

An Oral History Tape Transcription
Of
Baytown Oral Histories
With
Interviewer: James "Jim" C. Maroney
Interviewee: Mr. B. E. Wilson
February 20th 1976
Transcribed by: Lynnette Sargis

(Tape 1 of 1)

Baytown Oral Histories

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Interviewee: Mr. B. E. Wilson

Interview Date: February 20th 1976

JM: This is Jim Maroney interviewing Mr. B. E. Wilson on February 20th 1976. Now Mr. Wilson I understand that you came to Baytown in 1929.

BW: On Juneteenth.

JM: Juneteenth day. Can you tell us something uh, about your background? How you came to come to Baytown?

BW: Oh probably a week before I came here, I never heard of Baytown.

JM: [Laughs]

BW: I’d a, gotten out of the Navy and going down Jamesville where I was brought up and just wondering where to look for a job and Al Kleberg, who had been one of the builders of the refinery up here, was living down there and he was a close friend of the family and he called up the superintendent up here and said, “Yes, send him out, and he’ll go to work.” So I came up. It was that easy.

JM: How did you got here, or how did you do you traveling? By train or

BW: Came to Houston on a train then out to Baytown on the Interurban.

JM: Oh yes.

BW: And got off the Interurban down at the end of what’s now Harbor Street and if there’d an Interurban going back right then I’d a got on it.

JM: [Laughs]

BW: Gone back.

JM: What kind of, what did the place look like then?

BW: It just looked like, the end of the world .

JM: [Laughs]

BW: And uh, I started up, uh, Harbor Street into the old Montana Hotel. Went in there and got a room. I lived there for a week before I found out that it was notorious house of ill repute.

[Laughs]

JM: [Laughs]

BW: And then I moved over to Mrs. Uh, Sandman's rooming house, which is upstairs over where that sheet metal works is now on Minnesota.

JM: On Minnesota, okay.

BW: I was in there about a, oh last summer one time an, to get a piece of sheet metal to repair a gutter, and I went up to the office and I asked those girls in the office there, "Would you be surprised if I told you I lived in this room in 1929?" And they were. I think I paid 6 dollars a month for it.

JM: 6 dollars a month.

BW: Mhm

JM: How, How long did you live there?

BW: Oh up till the following, about 6 months I guess.

JM: About 6 months.

BW: About 6 or 8 months. Then I get, was able to get in the dormitory.

JM: Well, were there many rooming houses of this type at the time?

BW: Yeah, there were a lot.

JM: And what did uh, people who lived there, did they mostly work at the refinery? Or?

BW: Well that was most of the employment here at the time.

JM: Right, yeah. That most everybody was here worked there, okay.

BW: In most every part of around yeah.

JM: And uh, what did people do for entertainment in uh--? What kind of working day did you have, might ask that uh, how many days a week and so on?

BW: Five days a week

JM: 5 days.

BW: 7, 7:30 to 4:30 I was hum, I was very fortunate. I went to work as a, as an instrument assistant at 55 cents an hour instead of 40 cents an hour, which was the usual starting rate. And uh, well entertainment. I had, we had baseball games on Sunday and movies, and get drunk on Saturdays.

JM: [Laughs] Were these uh, baseball you mean uh

BW: Semi-Pro's

JM: Semi-Pro, people, the people that actually lived here and

BW: Oh yes, some of the

JM: Some of the plant people

BW: The local pillars of the community

JM: Yeah

BW: Were people that were hired in here as ball players.

JM: Oh yeah, okay.

BW: Jimmy Carroll, I think was one, a good many more of 'em are dead.

JM: Yeah, right. Okay and then you moved into uh, say the dormitory. This is uh Humble?

BW: Humble Dormitory

JM: Okay.

BW: Yeah, for, at that time it was just for single men.

JM: Uh-huh, can you tell us a little bit about the dorm?

