

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Wayne Gauthier

COLLECTION: 4700.2420

IDENTIFICATION: Retired associate professor with the Louisiana State University (LSU)
Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: Session I: November 5 2014; Session II: February 10, 215

FOCUS DATES: Session I: 1950-1970; Session II: 1950-1980

ABSTRACT:

Session I
Tape 4356

Introduction; Gauthier is a retired professor; his parents grew up in Cottonport and Long Bridge, Louisiana; railroad track served as dividing line for school districts; Gauthier born in 1943, has two younger brothers, they own the family farm today; four black tenant families also lived on the property; Gauthier attended elementary and high school in Moreauville, Louisiana; his father got information on farming from cooperative extension agents; his uncle Conrad was a county agent; information on his paternal grandfather who married three times, lost two wives to childbirth; realized through his work at LSU that American agriculture was going through an evolution; remembers mules being the source of animal power on the farm; his father had training on buying and grading cotton, was dedicated to maintaining his cotton fields; black woman who did domestic work for the family back in his grandfather's time, she stayed on the property after her employment ended; father enrolled the family in Social Security; learning to milk the cow, negotiations with his brothers over who would milk; describes a freezer locker plant in Moreauville where his family could store meat and get butchery services; early-winter hog butchering and distribution of the meat; rice was a staple food; various preparations of cornmeal for breakfast; state-subsidized school lunches; his mother always prepared an afternoon snack; he and his brothers wore hand-me-down clothes; role and importance of 4-H in his school; 4-H agents were usually younger than county agents; 4-H services to school children often led to connections to local representative that assisted with funding; dealing with the boll weevil pest by spraying DDT on the crops; possible impact of DDT and pesticide use on tenant farmers, family's water source; tenant farmers had gardens, they shared vegetables with his family; his father only grew crops that he could also use residually, for example, to feed their hogs; father was always looking for ways to generate more economic activity for himself and tenant farmers; father worked as a cotton buyer; Gauthier's parents stressed education; Catholicism was the

dominant religion in Cottonport; his mother sent his father to shop for groceries; authority figures were teachers and county agents; county agents assisted his mother with plans for building a new home; he started with 4-H in grade school, his enterprise was hogs; participated in livestock shows but never progressed to state championships held at LSU; home demonstration agents interacted with women, taught canning and sewing; his brother Steven tried to raise sheep through 4-H but the sheep picked up worms and died; encountering Future Farmers of America (FFA) in high school; story of a failed pig chain project that ended when the initial family ate their pig for Thanksgiving; agriculture teacher tried to start a project where tenant families would plant fruit trees on their property before moving, project failed because no one wanted to labor for someone else's harvest; Earl Butz was a dean at Purdue University when Gauthier attended, he recalls a parable Butz told about socialist farmers in Russia and reflects on the meaning of it; expectations for high school graduates to soon be married, employed, or starting military service; 4-H agents were critical in getting students into college, they would identify promising students and work with LSU departments to find jobs on campus for them so they could afford their educations; farm boys transitioned to farm work at LSU, lived in campus housing and took care of plants or animals while taking classes; Gauthier was able to attend LSU through a connection with Dr. E.P. Roy who sent him an application for the Dean Lee scholarship; he worked in a cafeteria on campus and got some free meals; started at LSU in 1961, lived in the stadium where Billy Cannon's father was a janitor; support from his uncle Conrad while at LSU; Huey Long would tell boys to go speak with people at LSU and find employment so they could attend; story about Long partially funding the Field House pool by draining funds from the *Southern Review*; that incident caused Robert Penn Warren to write *All the Kings Men* and he soon left the state; Gauthier participated in ROTC, was glad to be in the air force; ROTC drills on campus; stayed with ROTC and received an education deferment in 1965; had to report for duty in 1967 while at Purdue and worked with his major professor to finish his master's early; attended Purdue because of E.P. Roy, majored in agribusiness; his father told him and his brothers to get educated so that they wouldn't have to work on the farm; father tried different endeavors after consulting with county agents; father sold shallots to someone out of New Orleans, sent them by refrigerated railcar; his uncle Conrad's influence helped him get through LSU, he sometimes bought Gauthier a steak dinner; various events that affirmed Gauthier's desire to be a middle-man, seeing men working hard to haul corn and pick cotton; memories of going to the cotton gin; his decision to major in agribusiness at LSU, a new discipline at that time; Purdue was a great educational experience; he was shy around women because he came out of a rural community and didn't have a car; studying and socializing while at LSU, nightclubs he attended with friends; contrasts sports and academic culture at LSU and Purdue, which explains why Purdue graduates are the astronauts; academic qualifications to attend LSU; he had to take a remedial math course but did well in English; fortunate that his parents and relatives stressed education; story about getting a random phone call from someone offering him a bicycle and being suspicious; conclusion.

