

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### ABSTRACT

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Clyde Orgeron

**COLLECTION:** 4700.2087

**IDENTIFICATION:** Valentine, Louisiana, Native [b. 1947]; Lockport resident; former Freeport Sulphur Employee; former LOOP employee; Cajun French speaker; Catholic;

**INTERVIEWER:** Erin Donovan and Christina Shelby

**SERIES:** Bayou Lafourche

**INTERVIEW DATE:** October 24, 2010

**FOCUS DATES:** 1950s [childhood]; 1960s-1990s [professional life]; 2010

### ABSTRACT:

#### Tape 3933

Interview takes place in Cut Off, Louisiana; Orgeron from Valentine, Louisiana; sixty-three years old, raised in Valentine, homebirth; parents were very poor, farmers, lived off land most of Orgeron's childhood; produced crops to sell in New Orleans at French Market [garden and field crops right behind house]; always had property along Highway 1; went back 40 arpents but much of it was marshland [cattle back there]; higher elevation closer to bayou because silt would settle closer to the river; no aqua plants [back then] and no levees for protection; would plant on ridges; Orgeron was baby of four [three sisters]; was spoiled and teased, "rascal" of the family; Orgeron is Catholic, goes to church every Sunday; relied on prayer for crops as it was more weather-dependent then; Orgeron believes people got away from praying for what they need but that many things still come from God; Orgeron retired at a young age; graduated from high school about 1966; area was booming, "you could go anywheres and get a job"; father begged son to go to college; money was tight [lived off land: hunt and fish, grow own vegetables and beans, raised chicken, pigs, ducks, would sell whatever extra] and Orgeron didn't want to be a financial burden; decided to go to work instead; Freeport Sulphur Company in Port Sulphur, Louisiana; cousin drove him to aptitude test [mechanical and electrical systems]; got job; starting pay was \$1.90 hour, had to live in that area for year; lived in boarding house a bunch of men; get up in AM and go to work, get back in afternoon, "party a little bit sometimes," then do it again; after year transferred to offshore platform, Grand Isle Mine [?]; new location was one hour from house; closer, cleaner atmosphere [had been working in marsh, running sulphur lines, "a lot of dirty work"]; seven miles out in Gulf had less dust and pollen; platform was largest in Gulf at time [one mile long]; two drilling rigs and living quarters two hundred people; made drinking water out of salt water; "I learned so much out there"; everything was driven by steam; steam-generated electricity; direct-current drilling rigs; rig had putt-putt golf, TV, pool tables, Ping Pong to accommodate people on 7/7 schedule; after six months Orgeron "got bored" and began home-study course in electrical; foreman found out and company started paying for it, offered