BW: Well it was, uh, two floors with a long corridor on each floor with uh, uh double rooms. There were very, very few single rooms. Mostly you had a roommate and you-- ; At least moving in, you took who, what vacancy was available and then later on you could switch around but, and uh, the rooms were, would be primitive now. We thought they were fine then, up to the average hotel room, except they just had a swinging grill door across the uh, to close the front door and you, it was, of course, all men and you could uh particularly upstairs go down to the shower dressed any way, dressed or undressed anyway you wanted.

JM: Sounds pretty much like the army uh [Laughs]

BW: Yeah very much.

JM: Yeah, um, what was the uh, how many people lived in the boarding house approximately?

BW: Oh there must have been, been a hundred people in that dormitory.

JM: Well was there, uh-?

BW: And then well, and boarder and rooming houses there might have been from anywhere from somebody renting out one room to a commercial, to that thing that had half a dozen to a dozen.

JM: Mhm, was there a, a waiting list for the company dorm or?

BW: For a long time there was yes, and then eventually it got so that, in order to rent the rooms, they had to open up part of it to girls cause--

JM: How long did uh the company run the dormitory?

BW: They were, that thing I'm vague on this now, but uh, it was running through, through WWII.

JM: Through the war.

BW: Yeah, and closed down right after the war, soon after.

JM: Well

BW: There was restaurant in connection with it, but a lot of people uh, had at least their uh noon and evening meal at some boarding house out in town.

JM: I see, the--

BW: Where we would walk, walk out there to the Illinois and Minnesota from the refinery and back during the half-hour lunch hour and eat lunch in the meantime.

JM: Right. Oh yes, I, I don't remember did you say where the dorm was? The company dorm?

BW: Hum, it was uh, at the end of, well one corner of it was at the end of Finleys Street, which now goes down into the refinery and I forget the name of the street, Blaffer I believe, the one this way. The one south of it, and uh, there's nothing but tanks there now.

JM: Yeah.

BW: The uh, there was a large community house, which was the only community uh rally and meeting place for large, only large hall in town. That, uh, company operated that until about 1960 or 1958 or '60 when they took it down.

JM: But that was always the same uh community house,

BW: Mhm.

JM: They, it was always at the same location?

BW: Yeah

JM: Right yeah. Yeah I, I remember it wasn't too many years ago when it was still there.

BW: Yeah it was just dismantled about 1960.

JM: Yeah, okay. Well, what about back during the '30's? What kind of impressions did you have, do you remember of the Baytown or refinery and people here?

BW: Well the, during the '30's it was a job, when it wasn't lots of places--

JM: Right

BW: --weren't a job.

JM: Right

BW: All the, and the company always tried to keep some kind of employment going, although they got in a, got more ill will then they did good out of trying to uh keep a bunch a, from laying off a bunch of people by employing 'em on a pipe gang to renew a bunch of their dock loading lines during the, about 1930 or '31. Rather than lay 'em off, they put all kinds of people on to that uh pipework.

JM: You mean people didn't appreciate being transferred to that kind of job, is that you mean or?

BW: No, it hum, that wasn't their kind of work and, and that was, it was very low pay. It was something like 25 cents an hour, and it was years and years living down that two-bit gang.

JM: Yeah, I guess that was better nothing though. [Laughs]

BW: Well it, it was but I was in the uh, technical service and well we got uh, most of the salary people got uh two one-eleventh salary cuts, through the Depression and, but uh we did, did have a job. They didn't hire anybody in the, salaried role from maybe 1930 to 1934 but then began looking up hiring again.

JM: Right. Well, over all what would you say, what kind of effects did the depression have in this area in Baytown?

BW: Very little compared to uh, uh other places. We were really a prosperous area because we had jobs.

JM: That, that would because most people here did work for the refinery?

BW: Yeah

JM: And there wasn't just, there just wasn't much else.

BW: There wadn't anything else see.

JM: So people who were here, generally had jobs.

BW: Uh-huh.

JM: So there, there, we didn't, we didn't have the problem that in many areas they have, they had a great number of people unemployed.

BW: No, they, the people that were here and people that had been here and fairly well established and they, and uh up until 1929 or 1930 I don't think they ever turned down an applicant for a job out at the refinery. Anybody walked out there and showed up at the gate, they'd hire him.

JM: Right.

