

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Denver Loupe

COLLECTION: 4700.2384

IDENTIFICATION: Gonzalez native, former director of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

INTERVIEWER: Wyatt Winnie

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: March 17, 2014 and April 7, 2014

FOCUS DATES: 1954-1993

ABSTRACT:

Session I
Tape 4312

Introduction; Loupe was born in Gonzales, LA in 1927; his father was a small farmer who raised sugarcane and became a vegetable farmer; lived in a rural community off of highway 42, between Gonzalez and the River in the Burnside community; Loupe was a 4H member and in FFA; major project was raising pigs; he kept records on corn and strawberries; recalls the county extension agent in high school; the county agent introduced the corn and provided the seed for the new varieties of corn and it worked; fortunate enough to go to college on athletic scholarship; played one year of football and volunteered in the Navy in 1944; first experience in the Pacific was in a Marine barracks where the Japanese would fire on the base, not knowing the war was over; mechanical skills became usable when he decommissioned the ship; returned to Northwestern; had to transfer to LSU to qualify as a teacher; taught school for three years before entering the Cooperative Extension Service; was required to work in a parish that was different from where he grew up; filled the vacancy in St. James parish as the 4H agent; he was able to begin Master's education during summer school, while he was teaching; Came to Baton Rouge, to the extension service in the state office as a sugarcane specialist; this gave him the opportunity to earn his PhD; he grew into extension; mimeograph work was the means of transferring information; record keeping became a requirement in farming rather than keeping receipts in a cigar box; in 1978 became Director of Cooperative Extension; first experience was meeting with all the extension people throughout the state; felt they needed to know who he was; feels highlight of career was that he was instrumental in improving the technical background of agents; as director he required at least one computer in every office in the state; the delivery system of information has changed and now there are more people doing extension type of work; when he was a kid, farmers had a plow with a mule; everything was done manually; cut sugarcane manually; mills drove the carts to the mills; during WWII there were many changes; would cut sugar cane manually, but by the end of the war mechanical tractors came along to help cut sugarcane; now there are combine harvesters that cut and collect the sugarcane; from his time

in high school, to time as an agent until now, people were less educated; the educational background of the farm increased dramatically, particularly at the college level, and even at the Master's and Ph.D. level; when he started, women had equal opportunity in extension; home economist, 4H teachers who were both women and men; men and women went to 4H together; sometimes the men and women would split at meeting, but the opportunities were the same; the state extension office depends on the state legislature for finances; it was uncomfortable at times to support certain taxes, but was necessary for funding; during his time with extension from a 4-H member all the way through his career, he's seen changes from handheld plows to highly technological machinery; at the educational level, very few people left high school and went to college, but more and more kids over the years received higher education; at one time there were colored county agents who worked with colored people; in 1978 extension was required to hire a certain amount of black agents; says that after he became director, he didn't feel any civil rights tension; always worked well with people of color; was proud of his relationship with Leodrey Williams; says there were civil rights tension in extension, but in his office they worked things out; end of interview.

Session II

Tape 4313

Interviewer Wyatt Winnie introduces Denver Loupe on April 7, 2014; Loupe talks about a book he owns by Frederick Williamson that is a history of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services called Yesterday and Today; Loupe's major work was as a sugarcane specialist; his favorite example of demonstration was field days; Loupe explains the value of a field day as giving the farmer something tangible to see; Loupe believes the success of field days came from the farmers talking and sharing information; most parishes had field days; St. James Parish had one of the larger field days where people from other parishes would come and socialize; at the end of the field days, prize money and gifts would be presented by some of the local businesses; in the '50s people were still making homemade soaps and the extension agents would award ribbons and judge contests for the exhibits; the greatest thing that came from the 4-H clubs during WWII came from a collection that went into the building of a ship; it was a national effort that started at the local schools and Louisiana was one of the big contributors; Loupe had a family friend who was an agronomy professor and helped Loupe go to Northwestern University; this friend helped him adjust to college life; came to LSU because of the proximity to family and a few other reasons; always remembers Professor Malcom Garr, who was in vocational agriculture; Loupe always remembered him quote, "If the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught"; a favorite experience at LSU was an engineering class that required welding; he welded two pieces of metal together and was unsatisfied with the result, so he tossed them aside and would start anew; this continued through ten or twelve pieces; two of his class mates picked up a couple of his discards and turned them in as a project and received A's in the course; he turned in what he thought was his best work and received a B; many of the engineering classes evolved into products that would be picked up in the industry; Loupe had a favorable experience with FFA and with 4-H; they often worked together, but sometimes there was friction between FFA and 4-H; when he went to St. James Parish, livestock was a big project because he replaced a livestock

person; but he wanted to do something different from his predecessor; at the time there was the Chicken of Tomorrow program, where a student raised fifty chicks and would show the best at the parish fair; Loupe wanted to raise money for an award for the program, and the county agent got on the phone and called the banks and the grocers, and within a week had raised the funds, and gotten the sponsors because the agent had already had network connections; Loupe knows the show was successful because the county agent knew the sponsors; hurricanes took time from the normal work; agents were involved in natural disaster information; the specialists were able to prepare information that helped people recover; the county agent office was the place where the information was disseminated and the agents worked well with the police and National Guard; the information was mostly about preserving food and how long a family could keep the food before it would spoil; extension engineers could help restore a house that flooded by removing the walls and draining it; his personal work was more with sugarcane and how to tell the farmers what to do with the cane when it was flat on the ground; the equipment people helped develop harvesters that would help pick the cane off the ground; some agents were ahead of the game when computers were introduced; some people react quickly to technology, some other people plod along; he was a strong believer in field days; he thought that was the best educational tool available; he worked well with the agents and the agents would call him; premium money made the livestock shows more competitive; a grand champion steer would put you on top of the world; more recognition, ribbons, trophies, and a picture in the paper occurred with the livestock winners; he didn't care about the grand champion steer; one occasion led to the building of the sheep and swine facility because the parents of the children couldn't see the kids; he spoke to Johnny Cox and said, "Johnny, you see all these people here. Every little kid has two parents with him and probably a grandmom and a granddad, and we don't have any place for them"; doesn't want to take credit for the building, but he wanted to acknowledge that the kids with the very inexpensive project were just as important as the kids showing the grand champion animal; the most important thing about the cooperative extension service was that most people didn't recognize the [extension workers] as educators, but they did just as much educating with value to people in the state as any professor in the class room; the value of extension service was working with people in the field and it showed in the legislature; they educated in the barns and the fields and the students were adults on hay bales becoming better farmers; Wyatt Winnie thanks Mr. Loupe for his time. End of interview.

TAPES: 2 (T4312, T4313)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 2 hour, 8 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 11 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Newspaper Clipping, LSU Ag Center Hall of Fame Profile, Interview Questions and Notes

RESTRICTIONS: None