

An Oral History Tape Transcription
Of
Baytown Oral Histories
With
Interviewer: Betsy Webber
Interviewee: E. C. (Smoky) Wood
Estimated Date: Winter 1975
Transcribed by: Lynnette Sargis

(Tape 1 of 1)

Baytown Oral Histories

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[Music plays, and continues to play in the background speaking begins.]

Unknown Male: The Snowy Day, Ezra Jack Keats, The Snowy Day. New York. The Viking Press. To Tick, John, and Rosa Lee.

Unknown Female: One winter morning, Peter woke up, and looked out the window.

[Music ceases and interview begins, 00:37]

EW: It was 18 and 92.

BW: When did you come to Baytown and why?

EW: I came to Baytown on uh June the 20th of 1930. Uh, I got transferred from the refinery at uh, uh what was the name of that place? I don't remember.

BW: McCamey?

EW: McCamey.

BW: Mhm.

EW: Got transferred from McCamey down here to Baytown.

BW: Okay. You went to work at the refinery in what capacity?

EW: Carpenter.

BW: Okay. How, what were your wages then?

EW: Seven dollars a day. Eighty-seven-and-a-half cents an hour, and I went to work as a first class mechanic at that time.

BW: A mechanic or a carpenter?

EW: Well ...[Inaudible] that's first class mechanical wages, carpenter's wages.

BW: OK., where, did you do, is that what you did all the time during the--?

EW: No, there were three years during the Depression that uh, uh I went to work for the utilities department about 3 ½ years. I did shift work. I was fortunate in getting to work five days a week where the mechanical men only worked, only worked three. So I was very fortunate with that aspect.

BW: That was during the Depression?

EW: That was during the Depression, yeah.

BW: Mhm uh how long did you work at the refinery?

EW: 28 years and 1 month.

BW: When did you retire?

EW: Oh. October the 11th uh, 19 and 57.

BW: Now you've been retired fooor about, uh, 18 years?

EW: That is correct, yes.

BW: And during those 18 years, you've been rather busy haven't you? Hum I believe you had something to do with the Exxon Annuitants' Club and with the barbeque that preceded that. Can you tell us about that?

EW: The part I'd rather tell you about the barbeque as far as uh pu-, oh is that brought up to discussion amongst ourselves, was that uh we'd asked the company to allow us to have a barbeque each year uh just to the Humble Annuitants at that time. Well we had, I had the secretary to write Mr. Myron A. Wright who was chairman of the board of Humble Oil and Refinery Company USA at that time. So we got a very favored response and he told us that as long as a 1000 certificate-, participants in this club why they'd continue to have it each year and it's grown s-, so rapidly we had nearly 2800 this last year to attend the barbeque.

BW: Mhm, was Mr. Wright in the Houston office?

EW: Yes, ma'am.

BW: Alright now then uh the barbeque started first and then the Exxon Annuitants Club. Tell us a little bit about the, the starting that?

EW: Well I received a letter that was addressed to Hu-, uh Humble Oil and Refinery, established at that time as the Humble Annuitants.

BW: What time, what date was it?

EW: Oh I don't remember. Uh well it was some 10 years ago, something like that. And it happened to, we got ahold of it, and they opened it, and uh Mr. Red Weaver he called me [inaudible]. He'd gotten to be on the [inaudible] at that time. So they then presented it to Mr. Weaver and he in turn called me in, and so I read the letter and I took it out; showed it Mr. [inaudible], and then he thought it was one of the best ideas that ever come up.