apprentice in electrical and instrumentation department [“best thing I’ve done”]; before that Orgeron was working in warehouse, giving out parts, sometimes roughneck or subbing in power plant [“amazing”]; describes large steam boilers and thrashing [?] process to get sulphur out of ground with hot water; transporting liquefied sulphur to Grand Isle and onto heated barges, which were shipped to Port Sulphur; sulphur went into vats to dry or was shipped all over world; stayed with them for fourteen years; Orgeron got job at eighteen, married at nineteen; discusses housing: wife’s grandfather passed away, so they moved in with grandma; invested in some property in a new subdivision, bought five lots for \$7500, sold them later for \$11,000; bought eighteen acres with an old cypress house [in neighborhood Orgeron grew up in, aunt had lived there previously] for \$18,000; house originally from Golden Meadow [moved on barge]; had two kids, Sonny and Angela, while living in that house; moved house to Larose and rented it to a friend; over 1974-5 built a new house [on property?] over course of year when he was back from 7/7 schedule; three-bedroom brick home for \$30,000; Orgeron still lives in it; father had cattle; Orgeron got interested in cattle as “by product”; faith in community is less strong than “back then”; if you needed something you prayed to God; Orgeron was able to retire at early age; Freeport Sulphur getting ready to shut down [1978?]; was too costly to produce when you can get it as a byproduct of gasoline [1970s environmental impact dictated that sulphur had to be removed from gas]; Orgeron looking for work, best “on land” were chemical plants along river, but long drive from house; Louisiana Offshore Oil Port [LOOP] was just forming; brings oil via pipeline from foreign countries; had a job offer at Union Carbide but LOOP called for interview, and Orgeron went to check it out; [Carbide was] big chemical plant; everywhere he saw gas masks, tanks full of acid, stuff that was harmful; would have started at “fabulous salary”; during interview LOOP took Orgeron out to marsh, showed salt domes that capped eight crude-storage caverns, each with a four-million barrel capacity; traveled to site by crew boat [roads weren’t ready]; Orgeron tells about how northern contractors didn’t know how to drive crew boat, while he did it easily because he’d been navigating boats his whole life “we made ‘em”; had to navigate boat to get job; Orgeron did it right first time and got instrumentation job; before starting, Orgeron was sent on “education tour” to Foxboro [Rochester], New York, to Taylor Instrument School for two weeks; snow; “a little Cajun boy in New York... That was a blast” and learned a lot; worked year and a half, promoted to supervisor, worked five years; didn’t like how company was running things [wouldn’t take into consideration who Orgeron wanted to hire]; asked to get out of supervision; put on special project [contract jobs]; stayed there a while, after big cutback project supervisor position went away; transferred to cathodic protection program [method to use current to protect pipeline from internal and external corrosion, neutralize rust, superior to coating]; kept pipeline going from offshore [nine miles into Gulf] and supertankers that couldn’t go upriver; port is amazing story, building all kinds of thing; 100,000 barrels/ hour going into 48” pipeline; five lines going to different refineries [ex.: 40” line to Great Lakes, 8” to Canada, refineries going into Texas]; “I was blessed to be in right place at right time”; a map of different pipelines shows system is like a spider web; you can see pipeline crossing signs on Highway 90 [down bayou]; pipes need casing to go under highway, insulated with tar to protect from vibrations; Orgeron goes to church every Sunday; bought a place in Magnolia, Mississippi; sometimes goes to Baptist or Methodist church, too; Catholic church is “mother tree” [?] other religions are branches of tree; likes to go church to see what they’re doing; Catholic is big compared to others, in past didn’t cater to people like it should; other churches offer breakfast and coffee, trying to gather people to come [instill sense of community]; schoolmates and friends trying to get him to go [to other kinds of churches]; Orgeron in Knights of Columbus and Holy

