

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Betsy Webber

Interviewee: Grover C. Edge

1975

BW: ... Seventy-five. This is Betsy Webber at the Baytown Sun. Grover Edge has lived in Baytown a long time. He's been a leader in many organizations in Baytown. Grover, when did you come to Baytown?

GE: I came to Baytown November 1, 1921.

BW: That was how long ago?

GE: Fifty-four years.

BW: Ok. Why did you come to Baytown?

GE: I was looking for work, trying to get settled. I got out of the service. Had a service connected disability. Nervous and shell shocked. (Clears throat.)

BW: From what war?

GE: World War I. I was in the Navy. Certain destroyers known as a tin can. Destroyer number 21. It was a three-stacker. I got crippled up in a hurricane in October 1918.

BW: Where?

GE: Out in the Atlantic Ocean.

BW: You were in the Navy then?

GE: Yes.

BW: When you came to Baytown, how did you travel from wherever you were to Baytown?

GE: In a Model-T Ford, (clears throat) which was known as a jitney in those days. We caught them on Preston Avenue by the courthouse. We'd come down here, why, it would cost you two-and-a-half each way. And there were two places it'd stop: one of them was what is now the corner of Harbor Street and Market Street. **There was a Montana Cafe**. And up by the railroad track by the main entrance of the refinery, there was another restaurant that was operated by a fella by the name of **Powden**. That's called the Blue Goose. That's where most of the men hung out that worked in the refinery that were single. And there was a bunch of cottages or rooms in back of it, and that's where they stayed.

BW: Were you single when you came?

GE: What?

BW: Did you bring your family with you in that day?

GE: No ma'am. No, I sent my family to San Antonio. I was working in Houston's Sinclair Refinery, and I didn't like the Sinclair – I didn't like the people that worked there.

BW: Did you know you had a job when you came, or did you come to get a job?

GE: No ma'am. I come down to get a job. I walked into the east gate of the refinery. Not the east gate, but the railroad gate at that time. That's where the clock house was. I walked in. It was crowded, but I went on in. They had a watchman there checking people, but he wasn't paying much attention to who went in. There was only about 1,200 people working there including the officer. I went around over to the refinery, being as I had some experience firing before the war. I fired during the war, and felt like I knew a little bit about oil burning. Which they were burning some caustic fuel in that boiler, [3:10] and having lots of trouble. They had some machines there to take the gas away, and they didn't have anybody that knew how to operate them, and I felt like I could do it. And I went into Houston to see the plant manager who was Jack Penn [3:30]. And I went in and explained to him what I'd done, and I told him it would take me a couple of months to fix it up. I had intentions of going to California. In fact I didn't know what I wanted to do. I wanted to settle down. So after I got in there with him, I told him that I could correct the ailment they had down there in the boiler house. I knew what I was doing. So he come down and went to work on November 1, 1921.

BW: Tell me a little bit about the road from Houston that jitney traveled, and how you got across the waters.

GE: Well, you had to come down to Pasadena and this ferry, and come down through the Lynchburg Ferry, and the road crossover. And this ferry was operating with an old motor on the side, and pulled through on a cable run through a gear shift. And the cable – if the cable would break we'll just ... we'd go buggy riding.

(Laughing)

BW: How would they rescue you?

GE: A tug boat would come along, catch you, bring you back up and tie you up. Sometimes it'd be several hours before they'd get a tub boat, and then several hours tying you up. We all had fun. Well the family, we enjoyed it very much with each other.

BW: Did you get across safely that first time?

GE: Oh yeah. I only got on [5:08] the ferry one time. It broke several times, but I only broke it once. [5:11]

BW: What about the road, then, from the ferry?