Well he and I worked hand in hand. All during that every letter I wrote, Mr. [inaudible] got a copy of it. Which he had sent on to the company, the management, all the way through. It took me about 4, I worked about 4 months to try to get uh Baton Rouge to join, to come in with us. I had no way to find out who to contact over there, so I went to the, Mr. Pete Brewer, who was the manager of the East Gulf Coast Union there at the plant. He wrote the president of that, the manager of that organization over there, and referred to somebody. He wrote me a letter that he wasn't the right man, so I wrote to the othe-, another man, and he wadn't the right man. So I wrote, wrote another one. I saw that this man wrote to me, and he wadn't the right man. In other words I wrote four different letters, and they had no club of that kind of nature in Baton Rouge. They only have a 30-year club, which is the same as our 20-year club here in Baytown. Uh and uh he said that they had spent the entire life where they were working for Standard Oil of New Jersey at that time. Said they, and they felt that they wadn't obligated at that time to go into any, to unionize to work against the company. So that disrupted that plan altogether. And, also, I found out the man's name that was the presi-, uh president of the Annuitants' Club in the main office in Houston. Which I've forgotten his name. And I talked to him over the phone, and I was very dissatisfied to what-; the way he said it. He said "What do mean, are you trying to organize something similar to a union? For the workers down at Humble?" And I said, "Everybody else here-, is union. Why can't we be, why can't the Annuitants be a union?" He says, "I wanna tell you one thing right now, I say, Humble don't owe you a damn thing." So I [inaudible] by his response, so I sat down and had Mr. Pete Brewer write him a personal letter explaining what we was trying to do, and never did get a answer from him.

BW: Well now, just what were you trying to do?

EW: We was trying to organize the all, all of the retired people worked for, for who'd ever worked for Humble oil and, or Stand-, Hu-, uh Humble and Standard in the United States. Trying to get them to form a coordinating committee where we could sit down and maybe so make-, meet periodically and ha-, have discussions and find out what we wanted to present to the, to the companies.

BW: In the way of your retirement, uh, money?

EW: Uh yeah, well we, whatever way of increasing in our annuities.

BW: I see.

EW: In other words, it was uh we was getting so much of the Humble business for most of the Senior Citizens Club, that I thought it was a good idea to organize the Humble annui-, uh or, at that time, the Humble Annuitants Club.

BW: It was sort of a bargaining uh--,

EW: Yes.

BW: -- group for, uh, retirement increases?

EW: That's right. But in the meantime, I went ahead and got the secretary to write Mr. Wright a letter. Asked him to let me appoint a-, a committee. Either 3, 5, or 7 as a [inaudible] between the Humble annuitants and the company. And I got hi-, a report back, a letter back from him, he says he would accept the proposition, preferably 3, but said, naturally, they had to be Humble annuitants.

BW: Well, uh, how long was this after the barbeque was started?

EW: About 1 year.

BW: About a year, so the barbeques just been going on about 11 years, huh?

EW: That's right.

BW: And it's just for annuitants and their families?

EW: And widows yes. Well, their widows.

BW: Annuitants and their widows.

EW: Yeah.

BW: Where do you have this barbeque?

EW: It's out at the...just across from the Jr. High, uh, Baytown Jr. High School.

BW: On the uh refinery campus out there?

EW: Oh yes, they'll go all out. They put us a big tent at, at uh, if it rains, well we have it just the same.

BW: What time of the year do you usually have it?

EW: Well now about the first uh Saturday in October.

BW: Thought so. But that's different from, uh, Humble Day or,

EW: Yes.

BW: Exxon Day. Exxon Day, I believe, is in May isn't it?

EW: May, yes. Bout on May the 5th.

BW: What do you ha-, you just you have barbeque served?

EW: That's what we did with that one.

BW: Barbeque dinner.

EW: But we would had several, there was a variety of food you know.

BW: Mhm.

EW: So it's all, uh, it's all catered.

BW: And uh who pays for it?

EW: Humble.

BW: Okay, the Exxon Company pays for it.

EW: It's, well they, well yeah.

BW: Okay, uh how many annuitants are there in your group now? How many are, belong to your Exxon Annuitants Club?

EW: Oh if I have to say right now, there'd be between 5- and 600, counting the ladies auxiliary, I guess. [Inaudible]

BW: Did you find a ready response from the annuitants for, uh, organizing the club?

