

(Tape 1 of 2)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Martha Mayo

Interviewee: Raymond Kilgore

May 27, 1986

MM: Sterling Municipal Library. I'm having an oral history conversation with Raymond Kilgore.

MM: When did your family move to the Cedar Bayou area?

RK: Well, my grandfather came to this country from Ireland in, oh – at the age of 12. Just what age, what year that was I ... let's see. I can't back it up fast enough. But, uh, he came to New York and uh, with his sister, and they were looking for their older brother that had come over a number of few years earlier, and he were in the Philadelphia area. But, uh, when he got to New York, why, he had no money. He couldn't – he got a job on this ship to get over to New York. So while they were in New York, why, he tried to find a job, and he couldn't do it. So when his ship was ready to leave, well, he crawled back on it. And at every port they'd come into, why, he'd get off and try to find a job. And finally a boat came into Galveston, and he got a job there working on a freight boat from Galveston up the Trinity River up to Wallisville. And eventually he settled in Wallisville.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And married a lady, a Hartman. My grandmother. And they settled there, and raised 14 children.

MM: Oh, my goodness! (Laughs)

RK: Which, my father was about the – oh, I think he was about the fourth or fifth in line.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, uh, eventually they moved out on the prairie, which we know now out here off of 565, on out past the old radio station.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: Out there by the canal. And, uh, here master – I think he had a little over 1,700 acres, and he paid 25 cents an acre for it, and that's what they lived on.

MM: Oh, my goodness.

RK: Course, you take in those days, why, uh ... you was in – a large family was a asset to you.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: You almost had to.

MM: Yes.

RK: Because you had to raise everything you ate, and make everything you used. So it was a, it was an asset. Which today, why, a large family is a – is a debt to you.

MM: Yeah. (Laughs)

RK: But, uh, as it may, why, they raised their 14 children out there, and they all did well. And they were from there. And, uh, myself, why, I was born back in February 11 of 1912, on the back of Cedar Bayou here. And, uh, in our home, which my father built in 1906. He built the house, and then mother and I – he and mother were married in January of 1906.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, he said that they had their wedding supper at the house. And then the next morning, why, they caught a freight boat and went to Galveston on their honeymoon.

MM: Oh!

RK: Course, in those days, the mode of transportation was by water, by boat.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And, uh, from there, why, talking about the things that were happening in Cedar Bayou, why, I guess the most thing that was happened – most everybody – it was farming and ranching. And, uh, in the later years, long in about nine-, 1870 or 72, along in there, why, there's some brickyards began to show up. And the first one they say it was, was a fellow by the name of Collins was down at the mouth of the Cedar Bayou. And he had a brickyard, and he also had a little shipyard there were a schooner landing they called it. Where schooners would come in from Galveston and up this way bringing freight and stuff. And, uh, but over the course of years, why, speaking of brickyards, why, there was 11 at one time operating on the banks of Cedar Bayou.

MM: Goodness.

RK: And the reason for that is the clay is ideal for brickmaking.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, I saw one report one time that said that the potential strength of the brick that were made on Cedar Bayou yard were the best anywhere that's ever made.

MM: My goodness!

RK: Yes. And, uh, it was very good. So that was, uh, sort of a shot in the arm for industry-wise to the people. But yet, uh, we considered people that did that they were moonlighting.

MM: Oh, it was a second job?

RK: It was a second job for 'em. Because, uh, they'd work on a brickyard a half a day, see, they could go over there and make their quota. A quota was 5,000 brick.

MM: Oh

RK: A crew of six would go over there and make 5,000 brick, and then they have the day made. Well, they started...

MM: Did they have molds that they'd put clay into?

RK: Yeah. They, uh, would start it, say at daybreak. And by noon, they'd be through, and then they'd go home, work on their farm and gardens.

MM: Oh.

RK: Tend to their cattle -

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: and this, that and the other. And I called it moonlighting.

MM: Yeah. But then when did your father start with the ...

RK: Well, my father worked on brickyards when he was a boy.

MM: Oh.

RK: And then he went from there on up, and he got a job on a W.D. Hayden shipyard – oh, as a young man. Then at the age of 18, which about, well let's see, 18 – age six he was born in '78. Why, he started his own shipyard.

MM: Oh. He was only 18?

RK: Ya. Well, they had to start young I guess.

MM: Yeah.

(Laughter)

RK: Well anyway, he said that he had a quite a hard job trying to get the little education he got. He said out on the prairie, why, he had so far to go. And so, Nicholas Schilling, the old doctor around here, why, Dad stayed with him and worked for him for his board and room.

MM: Oh.

RK: So he could go to the school, which was up here at the old Masonic Lodge.

MM: Oh. Yeah.

RK: And, uh, it uh – whatever, it's just you'd have to cross the bayou and walk on up there

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: to that. And, uh, so from there, why – that's where the Hayden Shipyard was right there by it, so he got to work in there. And then when after he figured he's big enough, well he started his own. And, uh, the story goes that, uh, no – it's never a ill will wind that doesn't blow someone some good.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Well, the 1900 storm that hit Galveston just wiped it away. Why, uh, Dad and his some of his brothers that picked up lumber and stuff on the beaches down there off the bay. And he said he was able to finish building his shipyard with out of it.

(Laughter)

MM: I bet there was a lot of lumber down there.

RK: Yes, there was. I should think so, because Galveston was just wiped away, you know.

MM: Yes.

RK: They had, they had no seawall, they had anything to protect 'em.

MM: Yes.

RK: So it was a – they were just wiped out. But you speaking of brickyards, why, uh it was very primitive. Everything was done by hand.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: Or horsepower, or using a horse.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And, uh, as some of the old timers have told me that, uh – uh, it would start out with a, a mud pit. Have a big pit dug in the ground, say about four feet wide, about eight feet long, about four foot deep.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And they would haul the dirt into this, the mixture – the clay and the loam – and stack it in there, and then they'd haul water up there and pour it in, and let it set for 24 hours.