BW: But uh, everything froze, there was no expansion, during the, during that period.

JM: Well you mentioned something about the salaries uh, what about company benefits in that period? What sort of benefits existed?

BW: The only benefit up until about uh, early in the 1930's was the uh, stock plan.

JM: Uh-huh they had that

BW: They had the, company would match 50 cents for each dollar you put in up to 10%. There was, and there was uh, sickness benefits for salaried people but not for hourly wage people.

JM: I see.

BW: Then in the 1930's began coming in with a, with uh salaried benefits and then uh plus other things that the employees themselves developed, like the, the uh credit unions, and the mutual benefits association.

JM: Right.

BW: And the company began assisting with the hospitalization insurance plan.

JM: Right, well can you tell us a little about the, the mutual benefit association, how it came about and what its functions were?

BW: It's uh, it came about just as a voluntary association of employees. I, I can't remember who was the main promoters of it, it wasn't me, I just--

JM: Right.

BW: At uh, And uh, been very reasonable dues uh, they employed uh one or, one and then two full-time doctors and then began grad-, at first it was just uh, a doctor with offices upstairs over what's now uh Katribe Store down there on Market Street

JM: Right, uh-huh

BW: And Doctor Bill Marshal was an MBA doctor, although he never moved his office from over the old Baytown Drug Store and that I guess was the first one. He went over there and then Doctor Dolf was brought in up over the, the Katribe's and uh, sometime in the middle 30's built their present building and began putting in the laboratory facilities

JM: Right

BW: More and more until uh, uh, I guess began to find other outlets for their medical needs, uhm, right around the time of the war, World War II. Then uh, they uh, by means I didn't fully understand the medical societies uh, uh, raised enough pressure on them so that they stopped hiring the full-time doctor and began furnishing offices to the couple of doctors who just charged their re-, they took offices there but charged their regular office rates, office call rates.

JM: I see.

BW: They operated independently, which was enough to satisfy the society.

JM: Right, so they had, uh, practices outside of the MBA?

BW: Yeah

JM: Yeah, okay, and what about uh the, the where they, where members could buy their medical prescriptions and other things, did this, was always a service?

BW: In the begin-,in the beginning you just got a prescription from the doctor and went to your own uh

JM: Went to your own

BW: Own pharmacy

JM: I see

BW: For the prescription. Then uh, fairly early, I guess, is when they got the building they began

JM: When they got to

BW: On uh, tentative steps uh, getting in gradually into the pharmacy business until finally they were, well I guess they still do, hum, a great deal of the drug business for the members.

JM: Right.

BW: You can't park on that street in front of there--

JM: [Laughs]

BW: --early in the morning.

JM: Yeah, hum. Well let's see you were mentioning uh, the benefits during the uh 30's. What about some of the growth of the city and, and landmarks we might uh talk about. Anything unusual or either when you came here or, or during the 30's, any changes?

BW: Well there've been a lot of changes but I might be hard pressed to put my finger on exactly the order in which they happened.

JM: Yeah, yeah

BW: When they came in. Uh, transportation was an intersection, when I came here you had to uh, cross a ferry to get from Baytown to Pelly down in, in the

JM: Right.

BW: What's now Duran Road was in the Duran Ferry Road.

JM: Oh uh-huh.

BW: It was a movable bridge, actually it was a pontoon. The road crossed over and when a boat came along and it needed to pass from that one end of the bridge float out of the way and pull it out way and let the boat pass.

JM: Right.

BW: And uh same way getting out of town, uh, uh, north at Cedar Bayou to the north and over by the Cedar Bayou Methodist Church there other ferries.

JM: Right.

BW: Then uh, in the uh, middle 30's I guess they built a bridge on uh west, what's now West Main, it was then Pelly Road

JM: Uh-huh.

BW: And the ferry, that ferry, dwindled away.

JM: And going to Houston at that time, you went to, what, what choices did you have uh--?

BW: Well you had uh, either the Lynchburg Ferry in, going on the south side of the channel or going on the Market Street Road, which the bridge over the San Jacinto was some time around in the middle 20's I think.

