But I never had an office, I just worked out of my house.

SW: You could do it here?

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RM: Oh yeah. I did most of my work in the courthouses.

SW: Yeah.

RM: That's right.

SW: So it was pretty much sort of like the rest of the industry. When down times-

RM: Well, as far as I'm concerned there was uh, I mean, there's no health benefits or anything like that. It may be that way now, but it wasn't then. Back when I worked for an oil company, an abstract company, I didn't have any health benefits. [Pause]

SW: You were laid off just that one time?

RM: Uh, yeah. I worked for him 44 years. And then uh, when he ran out of work he laid us all off.

SW: Even during the '80s, in the early '80s when the bust was really bad.

RM: Oh, really big, we were, our abstract company was busy, busy, busy.

SW: Really?

RM: And reason for it was we turned out good work. In other words, if an examining attorney saw one of our abstracts come into their office, they were satisfied they had pretty good title before they even looked at it. And it was well presented. By that I mean, it was compiled the way it should've been. In other words, it wasn't just one deed after another according to date. It was compiled in a fashion like things happen. In other words, it, if they leased it, the oil company that leased it, the oil company who sold part of it, the oil company who did this and did that. All that was, in other words, that too was a chain, but it was within the abstract. It wasn't like they was records, all that was separate in the records. But when you put the abstract together, if you gonna put it together properly, you put it together as it unfolds. In other words, as it changes hands. And whatever happened to the property when this guy owned it was in the abstract as such. Whatever happened when this guy owned it, was as such. Now, if you just compiled it by date, you wouldn't necessarily have it in a good order. By that I mean, the examining attorney would have much more difficulty examining it than he had if the things were laid out properly. He could see it unfolding. And he could see any-

MrsM: You get a chain on each person.

RM: Oh yeah, definitely.

DD: Instead of this happened this day, this happened this date, you had-

RM: Right.

DD: This guy, he did this.

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RM: He did this.

DD: This guy, he did this.

RM: Correct. That's correct. Let's see. [Pause] Only thing really mentioned [resembling?] about suits. Like for instance uh, if a man died and he had minor children, and an oil company wanted to lease the property, he had major heirs and minor heirs, well they could lease from the mi-, from the majors. But they had to get a suit by and authorized by the court so that they could deal with the minors. That's how they bought the leases, they bought the leases that way. Same thing with a succession. As long as the succession isn't closed, by that I mean, they haven't been put in possession, they're just in transition so to speak. They had to get... you had to get a court order and it would be filed in the succession papers that so and so wanted a lease, this is what they're gonna pay, the judge says it's okay to do it, so [they'd go ahead and sell it?]. But uh, but of course you had, if a man was divorced, you had to put that in the abstract. And uh, you had any settlements, you know like he and wife settled.

MrsM: [Inaudible]

RM: You had to put the settlement in the abstract. So uh, it was... it was a bit to get everything in that should be there. Now, I would say 99 percent of the abstractors put everything they could in it, 'specially when they were paid by the page. Now when they get paid by the day, they could leave an instrument out and the oil company'd never know about it. Uh, I don't say that they did that, but it was easily done. And it might have been inadvertently done, you know. And I was talkin' to Judge Broussard one time several years ago. And I was asking him about suits. And he said, in his experience, in that parish, the most suits were [for boundaries?]. People claim, "No my line's here," and "No, your line's there." And so they'd have to go to court and settle. And how they settled it was their business, but they had to surely settle. [All chuckle]

MrsM: Well how 'bout the women and all their names, honey.

RM: Oh yeah, another thing that was confusing was uh, some parishes filed the deeds in the names of like say when a woman bought, they would buy, like say Missus Rufus Marin, they might put it down and just "Missus Rufus Marin." Oil companies would show she's the wife of so and so. So should they put it under her maiden name or her married name? Some parishes put it under both names, some parishes only put it under one name. So you'd have to run it both ways to be sure that you got it all. Because it would be in a different column. It would be in a different book even. A different index. So-

SW: [Wouldn't be?] consistent. [Chuckles]

RM: Right.

