

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### ABSTRACT

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Kenneth Roberts

**COLLECTION:** 4700.2385

**IDENTIFICATION:** New Orleans native, former associate vice chancellor and associate director of extension for Louisiana State University Ag Center

**INTERVIEWER:** Wyatt Winnie

**SERIES:** History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

**INTERVIEW DATES:** March 24, 2014

**FOCUS DATES:** 1970-2006

### ABSTRACT:

#### Tape 4314

Introduction; born September 19, 1944 in New Orleans, Louisiana to Nash C. Roberts Jr. and Lydia LeBlanc Roberts; lived in Metairie; part of the 4-H Club; in 1954 Roberts' father bought a farm; they built fences, picked strawberries, raised chicken and other livestock; on the farm Roberts commercially showed animals from the herd and used those animals for 4-H; his 4-H agent, Kermit Braud is still alive; Roberts' father interrupted education during the depression to help family; Roberts' education wasn't interrupted like his father's education was; started at University of New Orleans; transferred to LSU; Bachelor's and Master's in Agricultural Economics; PhD in Natural Resource economics; coached Pee Wee football as his first job; started with a 95 pound team and went to a 115 pound team; went to Oregon State soon after marriage; had an assistantship; offered a teaching job before finishing his Ph.D.; became a program director of Sea Grant program at Clemson; mainly dealt with extension agents on the coast; dealt with fisheries, marine matters, coastal erosion etc.; when he went to Clemson, he automatically became an administrator; received phone call from National Sea Grant Office; asked to work as a program director; went back to South Carolina after a year; LSU called soon after; decided that to work in higher education you had to go where the work was exciting; LSU offered exciting work; no one in ag economics dealt with fisheries or wetland economics; LSU offered a position, but he felt the lack of information was a red flag to taking the position; LSU offered him a position with 40% research and 60% extension appointment; his research associates helped him build a reputation for research; feels information is key to extension success; witnessed how personal computers changed extension; impact of desk top computers changed extension; in the '70's parish level advisory committees met to create programs; the flow of information though has changed because of computers and cell phones, which changed how the meetings worked; mentions that as a specialist you don't go to a parish or county without calling the Parish agent first; this practice changed as communication changed; some people in ag had to pay attention to minority or gender groups; he watched how it evolved in

other people's work; late in his career Vietnamese and Cambodians came to Louisiana and were subject to boat rammings and strife at the docks; Louisiana fisheries and wetlands, saw a lot of commercial opportunities with offshore oil development in the '70's and '80's; many Louisianans worked in both in the inland fisheries industry and in the oil industry ; the economy meshed very well for a number of years with the oil industry, but now the short term gain may have long term implications beyond fisheries—flood control, protection of homes etc.; commercial and recreational fisheries were essentially a male dominated industry, except in the processing plants which was predominantly women; worked with women who shuck oysters and peel shrimp; the prevailing issue in the processing plants is wages; recurring theme that the IRS tried to convince the owners that the people were employees; remembers distinctly wives having a heart attack after the court would rule against husbands; youth were not a target of the Sea Grant program; 4-H had a successful program called Marsh Maneuvers; he would speak at the marine camps; his most important accomplishments came in two areas; he developed database on research numbers; the database is a bench mark for people to constantly refer to; there have always been three levels of financial support for extension services; Parish money, State money, and Federal money; with Dr. Coreil, he instituted a program to get more support from the people and from the police juries; Chancellor Richardson merged the academic departments with the extension specialists; the researches and specialists merged into the same building, before they were separated; he is very proud of his part in helping to merge the two departments; there is frequent and serious deliberation of how relevant the Extension service can be in the older mode when there's the ability to go to direct to any information source in the world; communicating directly today can leave the Extension service out of farms; if a person has an inquisitive nature he can have information right now; Quality Control of information is for Extension service; he thinks it takes a different type of person to be an extension agent today; needs to be a student of information today; question will always be quality control; he suggests some people to be interviewed.

**TAPES:** 1 (T4314)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 21 minutes

**# PAGES INDEX:** 7 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Interview Questions and Notes, LSU Ag Center Profile

**RESTRICTIONS:** None