

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Timothy James “Timmy” Vincent **COLLECTION:** 4700.2279

IDENTIFICATION: Manager of the Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary in Vermillion Bay, lifelong resident of south Louisiana.

INTERVIEWER: Darcy Wilkins

SERIES: Louisiana Sea Grant Coastal Change Oral Histories Project

INTERVIEW DATES: June 14, 2012

FOCUS DATES: 1950s -2012

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4162

Interview introduction and consent statement; Timothy James Vincent (pronounced van-sawn) born 1952 in Abbeville, Louisiana, grew up in Erath; currently lives at headquarters of Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary, worked there for sixteen years; describes Abbeville changing from small family businesses to chain stores, changes in people’s occupations; his interest in the outdoors, boating, grandparents’ farms and furniture store; grandfather’s staple crops, cattle ranching, self-reliance, bartering for goods; early memories of Sunday dinners; three grandparents were Acadians and one was French; he speaks three languages, paternal grandfather, WWI vet, found that English disserved him, spoke French; maternal grandmother certified to teach French in Vermillion Parish; Cajun French speakers now rare; parents punished for speaking French in school; transition period with phasing out and then reintroduction of French language; mowing lawns as a young kid to make extra money, dismay that today he rarely sees kids doing chores or outdoor physical activities; management of wildlife sanctuary covering 26,000 acres; lifelong interest in wetlands; as only full-time employee, most time goes to management; hunting vacations in Texas; participation in sports; mothers worked as home economics teacher, father as insurance agent; most people he knew fed themselves “off the bounty of the land”; he and his older brother check on their elderly mom; information on his family name and Acadian ancestry; Acadians successful because they could live in vicinity of Indians; Acadians as first managers of wetlands, process of growing salt marsh hay, irrigation techniques; likely Acadian names were changed when arriving in New Orleans; his mother’s genealogical research, Vincent line is hard to trace; Acadians settled in Atakapa territory using system of Spanish land grants, land was hard to hold on to; Acadians belief in community property; claim that Atakapa were cannibals; prevalence of Broussard surname in Vermillion Parish; channelization of wetlands has led to saltwater intrusion, accelerating loss of the marsh; dredging canals to speed access to industrial areas; great memories of spending time with his

grandfather on Grand Isle every summer; culinary specialties of Cajun men; chores on grandfather's farm, picking cotton; time spent in the marsh; fewer alligators in his childhood so no fear of swimming, more gators today, people hunting gators on the black market; complexity of the sanctuary as salinity increases or decreases, high salinity hurts it; areas of Louisiana coast with advanced erosion of beachhead; changes in plant and animal species; migration of animals likely due to interstate highway system creating paths; effect of hurricanes, ensuing struggling communities, government regulations on rebuilding; difference in people rebuilding on their own after Hurricane Audrey, but waiting on government handouts after recent storms; other areas in U.S. with coastal flooding not held to same rebuilding standard as Louisianans; difficulty of making a living in the wetlands; much of the culture is lost or being impacted by imported seafood; people leaving due to flood risk and costs; Vincent's role in developing a ditch pump; Louisiana innovations that came from making do with limited resources, e.g. outboard motors made from lawnmower engines, aluminum boats; Louisiana cowboys still exist along the coast; first cattle drives in the U.S. took place in Louisiana from the Chenier Plains to New Orleans, Texans learned cattle driving from Cajuns; specific breeds of horses and cows that could endure the marshy land and insects; mosquitos so thick they would smother a cow's nostrils; ranchers used smoke to protect cattle from mosquitoes; abundance of insects in his childhood, mosquito control chemical spraying has greatly diminished insect populations, in turn has affected bird colonies; productivity and diversity of Louisiana wetlands comparable to rainforests; second in production to Hawaiian sugar cane fields; importance of Louisiana wetlands to seafood industry; Vincent trapped in the 1980s, explanation of waterproof making canvas sacks to collect muskrats from traps in the swamp, exhausting work that burnt calories; muskrat was preferred catch because preparing nutria was labor intensive; nutria not prevalent in Rainey Sanctuary probably due to high alligator population; E.A. McIlhenny's role in bringing nutria to Louisiana for purpose of fur industry, nutria nickname "Ned's rat"; interview conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T4162)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 58 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 8 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Video description written for publication on Louisiana Sea Grant website; Short documentary created using video footage from interview.

RESTRICTIONS: None