

(Tape 1 of 3)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Sarah Swofford

Interviewee: Norman B. (Doc) Culver

Wednesday, September 19, 1979

SS: Wednesday, September 19, 1979. My name is Sarah Swofford. I'm having an oral history conversation with Mr. Norman Culver in his home at 2207 Wyoming, Baytown, Texas.

SS: Now, Mr. Culver, what is your full name?

NC: My name is Norman Brooks Culver. I was born in Naugatuck, New Haven Colony, Connecticut, in the year 1898. My father's name was Miles Standish Culver, a name that was carried from the days of the Mayflower in his family. My mother's name was Mary Elizabeth Brooks, and she also came from an old family that was well-known in the days of colonies of New England. In the year 1910, my father moved the entire family to Laredo, Texas, where he built a home on a ranch south of Laredo on the banks of the Rio Grande River. It was here that I attended grade school through my 10 years of schooling. Due to the fact that there were so many Mexicans in the area, and most of the classes were conducted in the Mexican language, our parents employed tutors to help us children in our schooling. Uh...

SS: Well, Mr. Culver, let me interrupt just a second. Did you learn to speak Spanish during these years?

NC: Oh, certainly.

SS: So you are bilingual? At least you were at that time?

NC: I still am.

SS: That's interesting.

NC: I – you're off now?

SS: No, no. Go ahead. No I'm – we're still taping.

NC: Well, you're still taping. You're asking if I'm bilingual, and I want to interrupt here just a moment to say that when I first came to Baytown a number of the men that were sent to work for me in the medical department were wetbacks from Mexico that could not speak one word of English at the time they came to me. And due to the fact that I could speak their language we got along well. And they – best of my knowledge – there never was one of those wetbacks that came to work with me and stayed for any time whatsoever but what they have not, what they – but they do not today have a college educated children. Uh... We now get back to Laredo. In 1916, my mother had a problem, and my father returned with the entire family back east. During the time we lived at Laredo my oldest sister, Doris Mae Culver, married a man in that area by the name of Samuel Anderson from the family of old-time law enforcement officers in the Rio Grande country of Texas. His brother-in-law was the sheriff at Carrizo Springs. His uncle was one of the famous sheriffs of Eagle Pass, Texas. And even down to the recent years, Captain Alley, of the Texas Rangers, was also, uh, his uncle. After returning to Connecticut, I was employed for a short time in during the early years of the war. And when my mother died in January of 1918, it – I was, at that time, not an adult and had to have my parent's permission to enlist in the army. I was too young for the draft. It was my daddy's wish that I did not join the army, so I went to school in New York City attending the Mills School of Nursing at Bellevue Hospital, and ...

SS: Excuse me just minute – was this the Mills?

NC: Mills.

SS: Mills?

NC: Mills. M-I-double L-S. Mills School of Nursing.

SS: School of Nursing. Uh-huh. Ok.

NC: Associated with the Bellevue Hospital on East 26<sup>th</sup> Street, and also connected with the Columbia University. During these days – to my knowledge – there was no such a thing as a laboratory technician, x-ray technician, or any one of this kind with titles. This was merely a school of nursing where we learned the different traits of nursing, and progressed with a new medical and surgical skills that was being developed. They at this time had me training enlisted men from the Brooklyn Naval Base in conducting proper care of hospital patients in the Baytown hospitals. It was during this time that my father wrote me a letter and told me that he was proud to think that I obeyed his wishes and did not join the army when he didn't want to have me. However, if I still felt like I wanted to join the army he would give me my permission. I immediately joined the army enlisting in New York City, and very shortly went overseas in the Evacuation Hospital Number 24. This hospital was listed in the national newspaper at the time we left as having been the largest hospital unit the world had ever known.

SS: Now, where was this hospital located?

NC: This hospital was located in an area that was called the Neves-Bullshea Hospital area. Not only our unit, but many other units' base hospitals of the various army divisions were also within this area.

SS: And this was in France?

NC: Near Tours, France.

SS: I see. Ok.

NC: And at the completion of the war I returned to Connecticut ... Can you stop that a minute?