GE: Uh, well the road from the ferry on in and to the road all the way from where we turned off at Pasadena coming down to the ferry was awfully narrow and awfully rough. And if we ran into any trouble [5:28] we couldn't pass the cart, we'd have to pull off and let them move up. There wasn't very many cars in those days to run up and down the highway. (Coughs)

GE: Then we would have to leave Houston when we were going back and forth to work. We were in Houston for pleasure. We'd have to leave to be at the ferry by 11:30, or spend the night before we could

get across. Cause the last ferry would leave the Houston side of the ship channel at 11:30, and they would tie it up on the Baytown side.

BW: Do you know who operated the ferry? Was it a county, and was there any charge for riding it?

GE: No charge, county. It's always been the county operating there.

BW: What about when you got to Goose Creek? Could you get across the creek? Where did you...

GE: Well the ... when we got into – of course, the Baytown refinery was on the ...

BW: Other side.

GE: ...west side of Goose Creek, the stream of Goose Creek **in the town [6:30]**. They both were Baytown to Goose Creek and the Humble Company had a train that they would bring the workers over to the refinery in the mornings and then take the shift workers back, come back over in the afternoon and bring the shift workers back and wait, and take the men home. And then they'd run it, just one car at midnight. They'd run a **shift car [6:52]**. Had long benches covering the side of the cars themselves.

BW: So was there a bridge? There was a train bridge over there behind...

GE: There was a train bridge. But no, we had to cross the bridge at now where Robert E. Lee High School wasn't there then, but the cemetery was still there, but there wasn't no school building there. We had a pontoon bridge that you rode across unless the tide was high or real low. And if it was real high or real low, we had to leave our car on that Baytown side of the ... creek, and then walk on into town. And the same thing in Pelly. It went down through the old Pelly Road and had another area down there off there. **Had a [7:41]** Lot of hardship; lot of pleasure, but everybody knew each other, and we all got along real well.

BW: How long after you got the job in November did you – was it before you brought your family here?

GE: I didn't bring them down until February of '22.

BW: Did you live in Houston, or did you live in a dormitory?

GE: I lived in Baytown. I lived in a dormitory. They had the dormitory built there and a few stucco houses. They had a lot of what we called in those days, "shotgun houses" that families lived in, and they had a bedroom and a little kitchen. Had a community shower and restroom for everybody to use, and also they had a few of these **frame-ready cutouts [8:27]** there that some of the families was moving into. And I lived in that. After I brought my family down, I lived in a house from Mr. Newman, who was a watchman at the refinery. And I paid room and board to him for a while, and then I moved down on the Sun Company property. They had a two-story house – a fella by the name of Johnson – his property down there. And we rented a room upstairs, and we had to take our water upstairs and downstairs. Use a coal oil stove to heat everything, and also for cooking.

BW: Now this is still before your family came?

GE: No, that's when I brought the family.

BW: After she came?

GE: And then we moved from down there up in a little ol', on the they had some houses over on in Goose Creek. They called it the bull pin. [9:29] It was two square blocks. And it had a fence around it. An old straight installed everything. [9:34] And ... they were these frame-ready cut out that they was building two apartments. You had the front apartment and back apartment. I lived over there for – until 1923. Daughter was born there, and then I moved over on Logan Street. And I'd had some land from Mr. Wright by Cedar Bayou. Was gonna get rich. Get rich making – planted 15 acres of sweet potatoes.

BW: Like...

GE: Sweet potato. We had a good crop. And they were looked like I was going to really coin the money into it, had up and been raised on a farm. Then it started to raining about the time to start the harvest. And I didn't get a potato; not even one to eat.

BW: Golly. After... How much did you make when you went, first went to work at the refinery.

GE: I made \$150 a month.

BW: Now what were you – what was your job when you were first employed?

GE: I was assistant to the combustion engine. [10:34]

BW: In 1927, I believe you got a new title, didn't you?

