

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Morris Prater

COLLECTION: 4700.2606

IDENTIFICATION: Resident of Mossville, Louisiana

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project – Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: February 12, 2016 & February 25, 2016

FOCUS DATES: 1930s-50s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4558, Session I

Morris Prater born in Mossville January 20, 1929; doesn't remember name of midwife who helped deliver him; mother's name Eunice Towner Prater; father's name Erthy Prater; doesn't know why parents came to Mossville; moved from where he was born on the Old Spanish Trail to Prater Road, named for his father; moved there sometime in the '40s; dates parents died; started working when he was sixteen; first job clearing a right of way; oldest of eleven children, all born in Mossville; two wood yards in Mossville; store owned by Jim Moss used to be in the area; location of old post office; Jim Moss later had a sugar mill; processing sugar cane; Garrett's grocery store; you could buy amounts you needed, since staples were loose; Mossville a good community—everybody loved each other; community discipline; grandparents Irie Potts Towner and David Duff Towner; father's side were [Belzoni?] Lyons Prater and Henry [Stafford?] Prater; spent time with grandparents who lived on Evergreen; grandfather's truck patch garden; father's mother strict; drafted in 1951; married wife Irene when he got out of the army in '53; story of how they met at a café; three daughters Vera, and Margaret, and Deborah; father worked for WPA during Depression; Houston River Road built with mules and men with shovels; didn't earn money, but could purchase things at the store in Westlake; father later worked at the sawmill; rode his horse to work; later went to work for Firestone; Prater shows interviewer family photographs; mother a homemaker; never went to bed hungry; shows picture of siblings, names them all; mother got sick in the '40s, and he had to help care for them; learned to cook, wash, iron, etc.; attended school in Mossville off and on since mother ill; first job cutting wood with Oscar Jordan; other jobs he had in his youth, including cutting grass; lots of soldiers in the area in the '40s because of the airport; soldiers moved into Maplewood; describes the day he was drafted; memories of boot camp; captain's nickname "Cooter Brown", because he was mean; he was in the engineer construction battalion, but was never sent overseas; remembers training on an infiltration course; made an impression on him because it was real; end of interview.

Tape 4563, Session II

Memories of parents' large rent house in Mossville; neighbors spread out; dirt wagon trails connected properties; fun with neighbors; some family lived on Evergreen Road; doesn't know where the nickname Saprack came from; aunt and uncle moved into the large house with them,

they were Butch Lemelle's mother and father; liked to spend time with his two younger uncles roaming the woods; cut wood for the stove and heater; things changed when they moved to Prater Road—loss of childhood when mother took sick; didn't get a chance to finish school because he was helping care for younger siblings; had a good life in Mossville, stayed there for eighty-five years; grandfather a truck crop farmer, also had hogs and cows; when he got out of the service, he and his wife built a house in Mossville; called their subdivision "Green Briar", but only two houses there when he and his wife built; guesses there are about twenty-five houses there now; doesn't remember when they started paving roads, probably in the '40s; using crosscut saw with his brother to chop wood for the family; father worked in Westlake for WPA during the Depression; ate what was put in front of them; back then, there were certain places black people couldn't go, but times have changed now; things started changing when he was in the military; attending primer at the two-room schoolhouse in Mossville; had two teachers, a man and a woman; principal was strict; rented a room from his grandmother while school in session; used a strap to discipline the boys, "When he come down he didn't take no pity."; parents supported the discipline; mother strict, too, and parents were in agreement with each other's decisions; sometimes he and his brother would get in trouble for wrestling; appreciates the discipline because he never got into trouble as an adult; boys and girls played separately at school; school property fenced in; location of the old school; school morning started with a pledge or a prayer; games they played as school children; could buy a bag of candy for a nickel; used work money to buy a bicycle; riding bikes to the theater in Westlake; cost twenty-five cents for a movie ticket and a box of popcorn; segregated theater—black people used to sit on the bottom, but moved to the top because white people throwing things on them; location of drive-in theater; house they used to live in made into a club called the Wagon Wheel; used to frequent clubs in Lake Charles; man killed at the Wagon Wheel, so club closed after that; recalls a murder that happened in the '40s where a woman was shot by a jilted lover; local store where the post office used to be; Cities Service first plant to come in, built by Kellogg Construction; people started moving in and Mossville grew; Ross Reeves a white man who owned a sawmill near Evergreen; father used to ride his horse to work in Westlake; only a few families had cars; later, father got a wagon, but Prater didn't ride in it; father rode horses on his day off; used to be nothing but woods, and horses ran wild there; father's first car was a little Ford; Prater's first car an old Oldsmobile; wrecked it coming from the club; wife taught herself to drive a standard; first new car a '75 Ford; family likes to vacation in Disney World—he's made four trips there; catching the train in Mossville to visit grandmother in DeRidder; didn't wear shoes in the summer, just ran around barefooted; home remedies; castor oil and black draught to cleanse you out; lemon tea, and other types of tea; treating brother's fever with bitter weeds; turpentine and kerosene for cuts; using fat meat and bacon when he had a nail in his foot; cut his leg while woodcutting, poured coal oil and kerosene on it and wrapped it up; grandmother on mom's side could stop bleeding, and passed this gift onto one of his brothers; helped doctor remove his sisters' tonsils; sisters wanted ice-cream after; ice-cream parlor in Mossville called Sweet Dreams; the well in his yard went 420 feet deep; first he wanted a shallow well, but too sandy; Sasol owns it now; had to take out a loan to pay for his well; bought two lots at 250 a lot; Sasol bought the property, so he thinks he came out better; many people in Mossville had shallow wells; doesn't remember when community found out the water was polluted; issues due to shallowness of wells and corroding pipes; one of the plants put an alarm near the school; told to stay in house and put the windows down; working in Maplewood when Hurricane Audrey came through, but stayed home because of bad weather; community evacuated to the school and stayed there until evening; Hurricane Rita caused a lot of damage; remembers fallen trees everywhere; end of interview.

TAPES: 2 (T558, T4563)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 2 hours, 34 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 110 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Two photographs taken during Session I, and six photographs taken during Session II. Photographers Rebecca Cooper and Kyle Tanglao.

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence; Interview questions (5 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None