SS: Um-hmm.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: I – thinking back during my, uh, service overseas, I was the sergeant in charge of the operating rooms. And it was here that I really learned what it was to be among the real disabled patients. And I had much service and training that I could possibly not have received in a lifetime in the United States in peacetimes. After being discharged from the army I returned to Naugatuck, Connecticut. Here, I had my brother, Andrew Miles Culver, who was employed in Naugatuck. And I had a younger sister, Eunice Elizabeth Culver, who was yet a student in high school and living with my aunt. My father was a traveling salesman, and had a home resident in Torrington, Connecticut. I did not wish to apply for employment at that particular time because it would be a matter of but a few days that I would reach maturity – that is 21 years of age – and I could go out and secure a job without having to have a minor's permit. I applied for a position in the Scovill Manufacturing Company of Waterbury, Connecticut, to be employed in their medical department. I received a letter in a day or two telling me that they did not have an opening at that time, but thanked me for making my application, and they would keep it on file. It was a matter of just a few days they reached me by telephone through my uncle's residence, and asked me if I could come to work the next day. I reported to the medical department as soon as possible, and they introduced me to the staff, and reviewed the way they operated. And said for the time being, they wanted me to work five days a week, nights, from seven o'clock at night to seven o'clock in the morning. The – this work was very insignificant due to the fact that they had very few people working on the night shift. And I had a good deal of time to study their records. I believe they were one of the first people in the country to really have detailed information as to the injured employees on the job, as well as

complete history of the employee's family at home. They seemed quite interested in attending to the entire family of the employee. And when a man was injured, a complete detail and investigation was made at the time, and they could tell you exactly how many people were hurt on such-a-such a date, what time of day, what part of the body was injured, and the number, the frequency rate on various injuries, the time of day and so forth. And all of this information was left to my disposal. And I spent many hours during the night reviewing this information. It was while I was working here in August of 1919, I received a letter from my commanding officer, Dr. Colonel Charles M. Aves of Houston, Texas, who had returned to his hometown, Houston. And Mr. Ross Sterling – later to become Governor of Texas – was the President of a new company known as the Humble Oil and Refinery Company. Dr. Aves informed me that he had been appointed Medical Director of this new company, and he was wondering what I might be doing, and if I would be interested in doing some medical work for him in Baytown, Texas, at a small refinery where they was building a temporary hospital. He told me that conditions were not good, and the salary that he could get for a man of that position at that time was \$125 a month. And that he would like to have me consider as to whether or not I would come to Baytown and operate this small hospital until such a time they could construct a permanent hospital with the idea of me running the hospital. I replied to Dr. Aves, informing him the position I had with the Scovill Manufacturing Company. I had had a recent promotion, and was working straight days, and on a team of men to investigate accidents, in addition to doing x-ray work and a little first-aid work, and I was receiving a considerable bit more income than the \$125 he had to offer me. Eventually I received another letter from Dr. Aves telling me that he could not get more than \$125 at that time, but he would be behind me to help me in any way he could in the future. And he wanted me to not have any misunderstanding as to the conditions I would be coming into because of the fact that there was no modern conveniences available in the area at that time. Uh... let's ...

SS: When was this?

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Ok.

NC: I arrived in Houston November 1919, and reported to Humble Oil and Refinery Company's office on Fannin Street in Houston, Texas. Only to learn that the employment manager was not in his office that morning, and that Dr. Aves was in Baytown. However, they would attempt to get in touch with him, and for me to return after lunch. So I reported back to the office immediately after lunch, and they had been in contact with Dr. Aves, who had arranged for them to put me on the company roles, and have a car bring me to Baytown. I arrived at the Baytown Refinery late in the afternoon. At this time, the Baytown Refinery was a small area. Not near as large as the area of today. It was a rice field that had been farmed for rice the year before. The ditches, and dykes, and rice stubble were still standing with no, uh, draining of the ditches or anything at this time. I was let out at a small wooden building, which was the hospital. There was a boardwalk that lead across a ditch from where the man let me out of the car to the building. When I came to the door, there was a note on the door from Dr. Aves saying that he had waited the entire afternoon, and had gone to eat supper, would be back in a few minutes. Dr. Aves come by and suggested that I do what I could to make myself at home. There had been nothing done to prepare the building to be used as a hospital. And there was ... a ... one door that entered the waiting room. An office for use of the doctor was on the right, the first-aid on the left, and a small hall going back to a small ward that had some eight or 10 old, used army cots. And between the ward and the doctor's office was a small room that had been set aside eventually to be used as a bathroom. Dr. Aves

