

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Dr. Paul Coreil

COLLECTION: 4700.2388

IDENTIFICATION: Former chancellor of Louisiana State University at Alexandria and vice-chancellor and director of Louisiana State University Ag Center over cooperative extension services

INTERVIEWER: Christina Caminita

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: April 16, 2014

FOCUS DATES: 1976-2005

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4317

Cristina Caminita, agricultural librarian for Louisiana State University Libraries, introduces Dr. Paul Coreil, former chancellor of Louisiana State University at Alexandria and vice-chancellor and director of Louisiana State University Ag Center over cooperative extension services; Paul Dean Coreil was born on September 9, 1955 in Ville Platte, Louisiana; his mother's name was Juanita Smith, and father was Armand Bernard Coreil; his father was a cattleman; he remembers his grandmother butchering a chicken on Saturday for Sunday dinner; his grandfather always milked the cow; his grandmother would filter the milk through a cheesecloth in order to get the hair out; his family was big part of 4-H and were involved in a lot of projects, including food preparation; he started his first job around the age of twelve; he worked in the feed store and as he got older he loaded trucks and brought fertilizer to the airstrips where they fly fertilizer; as a junior in high school he got a job on a farm and learned how to make rows and plow; he worked fourteen to fifteen hours a day for \$1.25 an hour; his parents dropped him off in the dark and picked him up in the dark; he had an interest in wildlife, and ran into quail nests and dove nests and rabbits; his father was a little distressed by his interest in wildlife management; the counselors at high school helped him in any way they could, but only had knowledge of a few careers, such as nursing and clerical work; they didn't know about the available opportunities; his brothers and sisters have all been successful in school and in their careers; he earned a master's and a PhD at Louisiana State University; he was married in Lafayette at the Catholic chapel while at USL; his wife got a job in West Baton Rouge Parish at Chamberlain Elementary School; her salary was \$8,400 a year; he felt like he was rich; after earning his bachelor's degree, a professor named Randy Perry offered him an assistantship to study nutria; he followed six adult female nutria for a year; mapped the areas they used and what their habits were, and how active they were; he took the data and published it and received his master's degree; remembers walking in the hall and a professor, John Newsome, asked if him if he wanted to work for

cooperative extension; he interviewed and accepted the job in the Cameron area; there was a thunderstorm as they drove to Cameron in an uncovered truck; he saw an open driveway along the way and knocked on the door to ask if they could park the truck in the covered garage to keep their things from getting wet; he was the first extension agent in the area; he had no mailing list, no history or the job, no programs, or initiatives; because of family vacations, he had a connection to the place, but not with the people; he started his job by visiting fishermen and land owners and getting to know opinion leaders; one time shrimpers had blocked the ship channel; blocking a federal ship channel is an act of war; he helped negotiate with the shrimpers, who shuttled beer to each other, and had guns; the shrimpers later decided to open the blockade; it was the most scary event of potential violence he experienced; for years he listened to the heated conflict about Vietnamese immigrants who were fishermen; the Vietnamese didn't use the same kind of fishing techniques; they didn't use the same cultural practices; he was also part of a project that helped alligator meat to become as valuable as the skins; he's seen technological changes during his time in extension; his office went from one telephone line, to computers, to Twitter and Facebook; previously he used manual slides for a presentation and now he uses PowerPoint; he explains how the people trusted county agents in the past, and therefore they were successful; now technology changed agriculture in the past and is continuing to do so today; he also explains how information on the Internet can be accessed worldwide; he details the motivations behind different information services; some companies might have an interest in selling a product; some might have an interest in selling a service; but in extension an agent can provide information from a non-profit setting; extension research has found things that were being touted as accurate and really aren't as accurate as people think; it's easier to get information from the Internet, but it's not as easy to discern whether or not the information is good information; a good agent will be tied to the research scientist at the university and the research station and they're going to make sure there's a truth serum to everything; farmers realize there needs to be someone who presents the facts as they are with no other motives involved; someone needs to train consultants and all the other types of organizations providing information; the agent is still the go to person to make sure that all the potential options are considered; the university's unbiased opinion about what's out there is still necessary; that's why extension is still relevant; all the offices in the parishes are provided by the local government and the salaries pay for the salaries; with that kind of investment you better be relevant to the needs of the community; in 1914, about seventy percent of the population were farmers, and that's down to two, to two and half percent; there aren't hundreds of farmers clamoring for information; agents now are serving a broader population way beyond farmers; fifty years ago a business didn't plant flowers, but now everyone wants to have a beautiful landscape; the agents have to be more aware of horticultural work, work with locally grown foods, and the 4-H programs teach school kids about where their food comes from; agents today have to read the literature, to read the journals, they have to read the results of relevant information that keeps them on the cutting edge; if they do that, they will still be in high demand; there is a need to hire astute, motivated, and well-learned, life-long learning people; because the land-grant system is connected, extension agencies in other states can help each other out by providing each other information; the extension specialist has to be very connected to other states and that the information is flowing to the agents; extension was effective in the United States because of the quality of the agents that were hired and the commitment they had to improving the lives of the people; without trust, you're often dead in the water; hiring the right person to match the culture of the community and the expertise that is needed in critical; the biggest concern now is that