EW: Oh yes. Yes.

BW: Okay, now, this was all after you had retired, isn't it?

EW: Oh yes.

BW: Ok, now then something else that you've been busy at is the Baytown Senior Citizens. When was that organized, and what did you have to do with organizing it?

EW: Well it was Bob [Inaudible] and me in 19 and 59. He told me, he said "Mr. Wood," says, "There's a lot in the Humble Annuitants, uh, a lot of annuitants in this community needs something to do", he says. "How about organizing a senior citizens club?" I said, "Well, I, uh, hadn't ever thought about, about it." But says, "I'll present it people that'll come to it, and let you know what the-, what they think about it." So I circulated around, and found out that they thought it was good idea. So on April the 17th, 1959, we organized the Senior Citizens Club with eight members present.

BW: Where was it? Where'd you meet?

EW: Well at the, at, uh, Humble Oil and Refinery gave uh, uh ...the [Inaudible] club a little house that was set back behi-, behind the Sealy Lumber com-, uh the, that lumber company that over.

BW: On Market?

EW: Yes, on Market Street.

BW: Down by the railroad track, idn't it?

EW: Yes.

BW: Close to the railroad track.

EW: So the wife says, "We'll try to help you organize this club," says that we'll furnish the coffee and the provisions etc, until you all get to where you can be self-sustaining. So she wanted to try to get me to be president, I admit [laughs], I was reluctant. I, I said, "Naw, I talked to Mr.

[inaudible] and asked him if he would be president of it, and said yes, he accepted, and uh from then it has grown on to what it is today.

BW: How ma-, what is it today? How many members today?

EW: Well like I say, I'd be hesitant to say right now because [inaudible], but the ladies auxiliary they dissolved earlier than the men's club. Senior Citizens Club we have, I'd say between 5- and, 5- or 600 members or such.

BW: Wha-, how often do you meet and where?

EW: Well up here we have a recreation, we have games out there each Tuesday. Then each Thursday at the community building 4-, from 1 till 2-, 12 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and each second Thursday, well, we have a bus-, business meeting at 2 o'clock each second Thursday.

BW: Was it through this group that you helped to get the homestead exemption for senior citizens?

EW: Oh sure, definitely. I happened to be on the, uh, on the legislation committee which, uh, was appointed by Mr. Jones, uh, who was the president of the Texas Council of Senior Citizens and there was 17 of us on that committee and we were supposed to meet in Mr. Harrington's office to get this before uh, to his house. Then they had two of the legislatures where they would work on it. It was ... [Inaudible] at that time and uh it was 700 voted for it, and 3 against it. It was a meeting I couldn't attend, but our club sent a man with an instructive vote to represent us at that time and Mr. Herbert Cook was the man's name.

BW: What about the Senior Citizens Council? What is that, and what did you have to do with it?

EW: Well I thi-, that's, uh, various organizations, such as, uh, well, there's several-, several different senior citizens clubs in the community then there's the AARP, retired school teachers, and, uh, oh--

BW: Anyway,

EW: Oh and the CPU's etc, it's,

BW: The council has representatives from all of these?

EW: In other words, we enacted the correlating committee from that council to take back to our clubs.

BW: Mhm.

EW: To present to each club what's being asked of us.

BW: Tell me about the nutrition program over at First Presbyterian Church, the county program?

EW: Well, James Brady first started that nutrition program up in...

BW: That's Commissioner Brady, former Commissioner Brady?

EW: Former commissioner James Brady and he told me this was uh had some money appropriated for this occasion. But I couldn't do all of it myself so I hired Mr. Tidman, so he went in and talked to the Commissioners Court and got permission to start this up and he was appointed by 'em as a, as a uh, on the committee to select uh a place for 'em to meet. Which was selected as the Presbyterian Church at that time.

BW: Okay, you've been a member of the First Pre-, First Christian church for a long time, how long?

EW: Oh, 40 some-odd, 42 or -3 years, about 43 years I think I've been going here.