suggested that I move a cot in there, and make myself as comfortable as possible, and he would see me the next morning. After I had set up the cot, and put my steamer trunk under the bed, and arranged things for the night, I went out and set on the front steps of the building where I listened to the coyotes yelp for a short while before going in and getting a real good night's sleep.

SS: (Laughs)

NC: (Laughs)

SS: There were...

NC: Stop.

(Tape cuts off.)

SS: Now, before we turned the tape recorder off, Mr. Culver, you were telling about having arrived in Baytown, and sitting down on the steps of the hospital, and listening to the coyotes yell. Now, you could tell us something about the area, maybe, that – what the conditions of the countryside were like when you arrived here.

NC: Early in November, there was quite a dry spell for this particular area. Even though the rice field had not been drained, you could operate an automobile on the dirt roads. Mr. R.S. Sterling had built a railroad from Dayton to Goose Creek, and extended the railroad tracks into the Baytown Refinery, and they came along the opposite side of the street where the hospital building stood. Dr. Aves came by the next morning, and picked me up in his car, and we went out of the refinery on ... what is now known as Oakwood, I believe. It was called the East Gate in later years, and turned off onto what was then known as Main Street, and now known as Harbor Street. At Harbor Street we turned down Market Street Road towards the Goose Creek Stream. As we approached the Goose Creek Stream, we had to stop to prepare to load the car onto a ferry to cross the stream on our way to the Goose Creek Oilfields. Throughout the entire area could be found real large gushing artesian wells flowing pure water. And on just to the left as we approached the ferry, there was a very, very large artesian well that I admired very much. This particular road that we came down today is referred to as Durane Street; it dead ends at 201 Highway. Durane Street turned to the right, and from the right come on down to what is now known as Missouri Street. At this point, it continued along Black Duck Bay to the Sun Oil Company property, which now begins is what is now known as Oklahoma Street. Beyond the Sun Oil Company Street, there was a number of Texas Company homes for the employees of the Texas Company. And the road extended on across the – what is now the Humble property, and along close to the bay until you come to the point of what is now known as Bayway Drive and Crow Road. Bayway Drive was a continuation of Market Street, known as Market Street. And from there you went on up to Four Corners, and down to the ferry crossing at Lynchburg. Getting back to Goose Creek Stream we crossed the ferry, um... at Goose Creek and ... as we went on what is now called Barrymore Street, to our right was a Mitchell and Busch Docks. It was here that much of the freight brought into this country in those days were landed and freight coming from Galveston, Houston, and so forth. We went on Barrymore Street to an area known as ... as... West Main Street today. Um... at the junction of West Main Street and the old causeway road, or Lee Drive, we came to the business area of the Goose Creek town. Practically all business and residential buildings were on the left side of the road, with the oilfield being between that area and the bays down towards Tabbs Bay. After going to see the oilfield and becoming acquainted with the employees, with the Humble Production Department heads and so forth, we continued on to a point of where Main Street and Texas Avenue met. During these earlier days, there was numerous oil companies operating