GE: Yes, ma'am. I went, was transferred then into reclamation of oil. What brought it on, the company was letting a lot of oil get away from 'em in the ship channel. And the coast guard was jumping on us about it. And talking about it with Mr. Finley, and several men on these separators looking after wasted oil that had fired 'em, cause they couldn't catch up. [10:59] The big thing of it was, if they was working forty-something hours, and looking for a promotion, they wouldn't dare turn a man in for spilling oil the time oil lose [11:17], because they'd call him a tattletale, and he couldn't get a promotion. So Mr. Finley picked me out to put a stop to it, as someone had fined the company a couple of times for letting oil get into the ship channel. Lost a lot of that money. And I told him I wouldn't work on it under the condition that it was in. That I would work in the assistance of it only, but I would report direct to him. Not to any intermediate bosses, just strictly to him. (Inaudible) [11:50] They agreed to it after about a year and a half, (clears throat) why, they ... installing new sewer and new regulations, and made me Assistant Sanitary Engineer. Then later on when I found a job up looking after sanitary system. All the sewer system all the regulations. Things that went with it. [12:21]

BW: How long were you with the refinery?

GE: I lack 15 days of making 37 years.

BW: When did you retire?

GE: November the 15th of '57.

BW: There were a lot of firsts connected with your life here. Do you remember some of 'em? Your daughter was the first baby christened at First Presbyterian.

GE: In the first part of activities down here, the first thing we done was when it was a bunch to organize the better (inaudible) [12:55]. Or to protect both nine and 12. That was the one who organized that (clears throat) May the 9th, I mean March the 9th, 1922. (Coughs) And it was – we got a bunch of men

together to help the refinery out at Cedar Crest, I mean, Cedar Crest Cemetery, Cedar Bayou, and cleared off the weeds, trash, and stuff off of it, stacked it up to the side of the road, and light what we had on fire. Burning out there that on down out of Houston, they thought the refinery was on fire.

(Laughing)

GE: So, (clears throat) we was clearing that up, and then May 30th, we had the first parade in Baytown and memorial service out there at the cemetery. I was in charge of that.

BW: That was Memorial Day, wasn't it?

GE: Memorial Day 1922. And from that day on up to about eight or nine years ago, I was known as Mr. Parade Marshal of downtown. I handled all the parades of the town.

BW: What was the route of those parades?

GE: Well, set 'em up at the big tree in Houston, just for ordinary parades.

BW: Not in Houston.

GE: I mean in (laughs) down on Texas Avenue. Then we'd go down Texas Avenue, and up Main Street to where the railroad track was, it was an **icehouse [14:32]** there, and then break up and go to Cedar Bayou for most of it. And we was gonna just have a parade for other activities like holidays or Fourth of July, or the Veteran's Day, we would organize and line 'em up down here by the big tree where we marched over to Texas Avenue – and it wasn't Texas Avenue then, but it was Goose Creek Street. But on Main Street now. And we'd go down Main Street to just over where the police station is now. There wasn't any buildings down there. And we could then truck, have automobile the way we could transfer the bands. We had all of the school bands out, transfer 'em down on the edge of Pelly. (Clears throat.)

BW: You're talking about the old police station that's down ... south of the railroad track.

GE: Yeah.

BW: And not the new one that's out North Main. You're talking about going South Main.

GE: Yeah. We go down there and disassemble. **Send or convey 'em some down to [15:44]** just till we got to Goose Creek Street in Pelly. And Market Street, Pelly. And then rode back up, and we'd move on out to Baytown, and unload 'em there out there right at the Y over there where People's State Bank.

BW: Airheart turns into Market Street?

GE: Yeah.

BW: Uh-huh.

GE: It all comes right in there.

BW: Uh-huh. And close to the Trinity Episcopal Church.

GE: And then make the course down to around Timothy. The furthest district in old Baytown. And then disassemble.

BW: Didn't you have something to do with the flag raising at football games?

GE: After they built Robert E. Lee High School, having football games, why, they ... they must have having some trouble with the boys from the different teams that would come in at the players. But the spectator would come around and start rackets and trying to (inaudible) [16:49] on the football game. And I got in with the superintendent of the school and the school board. And we got permission to raise a flagpole at Old Elms Field that's where the cafeteria at Robert E. Lee is now. That's where we put it.
And