MrsM: That was always added work.

SW: Yeah.

DD: Yeah.

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RM: Then of course if somebody died and left a will, you had to show the will, 'cause lots of times the wills were filed separately from the succession. Like if I made a will, I could file it now, and die 10 years from now. But in my succession they have to go back and get my will and incorporate it in their succession papers. But anything and everything that affected a piece of property, any landowner that owned that property had to be shown in the abstract. And that had to be compiled and given to the examining attorney. And he determined whether or not it was a good title. And if he said, "Go ahead," they'd drill. If he said, "Hold on a minute, we've got to cure this title. There's this defect, that defect," then they'd [Inaudible]. So many requirements. Then they'd get into what they call a "title [curer]" who would also, I mean, who would take the information and do the necessary fieldwork. Like getting an affidavit that so and so lived on that property [over such and such a year?]. Uh, so and so is married to so and so. You know-

SW: Trackin' somebody down and getting a signature.

RM: Right. Getting a signature. When necessary. Or maybe getting a deed made over again because it was improperly made the first time. You know. So that was, that was the title curers job. None of that was filed. Then of course you had the oil wells that developed into fields. And they were all numbered. And to give you an idea how long ago I've been on this abstracting. In Vermillion Parish field number 34 is the Erath Field. Now it's in the thousands. See so [Chuckles] gives you an idea uh, as to, then of course once a field's established they only have one number. And if there's a later discovery or something, 34A, 34B, 34C. And in some fields like the Abbeville Field, you'll have uh, I think it was 120, Abbeville Field was number 120. And you'd have 120AA, 120AAA. Well they went through the alphabet three times.

DD: Wow.

RM: You know. And so uh, all of that had to be shown in the abstract if it was pertinent to your well. And they usually have a plant showing where the well is and what's involved in the production. So uh, that part we didn't have to worry about because we didn't do any [payin' off?]. [Chuckles] Yeah, that was the land man's job. Land, you know, for the oil company. [Inaudible].

SW: That's pretty comprehensive.

RM: Oh-

DD: Uh hm.

RM: As far as uh, another thing in this parish, in Vermillion Parish, you had acres [of orcant?]. An orcant was smaller than an acre. It was 190 foot by 190 foot, it was an orcant. An acre's 208 feet.

SW: Is it similar to a hectare?

RM: Well a hectare's two and a half acres.

SW: Okay. I was just, [Inaudible].

RM: A hectare is something that they use in South America. So many hectares. But anyhow, in

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Vermillion Parish you had acres and orcant. And an orcant being smaller. So some of the old farmers wanted to lease their land in orcant instead of acres, 'cause they were paid so much an acre, you see? And so like uh-

SW: They'd get more.

RM: They would get more if they got paid by the orcant instead of the acre. Some of the [Chuckles] some of oil companies really bought uh, I mean [bought?] 'em like that. Now lot of the oil companies uh, would deal with [Inaudible] who uh, owned property and couldn't make, couldn't deal in English, so they had to go see a lawyer, somebody who spoke En-, French and English that they trusted, you know. And I remember one time there was fella named [Sharpe?], he was from Florida. And uh, he went to see a landowner about buyin' some, buyin' a lease. And he, the landowner was eager to lease, but he wanted all he could get. So much, 'cause they lease so much an acre, you see. And so uh, he said, "Let's go see my lawyer." So he went to see a lawyer and the lawyer was, talked French and the landowner spoke French. And the lawyer somewhere in the conversation he said, "We gonna [stick?] that oil company for all we can possibly get." So when they decided to talk, when the lawyer decided to talk English to bring the land man in the con-, you know, into the conversation, the land man started talkin' French. So there he had, he exposed all of their closed [RM and MrsM chuckle] conversation. So. Little tidbits like that.

SW: I just have really one other question actually and this is basically an opinion question. [To MrsM] And if you'd like to answer this as well you're more than welcome. What do you think oil and gas, the oil and gas industry did for south Louisiana?