the Goose Creek oilfields such as the Texas, the Gulf, the Sun, the Humble and so forth and so on, in addition to many private owners. At the junction of Texas Avenue and Main Street, we turned one block to Commerce Street. Turning right on Commerce Street, the Goose Creek Railroad Station – known as the Dayton and Goose Creek Railroad System – had their depot. To the left of this was a small building the company had constructed to be used as a clinic and a doctor's office to care for the employees that were working in the Goose Creek Oilfields, and for those living in that area. Hold it just a minute.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: After surveying the building and the furniture and so forth inside, we returned to the refinery. At this time we drove a short distance out of what is now known as Texas Avenue to about where the library is, and went down along an area, and crossed the Goose Creek Stream on a small ferry just below where the Robert E. Lee High School stands today. And from this point on, we continued on the right-hand side of the Goose – Dayton/Goose Creek Railroad tracks directly into the refinery until we reached a point where we took a right-hand turn back to the medical department.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: Uh... in our hospital set-ups in the doctor's office there was a new desk; a swivel chair at the desk; one straight-back chair at the side; a new typewriter, which I possess today; a telephone; and a file cabinet. And in the so-called first-aid room I found a new electric instrument sterilizer. And with the exception of the articles named and the linens – that is the towels, sheets, pillow cases, and so forth, not including the blankets – I believe that everything that we had at our disposal was surplus army equipment that the company had bought from the army from an old fort out on Washington Avenue that had been closed down. On the out...

(End of tape)

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**(Tape 2 of 3)**

SS: Now, Mr. Culver, go ahead. You were talking about the conditions at the hospital.

NC: Uh... During these days we had complete segregation between the colored, and the Mexicans, and the white people. Therefore, the company had erected used army tents around the wooden building for patients of the colored and Mexican race. In addition to that, we shortly had a smallpox epidemic and had a surplus tent erected nearby to where we could keep the smallpox patients isolated. Shut it off just a ...

(Tape cuts off)

NC: Uh, the furniture within the hospital building itself consisted of two wooden benches made on the job without backs to be used in the waiting room. We had two chairs set up in the first-aid room for the patients being treated to sit in. The table used there was made in the plant; rough, unpainted. There were shelves built around for such material as we need: applicators, tongue blades, cotton, so forth and so on, and to lay our instruments and so forth. No covers; none of this was painted. There was no running water in the first-aid room itself. In the doctor's office there was a small wash basin. Cold water only. And there was no sewer disposal other than the waste water emptying onto the ground under the building. In the ward we had a large sink. This also was a second-hand sink. Nothing but cold water, and

all water draining onto the ground under the building. In the corner was a stack of rusty, used, iron army cots, a pile of blankets, and several packages of fresh, new sheets, pillowcases, towel, and so forth. I set up some cots in the ward to be used, and they each had a second-hand mattress. We had absolutely no sanitary ... uh ... equipment for use of the patients. There was one, what we called a three-seater outdoor jit sails, or toilet, that led from the front door of the hospital by wood walk to that area. This building could accommodate three patients at a time. Uh... We had slop jars for use in the building. However, there was no such a thing as ice or cold water for any of the patients. The only heat that we had for the entire building was a small potbelly wood burning stove in the waiting room.

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Now, Mr. Culver, what kind of hours did you spend in your duties with the hospital?

NC: At the time I moved into the hospital the beginning of November, there was no company doctor on duty at the plant during the first few months I was there. There was a doctor that spent part-time there, but most of the time I was there by myself, and I was on duty and subject to call 24 hours a day, continuously on through to December 1922. Except for the fact there was an occasions – there were occasions where maybe the doctors would agree to stay over the weekend. And along then to 1922 for the first time we got some men that knew a little first-aid work – maybe from serving in the army or navy – who we employed, and they could relieve me maybe over the weekend and so forth if the company doctor was gonna be in town. Other than that, for the first few years I was with the company, I literally worked 24 hours a day.

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Mr. Culver, in an earlier conversation we had, you mentioned to me that you were instrumental in forming the first community chest, or that type of organization here in Baytown. Could you tell me something about that?

NC: Christmas was close at hand in 1922 when the Veterans of Foreign War Post asked me, a member, to investigate the probability that we might help some family in need, and making this Christmas a brighter occasion for others. Only one old couple was named by our post that might be in need. Believing there was more poverty in the oilfield area during these times, I arranged to meet with the constable who was familiar with the residents living here. It was after dark the night of our meeting. I told him the name of the old couple that had been mentioned at our meeting. He said, "Yes, I know them well. Let's go by their home."

