

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Velton P. Guidry

COLLECTION: 4700.2096

IDENTIFICATION: Galliano, Louisiana Native [b. 1930, d. 2011]; fisherman [oyster and shrimp]; member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Galliano; amateur genealogist and historian

INTERVIEWER: Joshua Lambert and Stefan Jovicic

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History

INTERVIEW DATE: October 24, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1700s [early French settlements in Louisiana]; late 1800s [establishment of Catholic community in Bayou Lafourche]; 1930-1950 [childhood and early career]

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3942

Interview conducted in Cut Off, LA; Coastal Sustainability Studio at Louisiana State University; Guidry researches "everybody"; all Cajun "over here are related one way or another"; everyone with Guidry name "meets up" with Claude Guidry and Marguerite Petitpas; Claude was progenitor of all Guidrys in US, South LA, including Ron Guidry [baseball pitcher, b. 1950, played with Yankees 1975-88]; Guidry's paternal great grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Guidry married Marie Madeliene des Aidex Outremont, who was half-Indian [mother, Marie, was Indian, married Philippe de Outremont]; son was Claude Guidry, who married twice, Ann Lejeune and Ann Moise; came "over here" and started the Guidry family; deported from Acadie, Nova Scotia to France [Acadian Expulsion, 1755-1763], lost first wife, Ann Lejeune, and two children, on voyage; later married Ann Moise; after thirty years in France Guidry came to Louisiana, lived one year; lot of Guidry and Cheramie down here; tourist commissioner from Nova Scotia, named Boudreaux, visited last week; asked for research; Michel Boudreau and Michelle Aucoin started Boudreaux family; Guidry came up with 20,200 Boudreaux cousins in Louisiana; Guidry has been doing genealogy for almost fifty years; "love to do it," keep on adding new ones; "I know about everyone down here. I can't remember it all in my head, but I can go to my computer"; Guidry's work on a small, non-Cajun family, the Butchers [?]; grandfather was a Julia but there are none on bayou, mother don't know where her father's buried; publishing a book [?] on family; Guidry reads from an 1819 price list; cuspidor for spitting: 30¢; can of olive oil: 25¢; blue-label corned beef, large can: 25¢; Vienna sausage: 7¢; box of oatmeal: 35¢; bananas 10¢/dozen, 36 for 25¢; coal burning stove: \$6, [explains mechanics]; steam stove/wooden, like he used at school [cast iron 'belly' stove]; recalls slingshot, using mud marbles and chinaberry seeds; big brands were KB [?] and Prince Albert