MM: Oh, ok.

RK: And then it'd have a mixing ...

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: ... uh, mill. Which was just board built up with a king pin going down through it with a boards coming out of it – just make a paddle to stir it. And then they'd have a long, swooping arm, which was like a limb off of a tree.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And a horse, or mule tied to the other end just going around stirring this mill.

MM: Oh.

RK: And that's the way they'd mix their mud.

MM: I see.

RK: And the longer they'd mix it, the drier it got, see?

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, they would take it out then.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, put it on the molding table. And have sand on there – dry sand – they'd roll it in there, just like you was making bread up. And, uh, then they'd have a mold there, and he'd – and this molder, why, after doing it for so many of those, so long, he'd be efficient. He could just cut off just about as much mud as you want and just flop it into these molds.

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

RK: There'd be three molds, three bricks to a mold, see?

MM: Oh.

RK: And then he'd pat 'em and stripe it off, and he'd hand it to another boy, and he'd take 'em and dump 'em out on a board.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And then he'd take it and set 'em out on the ground out there someplace that was swept and cleaned off. And actually, that's where the name came for, for 'em: brickyard. They were just stacked out on the yard, see?

MM: Just ...

RK: To dry.

MM: Just dry in the sun?

RK: Dry in the sun. But, uh – that wasn't too good, because if it rained or something or other, it would ruin your brick.

MM: You'd lose the whole...

RK: You lose the whole day's work if you didn't get more careful. And then they wouldn't dry evenly, and some of 'em would crack –

MM: Oh.

RK: if you get too hot sun, and this, that and the other, so ...

MM: Yeah.

RK: Then they started building sheds and put 'em in sheds. And they'd set 'em in these sheds on these boards, and up with three brick at a time, and just stack 'em right one behind the other. And, uh, in, in the shed that way, why, they generally taked about four weeks for 'em to dry.

MM: Oh my goodness.

RK: Well, they were just drying by themselves, see?

MM: Uh-huh. Yeah.

RK: And, uh, then they would be hauled to a kiln and burned. So a kiln, they said then those days – I sort of doubted – but they said around 300,000 bricks to a kiln.

MM: That's a lot of bricks.

RK: That's a lot of brick.

RK: Well, anyway, why uh – well, you can do a little figuring at 5,000 a day, why ... 30,000 a week, would only take about 10 weeks to fill one, see?

MM: Yes.

RK: So (laughs). But anyway, why, that's the way the story goes. And, uh, then after the brick had dried enough, why, they'd be hauled and placed in the kiln. And then when they get the kiln full, why, then everybody would just stop everything, they start firing it. They would ... take about a, they said estimate about 150 cords of wood to burn a kiln.

MM: Ooo.

RK: And they'd have about four or five hours on each side of the kiln, and then start sticking these logs in there and setting a fire to 'em, getting 'em burning. And they'd start off with a slow fire, and they just gradually increased it up to about the – uh, let's see, it was the, uh, yeah. Fourth day. Then from the fourth day through the eight day, they'd just as, just as – had the hottest fire they could build. They have it in there, and the flames would be just going all up through the brick and burning 'em, see. And, so then after that, why, they, they were sealed up.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: All the ice, and then they'd throw a third up on top up there, and seal it off. And then it'd take about 10 days for it to cool down before you could get in there. And then before they could start getting the brick out ...

MM: It's a two or three week process, then?

RK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And, uh ...

MM: I had no idea.

RK: Well, you could estimate it'd take, I'd imagine about two month's time by the time they start till they have a kiln burn off, see. And, uh, it was just a summer and a springtime business because the wintertime, it was too cold.

MM: Yes.

RK: And the brick would freeze your brick, see. But ...

MM: Oh.

RK: they would still work. That's when they would get the wood. They'd go to the woods and cut timber, see? And haul it in.

MM: They'd have to get a lot of timbers.

RK: Oh, yeah. They have to have it – stacked up there cause when they got ready to go, why, they'd have to shove it to it.

MM: And they got it from all around here?

RK: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That was the secret to it. The raw material was right where the plant was.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And then, why, they'd have to be loaded on schooners, boats, sailed down the bayou and on out to the gul-, bay and on into Galveston, see.

MM: Yeah.

RK: But it was quite a process of trying to get a boat down the bayou when there wasn't any wind. So they had – they thought of the idea of using a mule or a horse they would hook onto the boat ...

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

RK: ... and he'd walk along the bank and drag this boat on out to the mouth of the bayou where he'd get his sails up in the air, and ...

MM: Oh. Yeah.

RK: There they'd go. And, uh, so... They said a brick on the Galveston Warf would sell for \$6 a thousand. So you can see, you take six men, why, they only make 30 dollars-worth of brick a day, see?

MM: Yeah. Pay wasn't real high, but ...

RK: Well, the pay wasn't high, about a dollar, dollar and a quarter, see.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And but that was good money. They thought. Best there was.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And, uh, actually the – what brought brick to ... to its death I should say in Cedar Bayou, was when they discovered oil in the Goose Creek oilfield and they started building a refinery back in I think it was 1919 or 1920. Well, the workers could get a lot more money.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, brickmaking wasn't too profitable anyway. It was just all hard work. And, uh, so it died. Pretty well.

MM: When was the last – well, when did the last one close?

RK: The last one closed... Well, my father is a – he worked on Gillette Brickyard as a boy. And he had an opportunity to buy it back in 1939. The reason I remember so well, that's the year I was married.

MM: Oh.

RK: (Laughs) Well anyway, why, he bought this flat, and uh, it was – got it to operating. And, uh, in fact this home we're in now, it was built out of the first brick that my father made in after he bought it.