NC: The couple appeared pleased to see the constable, and invited us to come in. Their home was not ... uh ... passed classed as being elegant. However, it appeared to be quite comfortable with a fire in a cast iron heating stove. They claimed to have a good supply of firewood to hold them through the winter, and had received word that two different organizations had informed them that they would provide them with turkey and all the necessary trimmings for Christmas. On leaving this home, the constable said to me, "Let's see if we can get in this house across the street."

NC: He received no respond to knocking at the door. He opened the door a little saying, "I'm Mr.," I don't recall what his name was, "May we come in?"

NC: Still, no respond. We entered to find there three small, barefooted girls dressed in very ragged clothes. They could have been in the ages, say from about five to 10 years of age. There was a small,

smoking kerosene lamp with a cracked chimney in the center of the rough, unpainted table. The girls standing around, each with their metal plate and a spoon eating what they claimed was the only food they had had that day, which consisted of cornmeal and water, to which they added sorghum syrup from a jar on the table. Except for the table and one chair, I saw no other furniture in this room, the only room in the house. No stove or no bed. Ragged blankets on the floor. The constable said the girls had no mother. The father stayed drunk most of the time. We visited some three or four other homes, and found deplorable conditions. I thanked the constable, informing him I had seen all I could to for that one night. I reported to our post commander; he called a special meeting. I reported my findings, and requested the post to permit me in the name of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to call a meeting of representatives of all the churches and organizations in the area with the idea to stop duplication, and maybe care for some in need that had not been looked into. Permission was granted. Mr. Henry Cathrina, the owner of the building at the corner of Texas Avenue and Commerce Street, who was the agent for the Ford automobile, allowed us to use his showroom in the front of this building for this purpose. He – the local people responded well. Some of the organizations had had their last meeting of the year, and had been instructed as to where to deliver their gifts. However, the meeting did help a few overlooked children given some consideration. It was decided at this meeting that in the coming years we would work together. A women's club – I don't remember what they were called – were in attendance at this meeting, and early the next year they began getting the different organizations together in a community effort as we had agreed on. This being called, I believe, the Red Feather. Today known as East Harris County Community Chest.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: In the organizing the Humble Oil and Refining Company, they were producing oil and manufacturing under the name of Dixie Products, and continued doing so into the 1920's when the first name change appeared that I recall. The billboards were spread with advertising of the Humble Oil and Refining Company advertising their flashlight gasoline. The billboard showed a large picture of a flashlight with the rays extending out across the board with the words, "Flashlight Gasoline." It was not long before another oil company brought court proceedings against the company for infringement of their copyright. They had a gasoline that they sold under the name of flash right, there being only one letter difference in the naming of the two gasolines. L-I-G-H-T, and R-I-G-H-T. The company lost – or in other words, possibly – surrendered the right to using the name of Flashlight Gasoline. It was during these days the company was doing whatever they could to use current money, have daily money for operating their business. And at the time they were paying 10 percent daily interest on borrowed money. A Mr. B.C. Morgan, an employee of the Humble Refinery, persuaded a group of fellow employees to have our own loan company. As I recall, stock sold for five dollars a share. We soon sold enough stock to apply for and receive a Texas State Charter, and open our own Baytown Savings and Investment Associations. Officers elected as follows: Mr. Morgan, President; Mr. Roticape, Secretary; Mr. Culvert, Treasurer. Mr. R.L. Blaffer was the Treasurer of the Humble Oil and Refining Company, and agreed to pay us 10 percent daily interest on all monies we would send him in multiples of hundreds of dollars. All money we sent to Mr. Blaffer was by company carrier without any cost to us. We agreed to pay our depositors in the association 10 percent interest on all money they would leave on deposit for a period of one year. In addition, we agreed to loan any depositor money at 10 percent rate of interest. There was a 25 cent charge made on all promissory notes that was written. The only cosigners on promissory notes we accepted were employees who total deposits in the association amounted to more than the amount of money being borrowed, and with the understanding that this money continued to be left in the



association until such time the note was paid in full. One day, the State Bankers commissioner came to Mr. Morgan inquiring as to what type of business we were conducting; he never heard of anything like what was going on in Baytown.