JM: Yes, okay. Hum, uh some people told me that they drove up to Highway 90 up almost to Crosby and went that way.

BW: They did, that was earlier.

JM: Yes.

BW: Before

JM: Yes.

BW: Before the bridge over the San Jacinto River. At that time you had a choice between the ferry and go on the south side or go up practically to Crosby and like that.

JM: Right.

BW: There was a bridge on U.S. 90.

JM: Yes uh-huh. Hum, you, you told me, you mention something about the origins of the name Slap Out Gully. Could you tell us?

BW: Oh yeah, on the hill up, just across the Gully as you approach it from Baytown there used to be a bootlegger and his establishment, and people would go out there looking for supplies on the weekend. He'd say, "I'm sorry, I'm just slap out."

JM: [Laughs]

BW: I've heard several stories, about, uh, the na-, that name well that's the, I think the real na-, origin.

JM: The real origin. That's, it's interesting how these names come about, and where, where exactly was this now?

BW: It was at the present bridge on uh, Decker Drive.

JM: Decker Drive.

BW: And right up on the hill to the north and west of the, that is across the bridge.

JM: Right.

BW: Was a wooden bridge then.

JM: Yes okay. Uh, well what uh--? Several people have talked about some of the effects of WW II in Baytown, and not only with the refinery and some of the uh, uh things such as rationing as far as individuals are concerned, and some of the security measures that were taken by the refinery and

BW: Well

JM: Air drills and air raid drills, and things of this sort.

BW: Well I'm uh, Think I took part in two air raid drills in the refinery where we uh, went and crouched down against the wall on an inside part there until, it was uh, over. But uh, when they started building the Baytown Ordnance Works in 1940 I guess, or late '40 or early '41. There was battery of uh field artillery moved in. Which had uh, which had the their, uh, barracks and establishment out at, in the mess hall, which the mess hall is uh, this Trinity Hall.

JM: Mhm.

BW: Hum, when the war was over the church bought this old mess hall over there reasonably and sawed it in two and moved the two pieces in here and put 'em back together and we've been in, and they're still in part of that, ever since 1946.

JM: Right

BW: But uh, they, um, station, or the, or the headquarters. That field artillery batter was out about where the, the B. O. W. parking lot is now and the, the extension of Park Street that runs through the refinery.

JM: Uh-huh

BW: And uh

JM: What's a B. O. W.?

BW: Baytown Ordnance Works.

JM: Oh, right, okay.

BW: They made uh, toluene for the war effort then probably uh, well I used to say the, the, the toluene for half the T.N.T. used in the war came from Baytown.

JM: From Baytown huh. Well did people think that the air raid drills were important or uh?

BW: At the, in the, in the beginning yeah, because uh, we didn't know, we didn't know what was gonna happen and we, and uh I suppose uh, if the Japanese had got the kamikaze [inaudible] enough, we'd of been in a range of uh carrier planes from the Pacific Ocean if they were

JM: Right

BW: Satisfied with one-way flight. But one effect of the uh, that Baytown Ordinance, uh, Works and anti-aircraft battery, well that battery was out there uh most of the local boys were off to the war, and those boys were here and they married off most of the local girls.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah. Uh, were there any uh,--? Several people have mentioned that uh there were some scares about submarine sightings and such things as this.

BW: Oh yeah, there

JM: Could you tell us?

BW: See had our share of those, they were all

JM: Yeah

BW: I was an air raid warden, and I lived out in Brownwood and, and when Bill Floyd called me on the phone one night, he was the head air raid warden at, there an Laurene Douglas's husband was one also. Bill called me, and I answered the phone at 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning. He said "This is no drill, this is no drill," and he gave me the rumor and so we got out and paraded around or rode around the roads armed with uh, uh, grubbing hoe handles or an occasional single barrel shot gun, looking for saboteurs. Of course, we found none. But I think ever place that had a, a sea port had one, at least one scare like that during the war.

JM: Right, this was, must have been what, about what year?

BW: Late '42

JM: '-2, '42.

BW: Mhm

JM: '42. That would be about uh right time

BW: Yeah.