MM: Oh!

RK: And, in fact, my father built this house for a showcase to show his brick. And, uh, after it didn't sell for about a year, well I bought it.

MM: It's red, or – some of the other Cedar Bayou brick I've seen is real dark. Was, were there different colors of the brick?

RK: Yes. Yes. It – that, that is determined by the amount of heat that hits it.

MM: Oh, I thought it was the clay.

RK: Makes it colored. And then, uh, later years, uh, they started putting different kind of chemicals on them. Would make 'em do different things.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, but, uh... But that was sort of the... Now, you take brickyards, why, they're just like everything else. Why, they've improvement. You know, disaster is the mother of invention. And, uh, back there where everything was done by hand, now it's all done by machinery. They have – they use dry dirt, and they have compressors that pack it and just bring it down. Instead of making one at a time, they make 10 at a time. Now these presses that come down, strap it, and they kick 'em out. Instead of having to wheel 'em, why they head on a conveyor belt, and it takes 'em right on out, goes right into the kiln. And there'll be a man out there stacking, 'em, see?

MM: Yes.

RK: Or several. And, uh, within a week or two, why, they've got 'em a 300,000 brick or more incidents.

MM: Oh.

RK: Into your kiln. So that's the way it is. But anyway, why, uh – that's about the way a brickyard was. But I raise-, I was raised up on a shipyard. And ... my father saw that we boys were over there working every minute we weren't in school.

(Laughter)

RK: And, uh... I, uh, spent many a hour over on the old shipyard. I recall Dad would have barges under construction, and I was up on top of it running across the deck. The deck out on it was just the beams, and I missed one and fell down through it.

MM: Oh, no.

RK: And, uh, sort of knocked the wind out of him, and my uncle wasn't too far from me, so he run up there and grabbed me and pulled me out and packed me up, put me under the shed. And he called for Dad, and Dad came up there, and he said, "What's the matter?"

RK: And I told him. No, he told – my uncle told him. And he said, "Well, how do you feel?"

RK: And I said, "I feel alright."

RK: And he said, "Well, you set up here and cool off a little while, and then get back out there and go to work."

(Laughter)

RK: So that's what I did. But anyway, now days, well you'd have 'em to the hospital, x-ray 'em and everything else, you know.

MM: That's right.

RK: But it wasn't nearly such a thing. But, uh... the ship....

MM: Excuse me.

RK: Ma'am?

MM: Go on.

RK: In the – Dad built barges back there, or he was quite busy building 'em, and I remember he built barges that went far as Tampico. Down at, uh, Mexico.

MM: Oh.

RK: And in fact, he was a, he had, uh – I think there were six barges from down up in Tupico, Tampico when the 1915 storm hit. He had 'em at his shipyard doing some repair work on 'em.

MM: Oh, I see.

RK: And they broke away from Dad's shipyard, which was just across the bayou from where we lived, and they all came over there and come around the house. And, uh, that's what woke us up that morning in September 1915 during the 19 ... September the 15th, I – ya. 1915. When I remember there was some noise hit the house.

MM: Really?

RK: In fact it just knocked the whole corner of the house right, right by ...

MM: Well, I was gonna ask about that.

RK: ... by my bed. And, uh, Dad jumped up and hit the floor. And he said, "Oh, my goodness, Clarence."

RK: That was my mother's name. Said, "Water's on the floor."

RK: And so, of course that frightened me. I guess it did the others. And, uh, next thing I knew is about daylight, my uncle came down there on a skiff and picked us up, and carried us on up to where we could get up and go up to grandfather's house.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, but after the water subsided, and, uh, they were there getting these barges all back in the bayou, why, uh, I remember one, one of the barges in particular, why, uh, I was up on it playing – my sister, my older brother and I – and, uh, there was about two foot of oil in the bottom of it. And I was looking over in the hatch down there, and it making a mirror, you know. And making faces at it. Next thing I knew, well I just tumbled over head first into it.

(Laughter)

RK: And, uh... Course, my brother and sister began to scream, and one of my uncle's was there working. He ran up there and got – reached down there and pulled me out. And about that time, Mother got there, and she was wringing her hands. Said, "My goodness, what am I gonna do with him?"

MM: Yeah.

RK: My uncle said, "Oh," he said, "just wash him off in coal oil and tell him to go on about his business."

(Laughter)

RK: So that's what happened.

MM: Oh! I bet you remember that well by now.

RK: Oh, yeah. I think that is about as – first thing, furthest back I can remember anything that happened in my life. And, uh, of course from them on, why, uh – the schooling I got here: well, we went to Cedar Bayou up here. And it was just a four-room school. It had 11 grades in four rooms.

MM: Gosh.

RK: And, uh... That is up until – let's see, I think I was in the eighth or ninth grade when they built another little building, which was just two rooms in it. And, uh, the high school was enclosed in it, and the other four rooms took care of the elementary school children. And, uh, but there, why, we didn't have any athletic at that time. I remember my junior year, why, they began to have some football.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, by that time, why, there was a high school – school over in, in Goose Creek. They called it Goose Creek. And, uh, they had a football team. So a bunch of out here, why, we got together and we'd get to play on Saturday. We didn't have a coach or anything, we'd just go out there in our clothes and play (laughs). And, uh, I remember my father, why, he wasn't too impressed with that then, because he said it, "Oh, you boys just losing time from working," he said. "You out there playing."

RK: And, uh, and my older brother went to the Goose Creek High. And he wanted to play ball.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, uh, so he was playing. And he kept asking Dad, he said, "I want you to come see a game, Dad."

RK: "Oh, I haven't got time to go. I've got things to do."

RK: And, uh – well anyway, why, one Saturday afternoon Dad went to the game. And my brother tells the story that, uh, he was – he played halfback on the team. And he said he didn't know Dad was there. And, uh, he said he happened to break loose and make a little run going down the field, and he said he heard somebody hollering. Said, "Run, son! Run, son!"