SS: (Laughs)

NC: After examining our records he congratulated Mr. Morgan, and told him we were operating the soundest banking institution operating in the state of Texas at that time. I do not recall of any of us being placed under bond. After a few years, the company requested we discontinue operating our association as a plan to give the employees an opportunity to purchase company stock in which the company would participating in helping pay for the stock purchase by the employees. To my knowledge, the Baytown Saving and Investing Association never lost one cent. Upon being... uh... Upon closing of the association, the original five dollar shares or stocks had a value of 50 some odd dollars.

SS: (Laughs)

(Tape cuts off)

NC: At the beginning of work at Baytown, there were few men that came and stayed more than a few weeks before leaving. I believe in the first two or three years I was there – not only in many other departments, but I believe the superintendent of the plant changed hands some three or four different times. And it was almost impossible to depend on anybody coming and living under the conditions after the rainy, cold weather had set-in along the end of November. The year of 1919 and 1920 was a very cold and wet winter. Uh, we had much trouble – not only with sickness and athlete's feet due from dampness in the employees' shoes and clothes, molding in the tents. However, I was in need of some help at the hospital, and they sent me an old Mexican man, Mateas Calvan, who was a soldier in Poncho Villa's army, and had deserted the army and come to Baytown. He could not speak a word of English. But he could cut wood and bring it in to burn in our little ol' stove: the only heat in the building. And I taught him the best I could to sweep and mop the building. It was during these days that we would see things that you would be hard to believe today. I remember one injured man coming in one morning soaking wet; he did not have a coat on. I asked him, I said, "Where is your coat?"

NC: He said, "I don't have a coat," he said, "I've got a wife and some children that are hungry, and I don't have any money to buy a coat with."

NC: I went back into my little room and picked out a coat that fit him exact. It was just a little tight for me, and I was glad to give it to him. It was a deed that he never forgot, and I made a real friend out of him. And in the past three years his son living in Baytown also returned the services to us when we was in time of need. Not financially, but because of an injury to my wife. On another occasion, there was a man come in and he was dressed quite well, but he had been injured and it was a horrible day. He told me that he hated to think that his wife was at home in the little one-room house without any heat in the house. I asked him why in the world he didn't provide her with heat. He said, well, he'd been out of work, he had no money, he had no credit, and he couldn't get a stove until after he'd made a payday and got the price to buy a stove with. I suggested that if he would checkout at that time, and go home, and install a stove to keep his wife warm, that I would give him the money to purchase the stove with. He agreed to do it, I gave the money, and I took off. This man evaded meeting me for some weeks. One afternoon I went out when the men were boarding the train to return to Goose Creek, and as he stepped up on the step of the car I reached up and got him by the back of the neck and yanked him

down onto his back on the ground. He was a powerful man; he could've whipped a half a dozen men like me. But you know the next payday he paid me in full.

(Laughter)

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Ok.

NC: In the fall of 1921, a company employee from the Houston office brought a number of applications for a poll tax to be sold to the refinery employees, each costing a dollar-and-a-half cash. I am not sure just where he left the applications. I do know the time office had some of them. These applications, which amounted to a dollar-and-a-half each was to be paid to the county tax collector not later than midnight, January 31, 1921, to obtain a poll tax to be used in the year of 1922. They'd be mailed out. Saturday afternoon, January 31, the man from Houston office picked up the applications and money to turn over to the Harris County tax collector. It being well-along in the evening when he arrived at the tax office to learn according to the laws, the tax collector could only accept same from a qualified voter living in the precinct for six months, and in the state a year, who could swear to the fact that the applications were purchased by qualified voters in the state at the time. As time was running out, the man rushed back to Baytown. It being Saturday night, men were hard to find. Uh, it was suggested they thought I would meet the qualifications. Upon being approached in regarding to taking the applications in, I told the men I had a number of patients to care for and could not leave the hospital. They found the company doctor who agreed to stay in the hospital, uh, and ... and care for the patients so that I might go in and deliver the applications. As I remember, it was eight minutes before midnight we delivered to the tax collector 27 poll tax affinitives, and \$40.50 cash. I was taken to the Rice Hotel to spend the rest of the night.