JM: I suppose hum

BW: There was all kinds of stories that uh, ships leaving the Baytown docks uh, that we never see 'em again. There was supposed to been a real graveyard of ships out, off the mouth of the Mississippi an at uh

JM: Yes

BW: I don't know, don't know too much about even though I was in the, more or less in the shipping business at the refinery then uh, we'd uh get the names of the ships after they, practically after they've docked. We'd just have a schedule for ship "x" due to be here

JM: Right

BW: At such-and-such a time. It was all very secretive, except that uh, I would get calls sometimes from the ladies down on Harbor Street uh wanting to know when's the S. O. Baytown gonna be here?

JM: [Laughs]

BW: Or is the S. O. Baytown past the customs yet or quarantine yet.

JM: Yeah

BW: They knew all about it.

JM: Yeah, [Laughs] they had a better signal system then the

BW: Then we did yeah.

JM: [Laughs] well the uh, what kind of quarantine station did they have?

BW: Well just the regular uh, at the mouth of the ship channel off Galveston. The Galveston quarantine station. Where all the ships had to check in.

JM: Check in. Yeah okay hum,

BW: And still do.

JM: Yeah right.

BW: It's the U.S. Public Health Service.

JM: Of course I guess things, the knowledge uh, like for example the toluene's produced here, they kept that pretty secret I imagine, uh?

BW: They tried to.

JM: Right, they tried yeah.

BW: And they thought they did, and then uh, then along 1943 or -4; had with all the publicity, they, they mustered all the publicity they could about the billionth gallon of aviation gasoline that was manufactured at Baytown for a big celebration.

JM: [Laughs]

BW: Half-holiday here, but, I guess the toluene's was always fairly well-

JM: Uh-huh

BW: Tried to keep it quiet in the same way with the rubber plants, there was lots of a, you had the different color codes on your badge and unless you had the color code for that plant, even though you worked out there, you couldn't go in the, the different plant.

JM: Uh-huh, right. Well, yes, but like you say, if their--; even with gasoline uh, bragging about the uh

BW: Well by 1944 though it was pretty obvious that the

JM: That there'd be no real air raids or anything--

BW: There wadn't gonna be an air raid

JM: Yeah okay.

BW: Here and maybe a little sabotage

JM: Well, okay, we, we've mentioned uh, talk of, or rumors about uh, maybe air raids and or, uh submarines how about saboteurs? Did you hear rumors about uh people trying to infiltrate the plant or?

BW: The only ones, the only one I came in contact with was that one where I was an air raid warden and there was supposed to be a submarine and a rubber boat and-

JM: Right

BW: The usual story.

JM: Yeah, well. That's, guess that caused some excitement though [Laughs], people were interested

BW: Yeah

JM: In stories like that I guess.

BW: We had one uh, black-out drill fairly early in 1942 and uh, in the early evening, kept all the lights off for a couple hours until they blew the all-clear.

JM: Right. What effect did the war have on the work week? Did you go back to uh ?

BW: Mostly, it was most everybody went to a six day a week.

JM: Six day a week?

BW: Yeah.

JM: Yeah, right.

BW: And even so of course, companies uh were all constantly losing people to the draft, and so whenever they got a chance to hire anybody, they did and uh

JM: So work, the plant was expanded then?

BW: The plant expanded tremendously.

JM: During the war?

BW: Well the, most of the ; Well there were some individual units in the refinery the big expansion during the war was the B. O. W. and the two rubber plants.

JM: Right.

BW: And uh, and some uh specialized units in the refinery that prepared feed stocks for those new plants.

JM: Mhm.

BW: For uh, a while there the only physical examination was to be able to walk up and apply for a job. Well shoot, if you were warm, you could get hired.

JM: [Laughs] right

BW: And they were, almost, more than 7,000 people worked out there. Working out there by the end of the war.

JM: Right.

BW: Or uh, a year or two after the war when they still had the war title lacerations and the veterans began to come back to their guaranteed jobs.

JM: Right.