MM: Oh! (Laughs)

RK: He looked back and Dad was running down the sideline with him, see.

(Laughter)

RK: So that hooked him from then on, why...

MM: That converted him right there.

RK: Yeah. From then on, my dad would make all the games then, so.

MM: Oh!

(Laughter)

RK: Yeah. But, uh... I guess – the rule of community then, why, uh: we didn't know any better, so we had lots of fun. Why, I can recall that every Friday night, why, it was a party somewhere for us. We'd have to walk and get there. But the girls and, and we'd all – it'd be a house full.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And we'd play all kinds of games, and this, that and the other. I remember ... card games. Why, it was Old Maid, Finch – I don't know whether people remember that or not.

MM: Oh. Yes, uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, now you take Bridge, or things like that. My father wouldn't let a deck of cards like that come in the house.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: Because he said that's used for gambling.

MM: Yeah.

RK: So I was in college before I learned how to bridge. It got ... (Laughs) And course you had dominoes, and we played lots of dominoes and 42 and moon. That's another game I learned after I got into college, and uh, which is a lot of fun. But, uh, I can recall during our summer months, why, we'd – I'd always look forward to every afternoon when I'd get off from work by – I'd get on my bicycle and my brother – or get on his horse – and we'd ride up her to the Illfree store, which is right ...

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: ... up here on the bayou. And everybody'd meet there and swim. Girls and all, man.

MM: Oh.

RK: We'd just have a – be a party every afternoon.

MM: What fun!

RK: Oh, from about seven on up to dark. It was a little after dark, so you know. And, uh, it was just a more or less community gathering, you know.

MM: Oh, that sounds fun.

RK: And I recall my dad. He was always very active in the church, and, uh, he was Sunday school superintendent. And every year, along in August or somewhere along there, why, uh, he'd take the whole Sunday school – everybody, the whole bunch – fishing. And, uh, he had tow boats and things then. And we'd get everybody on a barge and take 'em down to the mouth of the bayou and park it. Had seines. We'd take a seine, and just go out in the bay. A big, long seine. About 150 feet long. And about two swipes, well, we'd have enough fish and everything for everybody, see? And they'd have a big fish fry.

MM: Oh!

RK: And, um, so that was always a highlight of the summer for everybody. And, uh... But then, as time goes on, you know, I recall – I think it was 1926 the first radio was ... that, uh ... we had – the first radio we had.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: I had listened to radio before because I remember in the YMCA building back in Goose Creek, why, we went down there one night to hear – my sister was in college and she was on the radio, and they said that we could pick it up. They had a big set or something or another. So we all went down there to listen to my sister play a piano recital.

MM: Oh!

RK: Since she was going to school in Fort Worth.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, and that's the first radio I'd ever remember hearing or seeing. And in 1926, which I think was the same year, my dad bought a radio.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: Because we had just got electricity. Up to then, why, it was lamps, and, uh, we had a Delco Plant. Furnished electricity on a stored batteries, but half the time they wouldn't run or something or other.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And you was out of a fuse, so (laughs). If you had to depend on us boys to do it, why, it wasn't done, see. Then automobiles, why, they hit this country – oh, I believe it was along about '16. 1916 Sam Opperwood had an automobile agency. You know, in those days, why, if you started one thing, you had it all. I remember he was the undertaker, he was also automobile dealer.

(Laughter)

RK: He had a, he had a garage (laughs) and he had it all, see. So... That's my first recollection of cars.

MM: How old were you when you learned to drive?

RK: Oh, I must have been around about 12, I guess.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: Because, uh, well – everybody matured earlier then, I guess because ...

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Out of necessity, you know. I remember my dad, he'd gotten a Model-T Ford coupe. He was in business with the grocery store man, and the grocery store man went broke and to settle it, well, Dad come out with this car.

(Laughter)

RK: And, which was a forerunner of the old Bush and Kacey Store in Baytown, which was got to be quite a prominent store back in the old years.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh – well, anyway, why uh, Dad told us, he said, told me, he said, "Now if you want to learn how to drive," said, "just get out here in the pasture and drive around."

RK: Cause he had about a 20 acre pasture out there, so we had a beat a path all over that place where we'd drive.

(Laughter)

MM: Oh!

RK: Well, in fact, all of us learned how to drive by doing that, see. I don't ever remember Dad being in the car with us.

MM: He just ... he just let you get in there by yourself?

RK: Get in there and start. Cause you – we'd watched him how to operate.

MM: Yeah, but...

(Laughter)

RK: Not ever – I'm sure Dad did at some time when we first started, but I don't recall now of ever remembering him being in the car with us.

MM: My goodness. Well, then you – just as soon as you felt like you'd mastered it, then you'd just take off and went where you wanted to go?

RK: You ... well, wasn't anywhere to go, except up to church.

MM: Yeah.

RK: To school and back (laughs). No, there wasn't anywhere to go, so that wasn't a problem.

MM: Yeah.

RK: Why, even to get to Houston, why, you'd have to go from here to Crosby.

MM: That's what I understand.

RK: And picked up 90, which is 90 now, and, uh, go on in. Until in 1928, why, they built Market Street, which is I-10 now.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And, uh, I remember – course I was away in school when, uh, when that was run in.

MM: Where did 90 come in to Houston? When you went by way of 90, where did you...

RK: Just like it does now. Same way.

MM: I've never gone all the way in on 90.

RK: Well, it's been so long, I don't know whether ...

MM: (Laughs)

RK: Uh... When you're going into I-10, when you go over McCarty Drive.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: That is old 90.

MM: Oh.

RK: 90 runs into McCarty Drive.

MM: oh, alright

RK: In fact, it's still designated Highway 90 that comes on around and goes on into town.