SS: (Laughs)

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Mr. Culver, you had mentioned something about the formation of the original Humble Club. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

NC: It was on a hot Sunday afternoon during the summer of 1920. I walked a short distance to the company drugstore with the idea of purchasing an ice cream sundae. In these days, the druggist dispensed refreshment from the ice cream soda fountain found in most drugstores. Entering the store, a Mr. Spriggs and a Mr. Lopez were seated at a table in front of the soda fountain with their refreshments, and suggested that I pull up a chair and join them. Seated there, we discussed such as there was to be discussed in those days. I brought up the idea that I would like to have a club to provide recreation nearby for the use at such times we were off duty. We were getting well along with the discussions of the idea when Mr. Rodicape came in and joined us. At his request, I reviewed my ideas to provide recreation by forming a club. He was in accord with my suggestions, and said if I thought I could persuade enough men to support me that he would draw up a petition suggesting the principals and policies for the adoption. In a matter of a few days, men were coming to me asking how they could join. Soon there – soon more than 100 men had signed our petition and paid a dollar fee each. We called a meeting; there was no opposition. We voted to form a club to be known as the Baytown Humble Club. And before adjourning, we agreed upon the price that we would charge for dues. We elected officers, and were in business. The company provided us with a large frame building near Camp 4 mess hall, and

we were not long in providing non-talking motion picture shows several times a week. Dances, boxing wrestling events, and set up sacks for shooting clay pigeons in a place near the center of the refinery as it is today. We were proud of our football and baseball teams. Many of our men playing football held important positions in the refinery. Too many of these men lost working time caused by injuries and broken bones received playing these games. The company soon ruled no more football. However, they did continue to provide for many years beautiful baseball parks. As the company continued growing, the club grew with it. In a few years, employees in the Houston office formed a club naming it the Houston Humble Club. (Coughing) With the ever-increasing numbers of employees, the company began holding their Humble Day celebrations at Sylvan Beach. Baytown employees and their families were given passengers – given passage aboard passenger boats to Sylvan Beach. We were taken to the Baytown docks aboard the company train, and the employees in the Houston office came by railroad to the Humble Day celebrations. Years later, the company suggested each club celebrate...

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**(Tape 3 of 3)**

SS: ...the first, uh, for the Humble Days; how they celebrated Humble Day.

NC: Humble Days were held on May 11, which was the original Humble Day, and generally held as near that date as possible. That was the day that the company began running their first crude oil through the crude stills. In later years the company suggested that each club hold their own Humble Celebration picnics as they saw fit. The company continued to graciously donate to these picnics and support them in many ways. These celebrations are wonderful, and I believe growing each year. The clubs also hold many other events throughout the year.

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Get a little

SS: This is volume two of an oral history conversation with Mr. Norman Culver. I'm Sarah Swofford. This is Wednesday, September 19, 1979. And Mr. Culver, you were talking about the Humble Day celebrations of the old Humble Club.

NC: As the years passed the company suggest that each club celebrate Humble Day as they saw fit. The company continued to graciously donate to these picnics and support them in many ways. The celebrations seem to be a wonderful event, and I believe growing each year. The clubs also hold many other events throughout the year.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: Early in the 1920's, the Humble Oil and Refining Company purchased a large tract of property extending from Market Street – now known as West Main Street – to Black Duck Bay, and from the Sun Oil Company property – now known as Oklahoma Street – to about what is now named Louisiana Street. The company laid-out street; installed water lines and fire hydrants; sewer lines were installed, both sanitary and drainage sewer lines to drain-off the rainwater; installed concrete curbs, gutters, and sidewalks with concrete alleys in back of all their lots. This property was cut up into lots to be sold for company employees to – company employees only – to build their homes. A number of these lots along