salaries are low and there are no merit increases; agriculture is big business and the private companies are paying really good salaries; extension and the university need to be up there, hiring from the top of the class; extension has to make sure the expectations of success and how excellence is defined is clear in the mind of the agent; he describes the use of farmers with technology on tractors, and genetically modified plants and how things have changed; he describes when Katrina [hurricane] hit; the tradition of extension responding to disasters had already been there; some examples were the dust bowl and erosion taking place in the late 1920's; there were also tornadoes and hurricanes before, but none of them were at the level of Katrina and Rita; he knew for disaster response and recovery there was no one better established than extension services; to have an office in every parish that's part of the local community and a connection to the university; he was once involved in civil defense, which was the organization that handled hurricane evacuation; he evacuated eleven times in Cameron; those experiences helped prepare him for when he was director during hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike, and Gustav; he helped with Katrina; but when Rita hit and people were still recovering from Katrina, he flew down to Cameron and didn't recognize any of the landmarks; he helped establish a disaster recovery advisory committee of extension agents; he says "the morning it takes place when you lose all of your personal belongings is something that's hard to describe,"; Louisiana lost over one thousand people with Katrina with the flooding of people's homes; he began working on recovery for months and is still being worked on; they developed a volunteer management system for New Orleans; people were coming from all over the country and the land-grant and sea-grant agents had to help manage the volunteers; extension instructed in basic problems such as whether or not to plant a crop where salt water had been; or how to clean the black mold in the house; or can they drink the water out of their well; one lesson learned during the disaster is that the Internet doesn't work and cell phones don't work during disasters; they had to print information and deliver it to the people; they had to get satellite phones to communicate by phone; had to print literature and deliver it; the 4-H program was heavily involved with the children because of the emotional scars of losing their homes; the emergency teams brought in trailers and other resources to establish cell phone use and Internet connectivity; they also learned that they needed a system for contacting employees in an emergency; now they have a system of reporting in prior to evacuation of where they are going to be; established a 4-H camp in Pollock as an immediate place where LSU people can go when a disaster hits; for Katrina there were five or six hundred people in St. Bernard Parish who had nowhere to go; extension helped bus the people to the camp; it was the only time he saw people boiling crabs at 4-H camp during his career; he doesn't know where they got the crabs from; every used car within a 50 mile radius was a part of helping people leave because people started buying cars; established offices and phone banks and computers so that the offices in St. Bernard Extension office could reestablish links in Pollock and at least interact and prepare for people to go home; considers Andrew Granger from Vermillion Parish a hero; Granger's house was flooded, but he was out helping to get hay to stranded cattle; the agents found out who the cattle belonged to, fed them, and picked up the carcasses; they also helped build the big evacuation center on the Ag Center property; the extension specialists helped to run the whole center; the evacuation center had a hospital in it; county agents know how to work with people, coordinate programs, know how to organize things, and know how to work with a diverse audience; during the disasters, a diverse population were at the evacuation centers and 4-H camps; the people were receptive of that and needed help; for a good month there were no modern communications available; Holly Beach looked like someone bulldozed the area and cleaned it off; the established communities had been

cleaned off; he had a home he built and sold and he looked at it; the roof was there and a few studs; all the linoleum and carpet had been cleaned off; it was just a slab with a roof; he had also lost a child previous to the disasters and buried the child in Cameron; he went to check on the grave; many of the graves had popped out of the ground; but his child was still there; he is proud of the extension offices, especially nationally, because Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas have all been involved in disasters—they respond quicker than any other agency because they have established relationships in the parishes; he describes an established trust in extension; he says, “extension is a jewel to this country,”; he is glad to have been around for thirty five of the one hundred years of extension; he describes new uses for the extension model; one thing discussed is using the extension model for other areas of expertise such as landscape architecture?; around the nation, people like the idea of moving to the next step; he states that “if Louisiana wants to pull out of being last in a lot of issues; poor race relations and non-white races, the loss of population in Northeast Louisiana; extension needs to broaden the scope of information; believes it can be done at a low cost”; he is sold on the idea that people can start small; he speaks about a program in Georgia called the Archway Partnership; the programs brings in a team that looks at the community, establishes a game plan, and then the university brings in people to help solve the problem; he thinks we can do a project like the Archway Partnership in Louisiana; the sea-grant model reassured him they can broaden the capabilities of helping communities; he still can contribute, even though he’s retired; he enjoyed his career and it’s been rewarding for him; end of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T4317)

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RESTRICTIONS: None