

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Ted Savoie

COLLECTION: 4700.2089

IDENTIFICATION: Galliano, Louisiana, native [b. 1943]; Larose, Louisiana resident; tugboat owner/operator; Catholic; Oyster Festival founder

INTERVIEWER: Chaffie Jenkins, Amber Breaux

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History

INTERVIEW DATE: October 15, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-1950s [childhood]; 2010

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3935

Interview in Larose, Louisiana; Ted Savoie's house; Savoie was born in 1943 in Galliano, Louisiana; grew up in maternal grandfather's house; Larose, Louisiana, was "daddy's area" [sugarcane farming]; spent more time with family in Galliano; got married at 21 and moved to Larose; maternal grandfather was in oyster business; community leader and involved at church; people said "I need some help with the ...", offered political advice; grandfather was an elder of community; Savoie got to meet many people because of it; Daddy grew up in Larose sugarcane business; married mom and moved down bayou, which doubled his salary [\$1/day working for his father, \$2/day working on oyster boats]; difference was in Larose he was home every night; on boats: leave for thirty days, have three days off; different lifestyle; career developed from farmer to oysterman to tugboat business; Savoie took over father's tugboat business; background: family belongs to St. Joseph Catholic Church in Galliano; at time church was strictly chapel of parish in Cut Off, Louisiana; great grandfather was first person buried in cemetery in Galliano; grandfather was one of elders to raise money to build current church; grandfather was heavily involved with church; was part of Savoie's upbringing; family worked fairs, brought gumbo pots, built stands; mother was very religious; important the family go to church every Sunday; Savoie has four kids, all went to Catholic school then South Lafourche [High School]; all graduated from Nicholls State [University]; all involved with their church; now live in different places; important things on bayou are community and church life; no matter what religion you belong to; religion is very strong; growing up it was more Catholic; with oil field other religions came in [ex: Texas brought Baptists]; in early days, non-Catholic churches were rare sight; Savoie recalls starting to see other churches in 1950s, Baptists and Methodists; after that different sectors; now if a business fails it opens up into a church; today there are still four Catholic churches [Golden Meadow, Galliano, Cut Off, and Larose], but more of other types of churches [Methodist, Baptist, Community Bibles]; interviewer asks about transportation on bayou; Savoie's family always traveled by automobile; grandfather in Larose was sugarcane farmer and had car; in 1920s and 1930s [mother and father's time] Saturday night people might

ride boat to dance hall; there weren't that many automobiles; more cars became available; daddy [b. 1912] had a horse and buggy to bring kids to school [distance of a few miles] in 1920s; gathering places: Bellevue [?] Dance Hall, in Galliano; beginning of rock and roll, including [recordings of] Bill Haley and Fats Domino; brought bands from along the river [Thibodaux and Houma]; Savoie was charter member of Columbian Squires [junior Knights of Columbus]; organized dances and special events; during high school Savoie was involved with bringing entertainment, including Frankie Ford concert in gym, Dave Bartholomew [musician who discovered Fats Domino] for junior prom; Savoie involved in gamut of entertainment; in early days they had Lee Brothers [Dance Hall]; as little boy, remembers sliding on the corn-meal-covered floor between songs; you didn't pay to get in but had to buy a ticket to dance [nickel/song]; important part of community because people worked during the week, had Saturday night dance, and Sunday morning church; in Galliano during Savoie's youth there were no blacks or Vietnamese; black people were in Larose; "down bayou" didn't have any black people because there wasn't any farming; Larose was mostly sugarcane; grandfather would go to New Roads, Louisiana, to hire people to cut sugar cane [still by hand]; stack cane into wagon, take it to loading area; used to put it on barges to bring to Valentine; then trucks came in; elementary school was strictly white; when Savoie went to Larose, black high school in Raceland; then in 1960s that they started desegregation; African Americans in community were "almost like family"; individual person was always accepted, even if race as a whole wasn't; grandfather had people that would come sit on porch and have big conversations; everyone respected each other as individuals and working people; [African Americans] "some of the nicest people you want to meet"; [white community] didn't shy away from them; Vietnamese people came after Vietnam War; brought in different ways of doing religion, though a lot of them were Catholic, French-speaking; slowly got more and more into the churches, into schools, involved in the community; now if you go South Lafourche High School, of one thousand kids, maybe one hundred black, 5-6 percent Vietnamese, but still eighty percent white because this is still not a black community; Central Lafourche High School is a little different, more black, more farming; there has been a black church across bayou, Mt. Zion, for years and years; [white men] donated land to set up church; blacks in his congregation would sit together, front part of church in pews to the left; after a few years started sitting different places; [St. Joseph had] black deacon, one of the best organ players church had; played with the beat; "he was something else"; Savoie once told him, "I want to go out of here swinging," and deacon said, "you mean this way?" [played a jazzy riff]; parish has had a few changes, like the country has changed, in terms of religion, bringing in different people; Bayou Lafourche very strong on religion; in elementary school, school and church were across bayou from one another, with bridge between; Savoie would walk to church to do religion class and then go back to school; also religion class on Saturday mornings; went through whole process of attending every Sunday, first communion, confirmation; sister is six years older, in 1950s mother would make sister and friends say a rosary before they went out to dances; mother is 95, rosary is still her favorite prayer; Savoie brings her to church every Saturday; he can count on two hands how many times his mother has missed Mass; kids' families: oldest daughter is living in New Orleans, stepson graduated from Jesuit High School, went to Chicago Loyola on scholarship, now in Montreal studying language and math [linguistics PhD]; daughter's husband also religious; second daughter lives in Belle Chasse, Louisiana, with three kids who went through Catholic elementary, now one at Brother Martin, one at Cabrini; son and wife have no kids, live in Raceland, Louisiana; son goes to church but "not as often as I'd want"; son still respects church but a little lazier about going;