BW: So there were a lot of people out there for, but then uh, sometime after the war, other employment opportunities began coming in and they began developing these gas plants in Barbers Hill and

JM: Right.

BW: And uh the chemical industry began expanding, and there were lots of people lived in Baytown that uh, commuted and worked in those uh ship channel industries on the other side of the ship channel.

JM: Right.

BW: Commuting by ferry up until 1953, when they built the Baytown Tunnel.

JM: Yea, oh it was that late, I thought it was little earlier than that, 53.

BW: '53

JM: Yeah I bet that was a big event.

BW: It was, 'cause it was long way to get across that ferry .

JM: Right.

BW: During shift change time or on weekends.

JM: Yeah [Laughs], right. How many, uh, when they operated the ferry uh like you say at shift change times, how many uh, ferry boats did they have at one time to operate?

BW: They had two.

JM: Two, going back and forth?

BW: Going back and forth, crossing in the middle, same.

JM: How long would it take you to go get across in the time after?

BW: Well after you got on the boat it was only

JM: Yeah.

BW: Six or seven minutes

JM: Right.

BW: Just to cross but uh--

JM: But how long did the person that, one of these ships--

BW: It was quite possible to wait for two hours, like coming back from Galveston on a big weekend or something like that.

JM: Right, yeah. Quite a wait.

BW: And up in uh, through the war until shortly after there was, down at the ferry landing on hog island, people use to take their children swimming and picnicking on the beach along that Houston ship channel. I've taken small children, swimming in that Houston ship channel up until late '4-, early '40's, I guess.

JM: Uh-huh, right, let's see. What are some of the developments then since the war, that, in Baytown?

BW: Well I guess the biggest, one of the biggest things was consolidation.

JM: Right.

BW: When we, I was out of town when, happened New Year's 1946 I believe, on the last day of '45, uh, in the middle of the night the Pelly City Council had a meeting and annexed Baytown. Old Baytown was unincorporated then and --

JM: Oh.

BW: --just up for grabs.

JM: Mhm.

BW: And uh that was fought bitterly in the courts. But settled by 1947 that Pelly had the right to it, and sure enough, we were in Pelly. And then they had a consolidation, then folks began to realize we couldn't compete. Three little towns or two little towns like that, and it was wasteful and bred ill-will, all kinds of reasons I guess. Goose Creek and Pelly held incorporation elections and voted to uh merge, and, uh, then they took a census. The law was then that the larger town would annex the smaller town and by virtue of having annexed Old Baytown, Pelly was larger, and so they annexed Goose Creek and for about a year until the real consolidation in 1948, this was Pelly.

JM: Mmm

[Unidentified knocking sound]

BW: And I think, uh, during the Pelly, Pelly days they got, uh, got together and developed a charter, had an election to incorporate and all. Election for the name of the town, and Baytown became--

JM: I thought I remembered that vaguely. They have uh, they had a public election to let people uh, did, what kind of choices did they have? Or, or was it a write-in type thing?

BW: There were some choices, uh, let me see, to save me, I couldn't remember it.

JM: Yeah.

BW: But others now, course Pelly and Goose Creek

JM: Pelly and Goose Creek

BW: And Baytown and uh there were some others.

JM: Yeah.

BW: Sterling City may be all,

JM: Yeah.

BW: But there already was a Sterling City out in West Texas.

JM: Ah, so you, but does, in a regular election, you just got to indicate which name you --

BW: It was a straw vote.

JM: Yeah.

BW: It was, it wadn't binding.

JM: Oh I see.

BW: But uh they elected the city council, at that time and they were, they were uh, morally or strongly bound, not legally

JM: Yes.

BW: But morally to name it according to that straw vote.

JM: I supo-, as you recall it, pretty overwhelming to uh?

BW: I think so yeah.

JM: Name it Baytown?

BW: Mhm.

JM: And then after the consolidation, uh, we had the opening of the tunnel thenn and you say in 1953?

BW: Right.

JM: Uh, where are some, some of the other developments?