MM: Ok. I know where you mean.

RK: And it goes right by the turning basin. And, uh, on across Navigation Boulevard.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, that a way we used to go in town, but to cross on over and go up Navigation Boulevard up to Franklin Avenue on into...

MM: That was before 10 was completed.

RK: Now, 10 ... Oh, yeah.

MM: Coming in that way.

RK: Oh, yeah, well 10 went completely back into. Oh.

MM: Well, after we moved here in '65, and it was after that that it was completed.

RK: Oh, yeah, it was uh ... '75...

MM: Yeah, it was ...

RK: Almost '80, I guess before it ...

MM: Um, what was the depression? Did it, like, did it affect Cedar Bayou, or ...

RK: Yes, it did. Uh ... I guess, actually we were fortunate. In the fact that, uh, we were in there, Dad his shipyards yet. And he was operating – he had gone into the oyster dredging business.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, uh, had – he'd built all of his equipment there at the shipyard. Tow boats, and barges and all.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, uh, Dad was just this way. If he didn't have any shells to tow or dredge, he'd just bring all the equipment in, and tie it up there in front of the house, and lay everybody off. And myself and my other older brother, we'd have to look after it.

MM: Oh.

RK: Keep it pumped out, and ... (Laughs)

MM: Keep it in good check, huh?

RK: Keep it ready to go. And then, when he'd get a job, why he'd call 'em, and then nearly every one of 'em would come back.

MM: Oh.

RK: And there they'd go. They go back out there. But, uh ... I don't recall any long periods that he didn't have something to do.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Uh, I recall this, that, uh, it seemed like the salvation to it was like all government projects, you know, doing this. Those years they started what were called the Highland Farms. Which is out there off of Wallisville Road now, and now from Highlands.

MM: Now, I know Highlands, but ...

RK: Garth Road.

MM: Yeah?

RK: And Wallisville – from there on back into Highlands, why, there was nothing but farms.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And they were government. There were 60-acre farms, if I recall right. Uh, you'd go in there for a little bit, well the government would sell it to it. As long as you farmed it.

MM: Oh.

RK: And then, it was a fellow by the name of Harry K. Johnson came to this country – I forget where, I think it was Missouri somewhere – and he had the fig farms. And he went in there and had a lot of this property, and he had a fig farm. And, uh, he – and then he built a cannery.

MM: Oh, yes.

RK: Which is Southern Cannery, now, I think out there.

MM: Oh, I know where you mean. Uh-huh. The SMS.

RK: Yeah. And, uh, it was just those things develop and go from here to there.

MM: What year did all that ... Was that Depression? Was that a WPA type thing, or some kind of a ...

RK: Yeah, yeah it was sort of a WPA back in the '30's. I mean '35, and four and along in there.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Well, '33 when President Roosevelt went into office.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And then they started WPA and all that, those works. And, uh ...

MM: And those, the Highland Farms were as a result of that?

RK: Yeah.

MM: Is that what started Highlands?

RK: Yes.

MM: It ... was there much up there?

RK: It is. It is – it was just, just ...

MM: I didn't know that.

RK: It was just – that, and, and, uh, the, uh, this fella Harry, Harry, brother, Harry K. Johnson, he was instrumental in getting the interurban of the Missouri Pacific to build this on. They had, course ...

(End of tape)

(Tape 2 of 2)

MM: Well that's ...

RK: I recall that was a big day because we could go to Houston and back for 75 cents.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, well that was the highlight of our weekend. Particularly on Sunday afternoon, why, we could take our girls and get on the thing, go into Houston, see a picture show, and come back home.

MM: Oh! How long did it take?

RK: Oh, it would be nearly midnight time we'd get back, you know.

(Laughter)

RK: Yeah, time we'd leave here along about 1:30 or two o'clock, you know.

MM: Oh.

RK: I'd go into Houston and – I recall it took about 45 minutes or an hour to get into Houston on the interurban.

MM: Where'd you catch it?

RK: Right at old Baytown. Uh ... well, it ... later on, why you could get it right there off of Texas Avenue. You remember? And, course the depot is closed there, now.

MM: Yes, I ... uh-huh.

RK: Well, you'd catch it there.

MM: Oh.

RK: That was right after they got it extended into Wooster.

MM: Well, where in old Baytown did it ...

RK: In old Baytown, whew! Off of Harbor Street. Can you think on Harbor Street where the Houston Power and Light house just, uh – past Farmer Station?

MM: Yes, uh-huh.

RK: Right there.

MM: Oh.

RK: That's where the, uh ... if I recall right. It was, well, next to it or on that same piece of property.

MM: So what'd you drive there and park your car? And then ...

RK: Park your car, and you get on the interurban, and go into Houston. Oh, that was a big afternoon to be ...

MM: Isn't that sort of a risky place to park your car?

RK: No! It was all good people living here, that ...

(Laughter)

RK: No, you didn't think about ever loosing anything.

MM: No.

RK: Never locked your house.

MM: It – there was no ... you ... crime was not something you had to ...

RK: No, no. No, no. No. You didn't know what it was. I, I – I don't ever remember that home ever locking up. Well, I've never locked this house here until up to about 10 years ago.

MM: Oh, that's wonderful.

RK: We started locking it.

MM: That really is.

RK: And, uh, but, uh – I know that was a big, that was a big thing. We'd take our dates and go into Houston, see a show, and – at the Lowe's or the Metropolitan, or Majestic. And, uh, go have a big ice cream afterwards, or something or another.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, it was quite an event.

MM: Oh, I can see.

RK: And, uh – but, uh... I, uh – then after I finished high school here, why, uh ... we, uh ... I finished – well, Dad and Mother wanted me to go to Goose Creek in order to finish high school. And it was accredited. And I said no, I'm not going to go down there. So unbeknownst to me with about, about a day before, why, uh, my brother was going off to college at Lon Morris Junior College in Jacksonville. And I noticed they were packing two trunks. And I said something about it. And my sister said, "That's yours."