RM: Oh I think it uh, it was the guiding force you might say. Look at the number of people involved in south Louisiana in the oil patch. Uh... take New Iberia for instance. It housed I don't know how many uh, service companies that performed services to the oil patch. Look at the uh, major companies that came in here like Slumberger, and Halliburton, and so forth. That did offshore work. And uh, in my opinion if it hadn'tve been for oil we would still be a rural economy down here in south Louisiana. I mean, that's my personal opinion because oil uh, oil started here um, back in '20s and '30s. And you can step back and from '20s to '30s, I was born in the '20s, you could just see the oil trucks that were usin' the highways and the oil company cars that were traversing all land. You could see the myriads of activities. And all of that helped everybody. I mean, you could see an oilfield truck pulling drill pipe. And somebody had to drive the truck, somebody had to pay him, he brought, you know, pipe to the oilfield. And you could just see how many people were involved.

SW: Had a snowball effect.

RM: It had a definite snowball effect, absolutely. And uh, my personal opinion is if it hadn't been for oil in south Louisiana we'dve really suffered. We'd still be trying to emerge from the rural economy because we have no industry other than oil. [Pause] The only industry like in Iberia Parish at the time was uh, [Mackaleny?], tabasco sauce. We grew a lot of sugarcane, that employed people just seasonally. Whereas the oilfield was 24 hours a day, seven days a week, just like the computer, 24/7. [Chuckles] But uh, I'm glad we had the oil patch. I made my livin' from 1955 to today and if it hadn't been for the oil patch I would be, you know, pushing a pencil for some nondescript company and making just an ordinary wage, so much an hour. But uh, I m-

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MrsM: Plus the longer you work, the higher your retirement. More social security benefit, more-
[Inaudible, overlapping speech]

RM: Oh yeah, 'cause I didn't, yeah. You can retire at 65 and get x number of dollars from social security. I worked 10 or 12 years past that. The more you work, the bigger your salary is per month with social security. So I was delighted to work and I wanted to work. I liked the job.

MrsM: Oh he loved it.

RM: I had a lot of jobs before I became an abstractor. But once I became an abstractor, I fell in love with it. And I just kept doin' it until I quit. 'Til I retired. [Pause]

MrsM: Yeah, we have a son-in-law in the business. The uh-

RM: Oh yeah, we got a son-in-law that works for a service.

MrsM: So it's been good to us.

RM: A service company. He's doin' very well.

SW: Any other family members in the oil industry?

MrsM: Hm, no. Just. [Pause]

RM: No I don't think so. [Pause]

SW: I think that pretty much wraps it up.

RM: Pretty much. You think so?

SW: I've learned quite a bit. [All chuckle] About-

RM: It was all disjointed, there was no [Chuckles] you know, as things popped into my mind.

DD: Yeah, but this is one of the, this is gonna be one of the good ones I think.

SW: [Referring to recording equipment] That's why we have this. I can go back and look at it and make everything chronological.

RM: Oh because the way we did it was very disjointed. [Chuckles]

SW: Yeah, but that's the-

RM: That's the beauty of having it, yeah.

SW: Really, because like I can really, we can go back and see anything we missed is on there. So. We thank you.

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RM: Oh you're quite welcome. I feel uh-

SW: [Referring to worksheets] Can I have a copy of those? Of one of these?

RM: Oh, take it with you, right.

SW: Just to see.

RM: Sure.

SW: You put a name on here and you write the rest of it right there.

RM: Right, you see what I did was, reason why it's blank here was because uh, I put the seller here, and then buyer here, the type of instrument there, and then fill out this information. Every deed had a date and some of 'em have effective dates, they're dated a certain so on, they weren't to become effective until another day. And so uh, and everything was in a book, a page, and a number. And then every [mortgage?] was either cancelled or it wasn't cancelled. Every civil suit had a docket number. And every parish had a name. And oh here you just kind of-

[END OF RECORDING]