BW: You ever do any carpentry at the church?

EW: Oh my, first thing I built down on the old, down there on Texas Avenue and Whi-, Whiting?

BW: Whiting?

EW: Yeah.

BW: Texas and Whiting?

EW: Uh, we had no Sunday school place for them, so Uncle Bud Smith says, "Smoky," Said, "Say, let's you and me build some Sunday school classes," and I said, "Okay, Bud. You find me some money, and I'll do the work." So Buddy said, "Okay!" So that's the way it went, and we built that entire, we built that entire building, five, five Sunday school classrooms and nice dining hall and a kitchen for less than a thousand dollars; there wasn't one dime, uh, spent for labor.

BW: Golly, how long ago was that?

EW: Bout in the 30's, '35. I think it's, yeah, '35. Okay Mr. Deacon Jones, he done soldered the wire, he [inaudible], he'd come and donate his time to wire this building, wired the entire building. Mr. Swilley done the same thing uh uh at the plumbing and he come and install he would ...[Inaudible] and uh he came in, and did the work with our assistance, and then we got ready to paint it and the painters' union sent enough men down there one day to canvas the entire inside of it and prime the outside and inside, and the next day they finished the job; come and hung the paper, and finished painting the house. Cost us well not one dime of labor; it didn't cost us nothing.

BW: I believe you worked on the 1975 capital improvements program for the city, didn't you? Were on one of the uh subcommittees?

EW: Yes I was, I was ...[Inaudible] yes. I was co-chairman.

BW: Of the subcommittee on roads?

EW: Of the, of speeds, speeds yes.

BW: Now going back uh to the early days uh I believe that you, you played a little baseball didn't you?

EW: Oh a little.

BW: Okay when did you start playing baseball?

EW: Well that's I can't remember that far back, I don't believe [laughs]. I started uh playing baseball in my high school days. Well we had a team in s-, we formed when all of us was in high school; all of us stayed together about 20 years. Almost, all of us are [inaudible]. So we gained a lot of recognition just by that one ball club, what I say [inaudible] ball club for a town of that size and uh well what seemed to be the ... they used to have a county fair there; it lasted 4 days and ...[Inaudible] a lot of people visit there ...[Inaudible] and that used to be one of our great days out of the world series to have to go play that four, four games of baseball a day. At the t-, some kind of a county fair.

BW: Let's see, that was when you were still living in what town?

EW: Richland Springs.

BW: Richland Springs yeah mhm. Okay uh well did that end you baseball career, or did you play anymore after that?

EW: Well I, I played in the Hot Water League out here, yeah for a couple of years, that was nice.

BW: Tell me about that Hot water League. That was at the refinery wasn't it?

EW: Well that was just a refinery that was a, oh that was my baseball team that was made up of the [inaudible] divisions, like the process and the carpenters and the utilities.

BW: What was the name of your team?

EW: Uh, I wasn't, I [inaudible]

BW: Wasn't there one called the DD's? One of the teams called the DD's.

EW: I don't remember.

BW: Okay.

EW: DD's.

BW: Uh how did you get that nickname, "Smoky?"

EW: Well the last years, the last 4 years I played, I hurt my arm and I got to where I couldn't throw, so I couldn't hardly throw from one base to the other, so they ha-, uh a long time ago there used to be an old baseball pitcher by the name of Smoky Joe Woods of the first Boston Red Sox so the rea-, reason I, they called me that was 'cause I couldn't throw. But they called me Smoky Joe Wings-, Smoky Joe Wood, anyhow.

BW: You played some when you went to college, didn't you?

EW: I didn't go to college. I had an offer to from Howard Payne bo-, to go to uh an offered scholarship in board, board and tuition to go to play baseball.

BW: Uh who is you-, who were you, where you, was your wife, and where was she from, and tell me about your family.

EW: Well let me relate one thing: my mother was mother was named Brown, and I married a Brown.

BW: Oh?

EW: No relation [Laughs.]