Market Street were set aside to be sold for business purposes. Employees purchasing lots formed a utility company, each owner of their lot having one vote. The utility company secured a state charter, and was named the Baytown Utility Corporation. A board of directors were elected whose duty it was to provide services as needed similar to councilmen in our local city government. I do not believe that the director of the utility company had any authority in the enforcement of laws. Mr. M.L. Snider, my next door neighbor and President of the utilities corporation, came to me and explained if the corporation had a fire department, it would save the property owners a good deal on the cost of their insurance premiums. If we had a volunteer fire department, the utility corporation would purchase a fire truck, which would be kept in the office building of the company. He then, in turn, asked me if I would select a group of men that would consent to join a proposed volunteer fire department. I had little trouble in finding the necessary men. Some two or three of them, having had experience in volunteer fire departments before coming to Baytown. After calling our first meeting, we voted to name the organization the Baytown Volunteer Fire Department. We elected our officers. As presiding officer at the meeting, I requested my name not be put in nomination for any office. However, I wish to be a member of the department. Members began training at once. Quite some time before the first firetruck was delivered to the department. We had joined the Gulf Coast Fireman's – Volunteer Fireman's – Association. Uh... I had at this time been elected President to our department. In due time we voted to attend the annual Gulf Coast Association Voluntary Fire Department meeting and to their contents – their contest, which they were having in Houston, Texas, that year.

SS: What year was this, Mr. Culvert? Do you know approximately?

NC: Approximately... '25, '26...

SS: Oh, ok.

NC: ... that we went to the – we organized the fire department maybe in '24.

SS: Um-hmm. Ok.

(Long pause)

NC: In firefighting teamwork, we earned more points than any other department competing in the events. When we learned there was also to be a first-aid and rescue contest, which we did not know about, and had never heard about, nor did we have any equipment to participate in this event. One of the other departments there with good luck could receive enough points in this contest to take the grand trophy if we did not enter this event and get another few points. Uh... The departments, except us, were setting up their equipment to begin the first-aid contest. I told them we had failed to bring any supplies for this event. The department for that – these departments provided us with the necessary supplies.

(Tape cuts off)

NC: Ok.

NC: They loaned us the necessary supplies for us to enter in the contest. I believe there was some five men on a team. And except for myself, we had only one who had ever had any first-aid training, and that was years before as a Boy Scout. He learned to tie square knots in bandages, which seemed a little thing. However, there was quite a number of knots to be tied, and the wrong knots took away many points. I acted as captain of the team. Uh... the problems to be worked were presented in sealed envelopes – no

two envelopes being the same. Or in other words, no two departments having the same problems. With the aid of our man who had known how to tie the proper knots, securing splints and bandages and so forth, the other men were instructed to hold broken extremities as per instructed. Slowness being a minor penalty in the scoring, I also instructed treatment for shock by applying whatever was available to substitute as hot water bottles. Blankets and so forth were used in treating shock. The scoring was done by other than fireman. I do not remember how many – how we placed, but we did receive enough credits to not only receive some prizes, we did win enough points to receive the beautiful grand trophy of the event. (Coughing) Our department needed a good room and a room where we might train during bad weather. A suggestion was made by Brooke Mason in our department that we build a second story on these two little buildings, which not only give us a large meeting room, but we could also have room for a fireman to live there. By having a fireman on duty 24 hours a day it would provide another nice discount to our insurance premiums. We had many men of various crafts in our department, and well-qualified to do good work. After discussing the idea with – and the pro and con in a number of our meetings, I went before the directors of the utility corporation and suggested if they would supply the materials we would construct the second story to the building. With, uh, volunteers – with volunteer help from others than members of the fire department, the task was completed in much less time than we had expected. Our community had a group of volunteer firemen they indeed could be proud of.

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Mr. Culvert, now where was this building located in terms of Baytown today? What street would you find that building on?

NC: The original Baytown Utility Corporation office was on Minnesota Street. And it was here that the fire department added the second story. And the building today is still standing adjoining the odorless cleaner there on Minnesota Street. Is that ...

(End of tape)

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Transcribed by: Amanda Smoke 5/2/18