RK: And I said, well it looks like some of my clothes in there. Said, "What you doing that for?"

MM: (Laughs)

RK: She said, "If you don't know it, you're going to college with Joe."

MM: They didn't tell you?

RK: No.

MM: (Laughs)

RK: I said, "No!"

RK: And they said, "That's right."

RK: So I said something to Mother and Daddy about it that night, and they said, "That's right. Day after tomorrow, you're going."

MM: (Laughs)

RK: So ...

MM: I can't imagine.

RK: I did. So ... I, in fact I finished high school at Lon Morris Junior College in Jacksonville.

MM: Oh. Yeah.

RK: And, uh, I went back the next year, but it was, it was – it was five of us, I think, from here or six, was up at Lon Morris that year. I went back, and all the rest of 'em went out to Texas Tech. In fact, it was 15 people from here in the Baytown – uh, Goose Creek area there.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: That went out to Texas Tech. And I went, went back to Lon Morris, and the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to go out there with the other ones. So I just told them transfer my credits to Lubbock, and I was going to Lubbock. Well, I went to Lubbock to Texas Tech, and, uh, after waiting out there six months, why – I mean six weeks – why, I checked with the registrar every day. But they said, "Well your transcript hasn't come yet."

RK: And we'd write back to, and they'd write back, "Well, we'll send 'em."

RK: Well, after about six weeks I figured that I'd be so far behind I couldn't catch up, so I ...

MM: I'm sure you did.

RK: I drug-up and came home. Well, his own Dad's insistence, he called, and, and wanted to know what was going on. And I told him. He said, "Well," he said, "If you're not there by Monday," said, "you're coming home."

RK: I said, "Oh, I'll be here." I said ... In fact, I was enjoying it because ... at this – we had rented a house, and one of the boy's mother was there running it. And, uh, it was 16 of us there plus her and her baby daughter. And I was helping her.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Do the cooking and washing the dishes for my room and board. And then I got a job working in a slaughter house in the afternoons for four hours, and I was making a little extra cash that way.

MM: Yes.

RK: So I was in the chips, so to speak. And ...

MM: And not having to study.

RK: No! Well I was just having a big time. But Dad insisted I came, I'd come on home. So I came home, and then, uh, the following January, I went to SMU.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, went on there. Played ball at SMU, and finished up there in, uh, June of '35. But, uh, getting back to when I went to S – the summer after I went to SMU the first term in January – why, when I came home from school in June of '30, why, I'll never forget. I got in at night and the next morning Dad called me, oh, about five o'clock in the morning. He said, "Come on down. Breakfast is ready."

RK: So I got up, dressed, and was eating breakfast and he said, "Well," he said, "What you gonna do today?"

RK: And I said, "Oh, I don't know. I'll probably go to town and see what I can run into. See what's been happening."

RK: "Oh," he said, "I got a little job for you to do."

RK: And I said, "What's that?"

RK: And he said, "Well," he says, uh, "If I tell you, why, you'll know about my business as I would."

MM: (Laughs)

RK: So I said, "Well, maybe I better wait till the next day because I'll go get some work clothes today."

RK: And then he said, "Oh," he said, "I've got some old clothes here he does."

RK: So he went in there and come back with an old pair of overalls with a jumper and a hat and some old broke-in shoes. He said, "Put these on." Said, "Let's get ready."

RK: Well, I got all ready, and I started out. I thought we was going over to the shipyard, which was across the bayou from the home.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: He said, "Oh, no. Get in the car."

RK: And so I got in the car, and I insisted again, I said, "Well, where are we going?"

RK: And he told me, he said, "No," said, "You'll know when we get there."

MM: (Laughs)

RK: Well, we came on through town and just across of the railroad track down on Market Street, why, he stopped. Pulled over to the side of the road. And I said, "What's the matter?"

RK: And he said, "Oh," he said, "I want to show you something."

RK: So I got out of the car, and he did, too. And he said, "Get those shovels out of the back of the car."

RK: I said, "Uh-oh. Something's up, now." So I got the shovels and I said, "Well, what we gonna do with 'em?"

RK: He said, "You see that big sand mound right there?"

RK: And I said, "Yeah."

RK: He said, "We're gonna cut right through there."

RK: And I said, "For what, Dad?"

RK: Sorry, he said, "We're gonna build a building material yard in here. So I got to get this – get a railroad spur in there so we can get our gravel and sand and cement in."

MM: Oh.

RK: I said, "Well, alright."

RK: And he said, "We've got it staked-off. See those stakes, it tells you how deep to cut. And, uh, you've got a ruler there, so you can check it." And said, "There'll be a truck here in a little bit. You and that fella, why, just start shoveling that dirt in there, and moving it on down."

RK: Well, we worked there for four or five days. Practically all week. And one morning there was a new drag line on a ... train, or on a lowboy, I mean on a railroad car sitting there. And he said, Dad was there, and he says, "You can help this fella unload this crane."

RK: And I said, "Whose is it?"

RK: He said, "Well, it's ours that I just bought. Bought a new crane."

RK: I said, "Oh."

RK: Well, we got the thing unloaded, and got it rigged up. And the next day we went to work and, and, uh... So we were home that night for supper, and I said something about it. I said, "You know," I said, "Dad," I said, "you know," I said, "this other fella and I, we've been out there working about five or six days just hard as we can."

MM: Oh, I bet.

RK: And I said, "That drag line got there and about a few hours' time, he did all we had done all that time." I said, "Looks like to me, it was all time wasted."

RK: He said, "Oh, no." He said, uh, "You were busy, weren't you?"

RK: And I said, "I sure was."

RK: He said, "You didn't get in trouble, did you?"