[tobacco]; Virginia Astra and Target Tobacco; brogans work shoes with leather above ankle: \$1; washboard 75¢; using push lawnmower, charged 50¢ for large yard; before lawnmowers chickens would cut grass; Guidry family had cows [eight] but they froze one winter; used coal burners, then butane heaters; one winter butane froze and line broken inside house; Guidry would steam oysters on water pan on top of heater; Guidry attended school to seventh grade; didn't wear shoes until his mom bought a pair, "almost square like a barge, black and white"; Guidry was ashamed of them; family "couldn't afford to send me higher" [there was a school in Cut Off, LA]; walked to school; mom would make egg sandwich lunch; when father came back from oystering kids would have fried oyster sandwiches, "really something"; carried lunch bucket; story about size of brother Roy's bucket; strict teachers hit kids on end of finger with ruler; "today you would lose job"; teacher would send misbehaving kids to principal's for paddling, "you could hear it, pop, pop"; originally, there were no factories on bayou; started with peeling shrimp; mother would get up at 4am, go to shed to peel shrimp [mile walk]; come back before sunrise to milk cow before it went to the meadow for the day; go peel more shrimp; shrimp were put in barrels with ice, brought to Racine and put on train to New Orleans's restaurants; Mr. Dewitt [?] from Biloxi built a shed and factory that canned shrimp [first in Golden Meadow, c. 1928?]; shed on bayou side, packing place was on other side of highway [Highway 1, where town hall is now, Guidry remembers building]; mud [not gravel] road, only 5-10 cars a day but during rain no cars because mud made it impassable; Miss Frederick Collins, AKA Aunt Sussa, came to shed to sell homemade pies to shrimp-peelers; hygiene: would cover food with white cloth [lots of flies in shrimp shed]; made a living off sandwiches; most of people were farmers; shrimp peelers made \$6/day, better than farmer [\$3/day]; Guidry remembers building, there was dance hall close by; there was so much shrimp then that boats were sent out in rotation; fog horn blew to let people know there were fresh shrimp at the shed; "during the depression we was rich"; Guidrys had all their own food: seafood, garden, chicken; didn't suffer like others; mother would take milk that turned to buttermilk, put it in clean cloth and let it drain on clothesline to become cream cheese; buy coffee beans, roast and grind it same day; could smell neighbor's house; in one day she would make sixteen loaves of bread in mud oven outside; Guidry would play with Mason [?] Doucet, her son; snack of buttered bread, coffee with cream on top; "I'd give ten dollars today to drink a coffee like that, you can't buy it."; Doucet's deceased husband would make tobacco, wild tobacco plants all over yard; price of pipes; Guidry's father wore straw Panama hats; handmade locally with palmetto leaves, sold for 40¢; black pipe with curved handle: 50¢; 50-pound can of lard; 300-pound blocks of ice, put in a hulk of rice [?] to preserve; break it to chill shrimp; Guidry lists other shrimp factories; trawlers [now] sell to Chinese farmers to dry them, they are only buyers of shrimp; when Guidry was young, neighbors were spread out, corn or Irish potato fields between, planted sweet potatoes; "not one street out there"; Guidry's ancestor's arrival at Bayou Lafourche; when they landed they had to clear many acres every year, if you didn't you were "lazy and losing"; didn't look like today; vines, snakes, alligators, "you name it, they had it"; thanks Acadian ancestors "for what we have today"; people, hospitality "you'll never find it nowhere else"; they'll go out of their way to try to comfort you; won't slam door unless you try to sell them something; ancestors had land grants; started moving from above Raceland, LA; great-great-great-grandfather lived three miles above Raceland; sons kept coming down [south], so they live all the in south Lafourche; Cheramies, Guidrys down here first; a Spaniard [Jacques Grigo?] had bunch of land [three miles] on other side of bayou in Galliano, probably from Spanish land grant; great-great-grandfather, Olivier [?]

got himself and brother-in-law two miles along bayou; from Galliano bridge to close to here [Cut Off, LA]; grandfather was [Pierre] Caliste Guidry, married first cousin [Ozette] Carmelite Guidry; two brothers [married?] first cousins, three in a row [were] cousins; in “those days didn’t have many people so I guess that’s what happened”; all you could do was travel by horse, buggy, or pirogue; didn’t have dance hall to meet at; in Cut Off “most everyone” met their wives at Lee Brothers Dance Hall; Guidry found an underground tomb in Galliano; no one knows who’s buried there; Guidry’s father went to school in Galliano until the third grade [picture]; recounts father’s story about chamber pot salesman; Guidry shows pictures: Lockport in old days; young Velton; grandparents; giving CDs to library; Battalion Motor Sergeant, American Legion Service Officer; grandfather’s boat, Cincinnati [grandfather was oysterman]; Guidry used to troll in boat as 16-year-old; uncle fell from mast during hurricane and asked Velton to take the boat trolling; Guidry would stay out eighteen days; unload shrimp at freight boat twice a day [noon and at “knockoff time” 7pm]; father had boat too, Sipsy [?]; Guidry beat father with volume of shrimp; knew of school bus that brought kids to school in Houma [picture]; used to wonder how people got to school; a lot of people found work later in life at the Mr. Meer’s [?] store [in Leeville?]; father went shopping by boat, Guidry was so excited, “we went far away” [first time to Cut Off]; picture of Golden Meadow; catch oysters with a tong [?]; used to work on boat like that [picture]; put oysters in hull in at an angle; when the front part of hull full, put a plank [?] then put rest of oysters in; hard work; trapping with dad; with the west wind water would come into camp; only had oil lamp, so if the first one up hollered it meant camp had flooded; rats would swim over trap; Guidry would hang dead ducks on north side of camp, no sun hitting meant they stayed fresh; once it warmed up, to preserve duck partially cook, put in a 5-gallon can of pork lard; take out of lard, cook some more, just like fresh duck; good for six months; Guidry recalls childhood play and “past times”; made four-foot crutches [stilts]; wooden toys, boats and play in canal; made self-propelled boat with copper tube and hole through back, candle heated copper, produced smoke out back; playing “Gallot”[?]: make a hole, put marble in it, piece of steel plate, one that would cover the hole would win marble; played “pick” [?]: cut a branch of tree, stuck it in ground and held onto it, next guy would try to knock you down, if he couldn’t he would hit pick far away, had to hit ground six times before putting stick back; Indian wrestling: lay down side by side head to toe, “1-2-3 go” then hook up legs, whoever could flip the other one over was the winner; wrestling for fun; mother made my clothes of flour sack material; by end of day clothes were green [rather than white]; Guidry “doesn’t believe you could make a kid wear the kind of clothes I wore in my day”; mom would use RITE dye, tan fabric with that to almost white again; “we wasn’t rich”; most of time supper was a potato and onion with no meat; on Sunday mother would kill a chicken and fry it or buy string of #7 chop for 50 cents and make spaghetti [fed family of seven], couldn’t do that today; Guidrys never killed beef, but did kill pigs and chickens; only ate meat on Sunday; if mom didn’t have money for meat she’d “find something else”; of father was home she’d make oyster soup; camp on Barataria Bay; harvest bigorneaux [saltwater snail], which drill into oysters and kill them; to trap snails: 12’ long tree limb with pointed end, take palmetto leaves, nail them to post near bottom; oyster reef bed, and stick it in ground; next day dad would take skiff, 30’ long; rope on stern, big pole, pull it up, push it and skiff would go forward, go trap to trap; pull out trap, hit it in the skiff, maybe 100 snails would fall off leaves; would throw them on back [?], no way for snails to return to water, wasn’t like land snail that could crawl; Guidry liked to boil them; end of summer, caught pile of bigorneaux four feet high; mother used to make oyster soup so often the camp smelled like it; Guidry