Name Society; does a lot of things with community [cook on Thanksgiving, fundraising for church, help boys with games]; he asks friends who left Catholic church: "What did you put into it?" and they realize they didn't do enough; just going to church is not enough, need to be active in community, too, in order to enjoy it; Orgeron attended public school; all schools had religion [morning prayers]; two Catholic schools in area: Holy Savior and one in Larose; teacher would punish you if you spoke French [forced to talk English]; Orgeron could speak very little English [grandparents were all French, mom and dad spoke broken English, still with Orgeron main language was French]; sometimes on job would talk on radio in French; bosses got mad [thought they were talking about them]; church was five miles away [close]; in Mississippi Orgeron has to drive ten miles; elevation in Mississippi is three hundred feet; Orgeron's house has never flooded though he's seen many floods; community has thirteen-foot levee, which makes big bowl on both sides of Highway 1; outside levee it is all water; lives five miles north of Intracoastal [Levee ?]; water from Intracoastal displaced water north so they are building another near him; interviewer asks about changes in the bayou; when Orgeron was young, kids went swimming in bayou; bayou furnishes water for whole parish; purification plant in Lockport, Louisiana; drank water in cistern; as youngest, smallest, every year Orgeron had to climb into cistern and clean it out; at bottom had a slush; water stayed pretty good [doesn't remember boiling water]; some "little wiggles in it"; as kids went hunting with dogs and sticks [no guns, no shoes]; when they got thirsty they drank out of ditches in back [of house]; [interviewer mentions Mississippi water], Orgeron says tributaries in back of house were Bayou Blue, and the 40-arpent Canal; no one was spraying pastures but there was lots of cow manure and animal runoff; "first thing we killed we started cooking"; would stay out all day and come back with rabbits, nutria, coons, "something"; to kill a pig was "a community project", neighbors came around; no fridge, ice boxes deliver blocks of ice; put milk in there, half-way preserve it; people wanted the lard, crackin' or pork skin; hogs [weigh up to 1000 pounds] had up to 6" of fat with a little skin attached; were bred for lard; lard used for cooking, candles, soap, lubricant on tools, and preservation; now put hogs on rotisseries, use hog fat on gates [hinges and sliding compartments]; would store lard in milk jug [story about coyotes]; several neighbors would come because no one could eat all of; four families got thirty pounds of meat, which would last a few weeks; rotating invitations; put fresh lard in crocks, pork steak in lard to preserve it; Orgeron tells about a man and daughter who still live like in the "old days," cook over a fireplace summer and winter, don't use electricity; one solar panel to charge battery for computer, talks Parisian French; educated some sort of way [but is from here]; no car, no insurance, walks everywhere; fifteen miles to grocery store, still have forge [bake bread in earthen oven]; in cooking area, hangs pots and spoons on wall; Orgeron's father raised sugar cane after row crops, which was more lucrative; couple years had storms and cane fell down; before machines [farmers] went to Mississippi and Alabama to get people who wanted to work; people would pile in [to trucks] [no jobs over there]; would work, each cut a row of cane by hand, laid down stalks, reach the end of the row and put a card down with their names, that's how people got paid; sharpen knives so they could make headway; whole families; Orgeron got to be pretty familiar with them; as boy he would bring people in field water; amazing what these people were doing; father was thankful to protect workers; sometime dad had to defend workers with shotgun; [after break] Orgeron is asked to sing Cajun song in French; about Cajun girl, mom didn't like idea that girl was going to dance; old Cajun dance hall is almost like a roller-skating rink, railing all around; people stand around railing [outside]; had to pay nickel for two or three dances; every time on the dance floor you had to pay ticket; song is about a Cajun girl named "Colinda" ["Allons Danser Colinda"]; part in English

and part in French; Orgeron went to Nova Scotia this summer [Acadian exile]; [sings “Allons Danser Colinda” a cappella]; trip to Nova Scotia; couldn’t cross ferry [broken], so they had to take bridge, “lo and behold we were on Highway 1”; Canadians used arpents for land division; Common names: Comos, Thibodaux, look at spelling of people’s names; Orgeron tells story of how x’s show up in everyone’s name [put an “X” to sign, each was individualized, everyone didn’t know how to spell it]; rented house but had to cut trip short when father-in-law got sick [passed away]; business place in Nova Scotia has corner where old men gather and talk French; same thing there; Orgeron introduced himself and they were talking “same kind of French”; “not the real French” call it Cajun; people in Lafayette and Breaux Bridge talk a little different; similar place names; everyone has camps; so closely related; a few couples from Canada are visiting Louisiana this winter; Nova Scotia climate: 45 degrees at night, 80 degree high; no A/C up there; have to special-order A/C for car; Orgeron is planning to go back to Nova Scotia; Orgeron was impressed by churches in Nova Scotia; huge stone churches, massive ceilings, stones, wood, carpenter couldn’t read or write [but could build]; everywhere has French and English version; “people don’t want to shake your hand, they want to hug you”; after a meal, people break out music instruments, got Orgeron to sing; even small kids are playing, not bashful; “I almost felt like they were long-lost family”; ate many lobsters; “that’s my story and I’m sticking to it.”

**TAPES:** 1 (T3933)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 56 minutes

**# PAGES INDEX:** 5 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Interviewer index and contact material

**RESTRICTIONS:** None