RK: And I said, "No, didn't get in trouble."

RK: He said, "Well," said, "We're ahead one of 'em, then."

MM: (Laughs)

RK: Well, anyway (laughs) that was the starting of our Ready – uh, building material business, and it finally went into Ready Mix.

MM: Oh, now that's there across Goose Creek from Robert E. Lee?

RK: Yeah.

MM: Is that where that is?

RK: That's where our place was there, and we – we operated it on up to, uh ... hmm, 1966 when we sold it to, uh, Houston Shell and Concrete.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Then I went to work for them. And worked for them on up till they retired me in uh...

MM: Oh.

RK: '81. So, uh...

MM: Is it still that, now?

RK: No, the – the property's been sold to the Bayshore Motor Company.

MM: That's – ok, now I know. That, it's a little further up that I was thinking.

RK: Yeah. It's right there at the railroad track.

MM: Ok. Now, there was something about a road being on a bridge that could move so that the barges could come up?

RK: Oh, uh...

MM: A building. Somebody mentioned to me that, that when they would go from Baytown to Pelly, I guess.

RK: Oh, yeah. It would go to old Baytown and Pelly. Uh, it's where the, uh – well, it's not either. It's – the bridge now over Goose Creek, uh, on, on, uh, West Main. There was a bridge.

MM: I don't know where you mean.

RK: Well, if you ... I can see it in my eyes.

MM: Yeah. (Laughs)

RK: I can tell you – I don't know how to tell you. Uh, but back down there – I guess there's a quarter of a mile or further where the old, I guess it was just a pontoon bridge.

MM: Um-hmm.

RK: And, uh, it was just a ferry boat just reached plumb across the stream.

MM: Oh.

RK: And then when boats come along, they'd have to raise up the aprons, and twist the ... the ferry around so the boats could get through.

MM: Oh. Now, that was county operated, or...

RK: That was county operated.

MM: County.

RK: And, uh, that was sort of the head of, uh, Navigation. Up until we built a yard on up there further.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, but they had the bridge in ... it built when we moved up there, so we didn't have to contend with the pontoon bridge, you know.

MM: Oh.

RK: But it – up on Cedar Bayou at one time, it was three of 'em. It was, uh, three hand-operated ferries. To cross over, why, you'd drive your car on there, and then get out and get your, get the sticks, and hook onto the cable, and pull yourself across.

MM: Pull. That's what I've heard.

RK: Heh, heh. But, uh, they tell a quite a story about, uh, and old fella by the name of Brother Bayless. Bless his heart. His wife was a sort of a large woman, and, um, he lived across the bayou.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: From Ilfree's Store over there. And, uh, he drove his car on the, uh, ferry. And he thought he had set his brakes. He got out, got his sticks out, and was pulling the boat – the ferry on across the bayou. And he walked in and after a while they hollered, and he looked back, and his car had rolled off and was going in the bayou, see?

MM: Oh.

RK: And it did. And his wife was in it. And there was another car up there that had just drove up waiting to come on. So they jumped out and swum out there. And, uh... This fella dove down, and come up and, uh, he says, uh, "Give me your knife." He said, "Let me cut the top and I'll get – so I can get your wife out."

RK: He said, "Oh, no! Don't cut the top, it's a brand new one!"

(Laughter)

RK: Well, anyway, why (laughs) evidently he convinced him, cause that's what they did. They got her out, see. She was up, up and had caught enough air where she was just ... enough air to breath, see?

MM: Wonder if anybody ever told her?

(Laughter)

RK: I presume that's true, but I, I don't know. That's what they tell 'em.

(Laughter)

RK: No.

MM: Oh, dear.

RK: It, uh... No, it, uh... I tell lots of people. I think back to this – you talk about the years of Depression. I, I think that was the ... I had the best time of my life during those years. I can look back on 'em, and have the most ...

MM: You're not the only one who's told me that. That – a lot of people say that.

RK: pleasant thought.

MM: Yeah.

RK: Because I, I was – I was fortunate enough that Dad was able to keep me in college during those years.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, they were carefree years for me, see.

MM: Yes.

RK: Didn't have any money; nobody else had any money.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And, uh... but that's the way it was, but I can look ...

MM: Did you come home very often from Dallas?

RK: Not too often. Not after the first year. No, well after you're away a while, why, all your friends are there, and ...

MM: Yeah.

RK: And back here, why, they're gone other places, too.

MM: About how long did it take you to get to Dallas?

RK: Oh, on the train, why, you were – we'd leave out at 11, get there at seven the next morning. So it was about eight hour trip.

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, I remember used to run, I'd run – when I'd come home, I'd ride what they called the Sunshine Special, the SP. [14:09] And it seemed like to me it left Dallas about three in the afternoon. No, it'd leave at two. And it was, uh, a seven hour drive to get into Houston at nine o'clock at night, see.

MM: Hmm.

RK: And, uh – no, wait a minute that ... no. Early. It'd leave there at noon. That's what it was. And it would get into Houston about 6:30. And I remember I used to save about 30 minutes because it'd be going across the tracks, I'd jump off the train as it'd go over Navigation. And if I hit it just right, I had time to run down and catch the bus, come on in to Baytown, see?

MM: Pretty good timing.

RK: If it didn't, I'd have to wait an hour.

MM: Yeah.

RK: On the side of the road there. (Laughs)

MM: Oh.

RK: And, uh, to get on. But, uh... but... I finished there in '35, why I played ball for SMU, and, uh... Used to have a saying it says, let's see, "You join the Navy and see the world," said, "Join SMU and see the United States."

RK: So we played in New York, Saint Louis, Californ-

MM: You did? I didn't realize that.

RK: Oh, in California. Oh, one – we'd go to California every year. That was just a bonus trip for us they called.

MM: Who did you play out there?