remembers Sunday trip to Fort Livingston; steps, old cannon buried in sand, threat of snakes; tied their boat up in little bayou; old chimney there, called cheminee pep [Pep's chimney, after Pep Sanchez (?), who owned land]; Pep was very good with the sword, he'd kill any challenger [a *rendezvous*]; bought land "to get away from all that killing he was doing"; Guidry called it Canal Pep; at one point sugarcane grown and processed there; Guidry recalls going back to boat, running on beach; seeing something he thought was a big log that went *rarr!*; it was a big, blind alligator, had been in saltwater so long his eyes were white; Guidry stopped flat, went around, and told father; another time: Guidry's father brought them to Highland (?), which was full of white egrets, and they got eggs to cook at camp; to see if it was good, put it in water: if it sank they were good, if it floated they were no good, have hatch in them; never forget the trip [to Baratavia Bay]: best vacation I ever took; would get up to watch sunrise; "if ever I could go back for another vacation like that, I'd go tomorrow"; camp was built on island of built-up oyster shells; 300 feet by 100 feet wide with seven camps in area; used to run on oyster shells with no shoes; wouldn't be able to now, "have a hard time walking on blacktop"; only one that was painted was a shamby (?), white, rest was natural wood, all cypress "in those days", didn't have to paint; Guidry recalls trolling with father, started working in Gulf at thirteen; would go ten miles out in little boats, during the war; see someone raise their troll around 10 o'clock meant "oh, he's seen a submarine" and everyone would raise their trolls; Guidry remembers Coast Guard would check boats: fuel in drums, had to be 2x4 and bolted, when you went in and out; you couldn't have any lights on; blacked out windows in the "Indian room," where the young people used to hang and tell stories; one night had window down, Coast Guard came "hollering" to put the lights out; Guidry remembers when Exxon tanker blew up [the Brossar?], a big flame; sailors found floating, on the beach, bring them to Standard [oil] dock in Leeville; one time they passed a boat with a man tied to back, "must have had something to do with war; a lot of rationing, hard to get cigarettes and no sugar; during the war would sweeten with Karo [corn syrup]; you had stamps, when you ran out of stamps you couldn't buy no more; remember truckers used to pass and holler "we buy your aluminum!"; everyone would find old parts and sell them; during war we had to import rubber; finally came up with how to make synthetic rubber [necessary for tires]; postmen, toolpushers for rigs, could buy cars but you had to have a professional reason [for purchase]; Guidry discusses church history; used to be church mission in Cut Off made of cane reed covered in palmetto leaves: similar for first little chapel in Galliano; all little missions got destroyed by hurricanes of 1893 [Chenièr Caminada/ Great October Storm] and 1815 [1915 New Orleans Storm]; built another, wooden structure, in Galliano, first with a palmetto then steel roof; whenever Guidry was not working he'd go to church, "people was religious in those days"; priest would come to church twice a year to baptize and marry but didn't have a regular parish [another priest from another church would come down by boat]; no mass every Sunday, maybe once/month; Guidry has a book that tells about the church; [reading from book]: Old Assibia (?) church of Lockport, called Longville at one time, since 1842, met several times a year; settlers were primarily Catholic; parish history published in 1974 [125 anniversary of Parish]; received authorization from Archbishop Andre Bloun (?); small parcel, one arpents wide and two arpents deep, from Charles le Brun (?), framed chapel 30' x 50' constructed with no steeple; bell tower of cypress in yard; in 1850 blessed the church under invocation of St. Charles and St. Andre; became known as mission of St. Joseph in Thibodaux; a priest from Thibodaux would come regularly but not often; Our Lady of Prompt Succor in Golden Meadow, beautiful now, was palmetto then; [reading] one of two in diocese of Houma-