BW: Well, there, of course they're still going on.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah

BW: Uh, the, they were pretty slow for a long time because for a good many years that, the city councils and the people were committed to a pay-as-you-go and no bond issues. There were no bond issues for public uh, improvements until, oh middle or late 50's they began to, had to do some for sewer water works

JM: Mhm

BW: And street work

JM: Right, some, some people have complained

BW: Mhm.

JM: About the streets. [Laughs]

BW: Yeah, well they were pretty terrible before they began trying to build new streets and not just patching.

JM: Uh-huh, and that's the late 50's you say?

BW: Mhm.

JM: Approximately. Well in 1961, we had hurricane Carla uh

BW: Yeah.

JM: Uh, were you involved in, were you here then uh in town?

BW: I was here, we

JM: Where did you live at the time?

BW: We lived out in Brownwood then.

JM: Oh at Br--

BW: At uh, well, we lived at uh, where Maple, at the corner of Maple to then Crow.

JM: Right, okay

BW: And uh, that house it had had, uh. Our house had uh, 6 inches of water in it in 1941.

JM: And you, had you lived there in that house then?

BW: Yeah.

JM: Yes.

BW: And we rebuilt that house, but then we sold that house right at the end of the war when there was a tremendous housing shortage and, and people woulda bought the house then standing at the driveway without seeing the inside of the house.

JM: Yes.

BW: And so we, we were out of there from that, by 1946.

JM: Uh-huh

BW: Uh late 1945, in fact, I moved out, I, I've got a lot of farming out of my system. I kept two cows upon nearly an acre of ground and raised 400 chickens a year during the war. I got a lot of that rural business out of my system and was eager to get out of there

JM: Right.

BW: And move to Baytown, and I was able to get in a company house. But so we, we were gone from there by, by the time of Carla.

JM: Oh, okay.

BW: I, I was mixing up Carla and the '41 storm, in my mind.

JM: Yeah, okay but uh, what kind of, still Hurricane Carla was pretty severe you might not have had water in your house but uh what, what do you remember about the hurricane?

BW: Oh well it was, we were living over in Graywood by Carla and, and uh it was nothing but two or three days of high winds and heavy rain over there

JM: Right okay.

BW: In the, course the water runs both ways from our part of Graywood and we, we never flooded in.

JM: Right okay.

BW: And Graywood is still a high island.

JM: Yes, and now you uh, retired from the refinery realm when?

BW: In 1967

JM: 1967

BW: Mhm.

JM: And uh, what uh, what hobbies do you have, or what do you do now?

BW: Well I go to church.

JM: Uh-huh, right, Trinity Episcopal Church

BW: Yeah and uh, and the main other interest I have, I guess, is I've been working for 10 years on a, a book about the Confederate generals who were killed in action in the Civil War.

JM: Oh that's

BW: I probably have 2 or 3 more years of work getting it all assembled, and then I will probably have to turn around and rewrite the entire thing to cut it down by at least two-thirds

JM: [Laughs]

BW: Because it's heading for 500 pages now.

JM: Yeah well, yes. So how did you get interested in this uh, how'd you get onto this topic?

BW: Uh

JM: Sounds very interesting.

BW: Well I've always been kinda interested. My grandfather was a Confederate Navy veteran, and, of course, with my Navy background...

JM: What, what was his name?

BW: Uh, W. F. Wilson, William F. Wilson, he was in, lived in Port Lavaca. He was a doctor after the war and he'd kept a diary during the Civil War which I've uh, edited and put together and published this diary in

JM: Oh.

BW: In, uh, 1969 I guess. A copy of it's in the Lee College Library, by the way and uh

JM: Oh well good. Who, who published this?

BW: Uh me and Mrs. Bremer. It was just--

JM: Oh just a, right.

BW: Just a, that one was

JM: Right.

BW: Just mimeographed

JM: Uh-huh.

BW: And, and bound.

JM: Yes

BW: But I'd had to copy it so many times that, uh, I had, I made up a bunch of copies to give to cousins, and so forth.

JM: Right, Uh-huh. So uh, how many of these Confederate generals are you dealing with in this current book you're working on?

BW: Well there, I had to, to make a complete list of 'em to satisfy myself for the list

JM: Right.