RK: Well, I played Santa Clara, UCLA, Southern Cal.

MM: My goodness.

RK: And, uh...

MM: I had no idea.

RK: Oh, yeah. Well, the year after I finished, they played in the Rose Bowl, and played, uh, University of ... uh, Stanford out there. And got beat seven to nothing on a fluke.

MM: Oh.

RK: But that's just the way it is.

MM: Yeah.

RK: (Laughs) But, uh... Then I met my wife. Oh, that was the starting in my life in, uh, in '36.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: She came to Barbers Hill to teach school. And, uh, I had finished in '35 – June of '35. She finished in June of '36 and went to teach, started teaching in September. And I met her – I think it was along in November, first of November.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And it was a friend of mine that was teaching up there. And she told her, she said, "I have a friend that I want you to meet."

RK: So she came and spent the night with her, and ... I walked into church on a Sunday morning. I always kid her about this. When I walked in the church, I saw my friend sitting in the choir, and I saw my friend punch her. So I, I set my eyes on that cute blond sitting up there singing anyway.

MM: (Laughs)

RK: So after the service was over with, why, um, she came up to him and introduced me to my wife. And, uh... So she had planned this. And Jaqueline still thought it said, said she was tricked into it; she didn't know anything about it. Why, then she said, said, "Raymond," said, "Could you take Catherine home?" Said, "I've some other things I've gotta do." (Laughs)

MM: Oh. (Laughs)

RK: So I carried her back to Mont Belvieu, and ... and, uh, we started dating and from there on. Well, about three years later we were married in '39.

MM: My goodness.

RK: And, uh... We have, uh, four lovely children.

MM: Oh, do you?

RK: And, uh... Have a daughter that lives in Iowa; has three children. And, uh... a daughter lives in Houston that, uh, is not married. And I have a son that's a minister in Houston. He's not married.

MM: Oh.

RK: My oldest son.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And, uh, my baby boy lives here. In fact, he lives in the old home place. In fact, he has the old home house. We gave it to him.

MM: Now, where – where is that?

RK: Kyle.

MM: No, but where, what – where is the house? What house?

RK: That's, it's on 1607 East James.

MM: Oh.

RK: Right across the street from Thad Felton. You know where Thad Felton lives?

MM: Yes, I know. Uh-huh.

RK: Just across the street. The old two-story, white house.

MM: I see.

RK: He was down there on the bayou. And subsidence has got it to where high tide, it'd almost get up into it.

MM: Oh.

RK: So we – in order to save it, well we had to move it off.

MM: Now that's the house you were in when the barges were hitting the house?

RK: Right. Yeah. Yeah. That's it. It was, the house was built in 190-, which, Dad moved into it in January of 1906.

MM: Oh!

RK: And, well, its 80 years old now, see.

MM: Is that right? That's nice it's still in the family, isn't it?

RK: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well... we felt, we felt like that's the only way we could keep it in the family. Because the rest of us didn't have any use for it.

MM: Yes.

RK: And, or anything just goes to pot if it's someone not living in it.

MM: Oh, it surely does.

RK: And caring for it, see?

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And that's the way it was. We had a fella that was leasing it, but he was just down there on weekends, and, and, uh ... using it for a party place. And, uh ... so, uh ... finally he dropped his lease. And I, my brother and sisters told us well, we gotta do something with it. And I said, "Well, Kyle would like to buy it, like to get it."

RK: And, uh, so we all talked about it. "Well," said, "We'll give it to him if he'll move it off."

RK: Because you can't fix it up there and survive. Cause sooner or later, why ...

MM: Yes, it's gonna be worse and worse. Uh-huh.

RK: Yeah. So, uh ... he agreed to move it off, so that's where it is.

MM: Oh, that is nice.

RK: Yeah. But, uh ...

MM: Cedar Bayou must have been deeper at one time than it is now. Was it? I mean, can barges come up Cedar Bayou now?

RK: Oh, yeah. It's deeper now than it was then.

MM: Oh.

RK: The traffic on it. Oh, yeah. See, the stream of Cedar Bayou: it's all clay bottom. And, uh ... it doesn't ... fill up with trash.

MM: Oh.

RK: The slick part, and if you have enough current ...

MM: Oh, you just go and get carried right on out.

RK: Carried right on out.

MM: Oh!

RK: Till it gets down to the mouth of the bayou, and then it spreads out.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: And then it drops its load, see.

MM: Yeah.

RK: And ... so it, it's always been a good, navigable stream. Course, the more you use it, the wider it gets, you know, cause the washing and it wears down.

MM: Yeah.

RK: This, that, and the other. Course Houston Power and Light dredged it out here, what? Ten years ago? Or when they built the power plant down here. And, uh, they're more – widened it more and they deepened it.

MM: Uh-huh.

RK: Cause they were ... they were – environmentalist was afraid maybe they wouldn't get enough water.

MM: Oh.

RK: So they had to, they had to widen it out. Do this extra dredge and be sure that you have ample water supply. And, uh, which would – I guess – would help to the, uh, navigation anyway. And, uh ... put together. But, uh... No, I, um... Since I retired, why, uh, it's just been Mother and I here. Sort of taking care of the place.

MM: Yes.

RK: And, uh – I'll, I'll say this in closing that, uh, it doesn't matter what you do or how you do it; when. Long as you do it, everything, according to what the Lord wants. Because after all, we're here for one thing. And that is prepare our self for the second world. And if we don't prepare ourselves for the second world, we're lost here, and we're lost over there, so ... That's, that's the goal of everybody should be is to prepare themselves for the coming of the other world. And, uh ... it's coming. I can't say when, but ...

MM: Yes.

RK: (Laughs) But the good book says it's going to come. As sure as you and I are sitting here. So I – I've enjoyed talking with you. Appreciate that.

MM: Well, it's ... let me.

(End of tape)

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