Thibodaux which owes its name to patron saint of Louisiana; many of parishioners are descendants of settlers who fled the ravaged coast of Louisiana at turn of century, after severe hurricane [1893 Cheniere Caminada]; Acadians moved further north on Bayou Lafourche; Golden Meadow was mission of Lady of the Rosary in Larose; in 1916 Father Yvez Guirelle [?], native of France, assigned to Golden Meadow mission; Father Guirelle called it St. Yvez [?] after his own patron; priest living was EJ Falgout's [?] houseboat; across the road was the former dance hall, first floor of building was converted into first church of Golden Meadow; father Guirelle was unsuccessful in convincing Golden Meadow to build a church and was transferred; pastor of Larose and administrator of Archdiocese tried to get a congregation; as protestant population began to grow a Catholic parish seen as necessity; 1918 father Euclair Blanchard [?] became Golden Meadow's resident pastor; 1822 [1922] the first mass was celebrated in new church; 1940s time and weather had taken toll on building; 1958 built new church; Guidry had no religion in school; had Catechism school in church [learned your catechism so you could make communion]; had Catholic school in Larose; first movie [in area] shown in building of that school; now Guidry goes to St. Joseph in Galliano; began as mission to serve Galliano, Cut Off, Golden Meadow, and Leeville; Golden Meadow eventually became parish, Galliano was last to become parish [1978?]; in 1899, St. Joseph became mission of Our Lady of the Rosary in Larose; chapel was known as St. Jacob; area was called Cote de Challime [?]; became Galliano with notion store [?]; parish had floorless church; rough woodwork, covered with palmetto; destroyed in hurricane of 1893; 1900 built larger church; celebrated once/ month priest with from Larose; currently there's two-three masses a week [Saturday afternoon, two Sunday]; Guidry goes "not too regular"; believes in Jesus Christ; wife is a regular; "I don't go like I should" [laughs]; Guidry wouldn't steal a penny from anyone and tries to not hurt; if he did more wrong he'd go to church more often and ask forgiveness; Guidry told priest "you've got two roads to take, father, you take the wrong road or the right road, I'm traveling the right road"; Guidry is not afraid to die; Guidry is like his father; "couldn't find anything wrong with him" though he never went to church; mother used to tell him to go to church; when Guidry started working he got out of habit [working thirty days come back for three]; it's like going to movies: the more you go to movies the more you want to go to the movies; beautiful church; cousin jumped off the steeple of the church and didn't break anything; Father Weiss [?], German during war [WWII], everyone said he was a spy [gossip about short wave radio in the steeple]; after dance at Lee Brothers a bunch of fellows wanted to "get him"; Father Weiss had to move, Guidry heard it was in Biloxi, MS; Guidry doesn't believe he was a spy; went to church and heard a preacher promote communism; priest later had confrontation with father about being a "good Christian"; Guidry never had any confidence in that priest; "my father was one of the best Christian they had";

TAPES: 1 (T3942)

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OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer index; Contact information; Obituary

RESTRICTIONS: None