BW: Because some of the published lists, uh, have people that were vaguely, only vaguely qualified and some left out. Men that I thought were qualified to be generals, uh, there are lists available anywhere from 420 to 460, and I came up with a list of 442.

JM: Wow

BW: Uh

JM: And you're writing something on each of these?

BW: I'm writing, no I'm just, well I've got a uh, appendix table that I have a tabular presentation of each one,

JM: Right.

BW: His name and his rank and his born and died dates and the date of his

JM: Uh-huh.

BW: Highest commission. But then there were 81 of them who either died in battle

JM: Oh yes.

BW: Or died at

JM: Okay so those are the ones you're writing, the ones

BW: But I'm bearing down on the uh, the 80, 81 who were

JM: Right.

BW: Killed in action and a, a sketch of the battle in which they were killed and a little sketch of his biography.

JM: Oh that's, that's an interesting topic, yes.

BW: Yeah, it's better to say I'm, uh, working on a book than to say I'm just sitting around loafing.

JM: [Laughs], well I'm sure it's a lot more interesting too uh you know.

BW: Yeah.

JM: So you've been working on this for ten years. Do you have a projected date you think you will wind this up? How many of the 81 have you uh worked with? Or, or did I understand you say that you've essentially already written it, and now have to rewrite it to cut it down?

BW: Well I don-, I haven't, I've got uh, there were 36 battles in which confederate generals were killed and I have worked up 21 of those, and while I have most of my basic data, I haven't organized it and written 'em up. I have, uh, biographies and I've checked, uh, everything I can about the uh, their commissions, I've, uh, just about read the entire journal of the Confederate Senate in order to get their confirmation dates for, that accounted for how most of the ranks of most of them. I had to dig for some of the others.

JM: Well

BW: I've pretty near waded through all 128 volumes of the official history of the Civil War, at least skimmed through it.

JM: Where did you get access to this?

BW: The Sterling Library in Houston, the genealogical library. They also have a set of the official records, and the Confederate Congress Journal on micro-cards.

JM: Right uh, and what oth-, what other sources have you used?

BW: Those are the principle ones and although I've, I've read uh, I've read everything that uh, that's crossed my path about the war that uh

JM: Yes.

BW: I've tried to uh, confine myself to things that were official to the, not tread anybody's copyright toes.

JM: Yes, right. Well uh--

BW: I think I'm, I'm, I may come out with this year with a little, uh, I may publish this year, just uh, probably about, uh, 80- to 100 page work with the, the uh, the tables of the generals.

JM: Uh-huh

BW: The tabular list with about 30 pages of the text accompanying it. Just in order to get that, get my list copyrighted. I may do that, so I probably can print with that this year.

JM: Alright. Well good, I'm sure we'll be looking forward to this. Well that uh, how, how much uh, how often do you work on this? Do you have a se-, any kind of schedule or just when you feel like it or what?

BW: I, I don't have as regular a schedule as I should. I, I go, I manage to get into Houston to the library probably every other week.

JM: Every other week.

BW: And uh spend the morning in there. Which is about as long as my attention span is, and uh, I do some work on it, oh, just about every week.

JM: Mhm, well that's uh, certainly uh, quite a project.

BW: Like I've been promising myself uh, for 8 years though, that week after next I'm gonna have time to just fool around and not do anything but work on my own projects, and I haven't had that time yet.

JM: [Laughs] Yes, that's

BW: If that time ever comes I, I'll keep regular office hours, till I get through.

JM: Right, right. Okay, well uh. Thank you very much, and as I explained to you earlier we'd like uh, we plan to keep the master copy of this tape in the Lee College Library and two copies, which will be made -- one in, will be placed in Lee College Library and one in the Sterling Municipal Library, and both of these will be able to, people will be able to check out and researchers and people who uh, are interested in Baytown's history, and we would like your oral consent that they may use these.

BW: Well, for what it's worth, it's my pleasure.

JM: [Laughs] well we thank you very much and uh, it's been very enjoyable. Thank you.

[END]

Transcribed By: Lynnette Sargis