third daughter lives in Prairieville, Louisiana, with two kids; married outside church [Savoie can't remember husband's religion]; son-in-law is allowing the kids to be raised Catholic; kids go to St. George Catholic in Baton Rouge; all but oldest daughter got married in the church [son-in-law's second marriage]; Savoie recalls his momma's first cousin, who got married, two months later got separated [and married again?], never got an annulment; but he was at church every Sunday with his kids; only problem was he couldn't get communion; religion in daily life: daily prayers, not going to break the commandments; help fellow man, gives to charities; wife and Savoie are "more into" local over national causes [would give to community store rather than Goodwill]; contributes to organizations that help people with food, bills, fundraisers for healthcare; charity towards fellow man; interviewer asks Savoie what is most important to Bayou Lafourche residents; Savoie makes example of close friends John Brady, Jr. [d. 2008]; weren't brothers "but we were that close"; Brady was heavily involved in church; Savoie was on diocese and school boards; John was owner of telephone company here; people didn't realize all he was doing to help community, unknown; his sense of community was being involved, getting things for community; had connections in Washington and could get things done; sense of community: get together for local festivals [to raise money] and church fairs; Savoie, with Chamber of Commerce, started Oyster Festival [like Rice, Shrimp and Petroleum, Sweet Potato]; started small, then Chamber dropped it, picked up by Oyster Fest Association, eventually burned out; first Oyster Festival Queen rode in "one and only" Sugar Bowl parade in New Orleans; rich in seafood, crabbing, oil field, farming; the old saying: why did the Cajun go into the swamp?; Savoie believes they didn't want anything to do with Civil War, which was fought on high land; Cajuns went into swamp to avoid troops, and realized it was same thing as Nova Scotia; all the food they wanted to eat was there: shrimp, fish, deer, rabbits, duck; landscape was similar, changed instead of lobsters it was oysters and shrimp, eating just as good as rich people in the city; "it was natural"; able to survive and this is what built up community; family is part of Acadians; Savoies are direct descendants of Francois Savoie; came down from Italy and France to Port Royal; 2-3 generations there; then moved to St. James area; from there to Thibodaux and my grandfather was right across bayou from here; bought this piece of property, his brother built next door; in 1918 built two houses exactly the same but one had kitchen facing north, one had kitchen facing south; one cost \$1900, the other \$2100; Savoie's dad was six when they moved into house; never remodeled [stencil in living room ceiling still there]; Savoie spent a lot of time there; showed picture of mom's house; in 1948 mother and father built a new house; mother lived there until 2007, too old to live by herself; one of her great grandkids lives there now; Savoie's current house was built in 1964, has undergone to accommodate family [combine dining room and living room into one room so everyone can sit down to dinner]; family gets together every 4-6 weeks to celebrate the birthdays and anniversaries of the month; only two or three months that don't have any events; wife [Jane] tries to get everyone to attend; Savoie's momma made gumbo on Sunday; ninety percent of family would come; had to eat in two shifts, dining room wasn't big enough; sometimes have boiled shrimp on Friday, call around and family members show up, at his house or sister's; as kids got older and married it became harder to get together; Jane will tell kids a few weeks ahead; most come back; for holidays, Easter and Christmas, Savoie doesn't expect all his kids to be there [strike balance with in-laws], not offended; being together on holidays isn't as important because Savoies do so much during the year; odd years mother goes to sister's house for Christmas; even years she comes to Savoie's; mother and father's sixtieth wedding anniversary party at Savoie's house; father [died at 92] said biggest joy was that every one of his descendants were still alive; by comparison, aunt has lost

two kids; Savoie is fortunate that family has everyone in good health; “thank god for a healthy family”; family and religion is part of a way of life; they work together: community life, church life, and family life; all part of one big gumbo pot, it all mixes together; in early days community was even stronger than it is now; in 1940s-1950s, everyone knew everyone, now there are strangers moving into region, families fractured more and more, he knows less people; concept of home: Savoie and wife have talked about what “would happen if this [house] wasn’t here, where would we go? we don’t have any idea, this is what we know”; born and raised “over here”, we have “our feet hooked to the ground”; no way I could leave this area; home is South Lafourche; would have to be something real strong to make me leave; “can’t imagine going anywhere else.”

TAPES: 1 (T3935)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 49 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 5 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer index and biographical sketch

RESTRICTIONS: None