

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Hal McMillin

COLLECTION: 4700.2681

IDENTIFICATION: Westlake city councilman (1995-1999), Vice-president of Police Jury (2002), President of Police Jury (2005), retired from 23 years of service at Conoco, continues to serve as police juror while also working as a business development manager at Levingston Group.

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project – Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: July 13, 2016

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-1980s; present

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4641

Interviewee spells name; parents' origins; born in Lake Charles on November 18th, 1955; blessed to grow up in southwest Louisiana; attractions of the area include fishing, hunting, good food and pretty women; father a plumbing contractor from Jonesville, Louisiana; mother a clerk for the city of Westlake in the 60s and 70s; attended conventions with his mother, so he always had an interest in politics; born with leadership qualities; parents were Harold McMillin and Dalton Edith [Welch?] McMillin; three siblings much older than him; he and his brother ten years older had differences, but they've grown to love each other; graduated in 1973 from Westlake High; McMillin family serious about duck hunting; hunting guide at Chateaux Charles; God-given gifts contributed to his work as police-juror; grandmother [Cattie?] McMillin; father had five brothers and three sisters; mother was an only child; parents were Bessie and Charlie Welch from Oakdale; memories of their gardens, fig trees, and digging up potatoes; happy childhood; Ernest Bates a black man who worked for his father; several different black domestic workers helped raise him; one named Hazel, and her daughter Katie was his first girlfriend; Ms. Thelma Perkins the reason he loves soul food today; would play at the recreation center near the house, and come home for lunch; black and white kids played together; she cooked smothered pork chops, smothered chicken, beef tongue, tripe, fried chicken; wife won't let him cook tripe in the house because of the odor; recalls integration; police man at his junior high, S.P. Arnett; black students being brought from Mossville to integrate Westlake Junior and High School; tension, but he chose not to be a part of it; homecoming cancelled because of racial tensions; raised in an environment where you respect people; father used to squeeze his hand to help him calm down; father a hard-working man who loved life; core values; wouldn't have wanted to grow up in any other era; fond memories of the television shows of the time, riding bikes to the ballfield, playing and swimming at the recreation center; brother Mickey graduated from McNeese in forestry and

would take him hunting; later learned he just wanted to shoot his duck limit; almost shot an arrow into friend Mark Moore's eye; paved the street in the 60s, and he made a killing with his lemonade stand; zip lines and carnival shows in the backyard; at fifteen, he had his own car; when he was a senior, got a brand new Pontiac Grand Am; as a sophomore, the seniors adopted him because he had a car and a boat; good times camping and skiing on the river; story of seeing a snake in the water; played on the state championship First Baptist basketball team; tried out for high school basketball team and coach kicked him off because he didn't get a haircut; Coach jokes he can join the team now, since he's bald; skipping class to go hunting was excused if they brought teachers ducks; in hindsight, wished he would have applied himself; calls money "fun coupons", the more you have, the more fun you can have; drawn to class clowns, because that was him; learned humor a great tool for building relationships; watches people, and enjoys impersonating them; this skill helped him get his auctioneer license in 2007; wife Sue also went to auctioneer school to learn business side; attended McNeese for a few years; decided local industry a better option; got hired at Conoco; Westlake and surrounding communities known as "bedroom communities" to the industries; memories of McNeese; girl he carpooled with the worst driver; pro-industry; worked eighteen years in operations, five years in environmental group; first duties as an operator at Conoco; learned to be a team player; practical jokes of employees; industries more strict than they were then; chain of command; observed business development employees delivering boudin, doughnuts, and pistolettes and decided he wanted that job; business development manager for Levingston Engineers for ten years; sells the work of engineers; started radio show Sportsman's Paradise in 1995, and it has kept him in public eye; extracurricular activities help him build rapport; met wife Sue in high school, but they didn't start seeing each other until their fifteen year class reunion; persistently pursued her and considers her his best friend; first-hand knowledge of DEQ and EPA; industry tries not to hurt environment; has faith in the agencies that watch the environment; trade off with lights, noise, traffic from the plants, but benefits to be considered; right in the middle of industry's EDC spill; remediation work; they did the right thing, in his opinion; mother's work inspired him to public service; overcoming public speaking nervousness; first time he ran for political office, he lost; campaigning process; story of a woman who recognized him as the boy who threw tomatoes at her car; when first elected as police juror, half of Mossville was in his district, now it's entirely in his district; childhood memories of Mossville; father had friends there; Mossville High School had good football team; names some families in Mossville; on the recreation board with Josh Rigmaiden, who Mossville recreation center named after; Coach Williams a mentor to him; appointed people to Mossville water board; enjoys being conduit between the problem and the solution for his constituents; always available by phone; beat incumbent police juror in a close election; toughest decisions in politics are zoning issues; rezoning Mossville to heavy industrial; opinions on Sasol's buyout program; wants to be proactive about future plans of the parish; different Police Jury responsibilities; biographical details of siblings; brother seventeen years older than him lived in New York City, and he attended Broadway shows at a young age; brother Mickey a hunter; sister Jan used to babysit him and would make him sandwiches when he "ran away"; her grandson is second baseman for Atlanta Braves; he has two children from first marriage, and wife Sue has two from her first marriage; raised Sue's nephew after her brother and his wife killed in car accident; married Sue on July 20th, same day as the lunar landing; father died in his arms; growing experience for him; mother died at ninety-three years old; believes he will see them in heaven; church background; memories of Gerald Washington; saw him the morning he died; doesn't know why he committed suicide, doesn't give credence to any

other theory of his death; his death is a hole in his heart; president of Police Jury when Hurricane Katrina and Rita hit; didn't know the Police Jury president becomes highest ranking official in a declared national disaster; making tough decisions, like whether or not to close schools; seeing what had happened with Katrina helped them mobilize efficiently; mandatory evacuation of Calcasieu Parish; Hurricane Rita a direct hit; people who didn't evacuate feared for their lives; his house and mother's house completely destroyed; recovery process; became close with General Honoré; meeting President George Bush; president tells him "Hey, today's the worst day. It's going to get better from here."; don't hear much about Rita because all the people worked together to rebuild; police protection; slept at the radio station; FEMA did a good job in Calcasieu parish; what makes southwest Louisiana special; culture of hospitality; personal approach to life; how he would like Mossville remembered; wants his work as an elected official to impact future opportunities of the area.

TAPES: 1 (T4641)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 58 minutes

#PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 79 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Four photographs taken during interview with McMillin at the Imperial Calcasieu Museum in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Photographer Kyle Tanglao.

OTHER MATERIALS: Interview questions (3 pgs); Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: none