BW: Uh-huh [laughs].

EW: Uh my wife was named Rosa, and they was one of the old timers in San Saba County. They was one of the first 15 also that moved to San Saba County, and before there was ever a county established there. And, uh, her grandfather started a school on the creek down there on his farm built out of logs, he, I don't know what it was, but he even had log benches to sit on and uh they called it Daddy Brown School, cause that was his nickname, Daddy Brown. Gee I don't know, I guess it's because he had so many kids.

BW: [Laughs]

EW: I tell you, so it was called the Daddy Brown School. That's--; And my wife was uh given up to be one of the best cooks in our church. Many, many a time uh she'd take her, what she'd cooked in to the serving committee, and never get even to put out because the ones doing the serving'd put it back and eat that themselves.

BW: How long were ya'll married?

EW: 62 and half years.

BW: And she died in '73 I believe?

EW: Yes.

BW: Uh you had three children, uh, an Eldon Wood was, was he the eldest?

EW: He is the eldest.

BW: And he died when?

EW: Uh, uh February the 9th of uh 64.

BW: 64.

EW: Well 63.

BW: Mhm. Okay and then you have another,

EW: No wait a minute, no, no '64. Wife died in '63.

BW: She died in '73.

EW: '70 I mean '73 not. Oh did I caught, I meant '73, I meant and he bi-, he died the next year, just 10 month After she died.

BW: in 74?

EW: Yes.

BW: Okay and who, who is your other son?

EW: James Beryl Wood. He lives here; he's native, lives in Baytown. He was a em-, he used to work for Humble Oil and Refinery Company and he quit, and went to West Texas and went to farming and went broke – me, too. [Laughs]. Moved back and then he went, started to work for Ashton Oil about 20 years.

BW: Who is your daughter?

EW: Mrs. Eddie Cleveland.

BW: Her name,

EW: That's [inaudible]; her name is Geraldine.

BW: Mhm.

EW: She, well, Eddie, you know, is the first mayor, or the last mayor of Pelly and the first mayor of Baytown. Which, they operated for some time under the charter of Pelly was on the charter of Pelly, who had no name. They had to, uh, call for re-election, ah, call for election to let people vote on what to call, call Tri-cities.

BW: Mhm.

EW: At that time. He's putting in may-, had to put in a many hour working all this out, him and [inaudible] Maloney and some of the rest of 'em.

BW: That was in 1948, I believe.

EW: Uh-huh, that's right.

BW: Okay I believe that you had some property over on Jack Street one time. Did you ever live there?

EW: I lived there form uh from '39 to '59.

BW: And what's on that property now?

EW: Oh, Sec-, uh Second Baptist Church there. In fact I sold that myself to them.

BW: So you had some famous ancestors. You wanna tell us a little about your ancestors?

EW: Really I don't know whether they're my ancestors or not, or just about what I've been told uh. My great-grandfather moved to Texas 18 and 30. He was a what they called a [inaudible] I presume that's something similar to a representative or what's known as a Mexican form of government at that time.

BW: Councilman, like a councilman?

EW: Yeah something, something like a representative, I imagine. I don't know, and he was called ...[Inaudible] and was stationed over at uh Liberty, Texas, and he said he signed the Texas Declaration of Independence. But he, he was off on a mission when they were all together there, and he couldn't, he had to sign the next day ...[Inaudible] That's probably [inaudible].

BW: Uh-huh. Okay, Smoky, um, I believe that just about covers the whole thing. Where do you live now?

EW: 108 Dilago.

BW: How long did you live there?

EW: I've been there since in '59.

BW: Since '59?

EW: mhm.

BW: Mhm, yeah well, I want to thank you for the interview, and this interview will go into the Baytown tape collection. Will be kept in the files at Sterling Municipal Library in the Baytown Historical, Baytown Hist-, Heritage Museum and the Baytown Museum once it gets, uh, started.

TRANSCRIPT BY Lynnette Sargis