Session II

Tape 4413

Introduction; Gauthier was an associate professor; participated in air force ROTC; ROTC drills on campus at LSU; was commissioned as a second lieutenant in May 1965; educational deferment allowed him to pursue a master's degree at Purdue; had to hastily complete his degree when he got orders to report for service in September 1967; memories of his thesis defense; his

father helped him get a car so he could travel to Kelly Air Force Base in Texas; spent almost two years at Kelly and almost two years at Shu Linkou Air Station in Taipei, Taiwan; he enjoyed the service and almost stayed in it; training involved drills, physical tasks, timed maneuvers; quality of the land in West Texas is much different than Louisiana; he once fell asleep during a training on astronomy; he accumulated many demerits one day but didn't have to walk them off because the cadets won a baseball game against the cadre; eating a snake during one overnight training exercise; a training exercise that involved a lot of running back and forth in the heat, then having to stand in formation and watch an officer drink a cold Coke; lots of aggravating experiences and hurrying up to wait in the military; memories of Shu Linkou and his responsibilities there; aspects of mortuary officer duty, one widow asked if he could return a chair to Sears for her; San Antonio, Texas, is home to several military institutions thanks to Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson; enjoyed military service because he was burnt out on school; recreational time while in the service, he met some nice women and enjoyed the time; R&R locations for soldiers in Vietnam; incident where employees at enlisted clubs were skimming money from slot machines; pressure from above when you're in the military; encouraging soldiers to participate in United Way and savings bonds, there were many loopholes to get desirable statistics for your unit that looked good on paper; similar situation when he attempts to recycle paper at LSU, he thinks it may be for show; performance evaluations can be misleading; someone needs to play the bad guy, he saw that in the military where a commander would be strict and his deputy would be more accommodating; kept up his military affiliation through the reserves; explanation of how the Selective Service System and the order of call work to bring young men into the military; more men are drafted than are actually needed because many don't make the cut physically or mentally; evaluations take place at Military Entrance and Processing Stations; military service took him places that he never would have gone; once he was charged with being the officer of the day and had to wake up at three AM to salute a general that was boarding an airplane, just another example of aggravation; after leaving Taipei, he returned to Long Bridge and bought a car; tenant farmers were mostly gone from the property by then; tenant farmers had impacted his rearing; his father was faced with the choice to give tenant farmers an acre of land each, or ask them to move, it caused him a lot of consternation; family lawyer counselled that he should not give away any land because it was mortgaged; his father didn't worry about the current tenant farmers, but worried about what their successors would do after inheriting the land; tenant farmers eventually moved away; his father sold the timber from the tenant homes; Gauthier took down the last of the homes after his father's death and after most of the original tenant farmers had passed away; the homes were shotgun houses; he found some memorabilia on the property from the railroad depot that used to be located nearby, but someone stole the items; someone bought the timber from the cotton gin and built a home from it; he identifies with farmers better because he was raised on a farm; his uncle, Conrad, was part of Cooperative Extension Service in St. Martin Parish and served for thirty years; his father would attend extension meetings, was trained in cotton buying; father allotted land to four tenant farmers, they provided labor and took care of the mules in exchange for the land, were paid for picking cotton and crops; father grew some truck crops during the fall, got advice from county agents; attempts to grow the red pepper for Tabasco failed because picking by hand was risky to one's eyes; father grew shallots that tenant farmers prepared for sale to a Mr. Christina; extension agents interacted with tenant families as well; 4-H participation when Gauthier was in school; he participated in livestock shows but never progressed to state championships held at LSU; tenant farmers' children did not participate in 4-H; home demonstration agents and other activities on the farm; extension

services provided advice and counsel; memories of picking cotton and bringing it on a wagon to the gin in Cottonport, Louisiana; his father was a cotton buyer at the gin; father also grew sweet corn; extension service introduced and attracted students to LSU; a county agent helped his mother design a new home for the family; county and 4-H agents were critical in getting students into college, would identify promising students and work with LSU departments to find jobs on campus for them so they could afford an education; technology-induced changes mean that many smaller farms have now been absorbed; technology has largely displaced human labor; metaphor of a three-legged stool made up of teaching at the university level, research taking place at research stations, and the extension service; story about Norman Efferson proving to his father that fertilized crops were more productive; extension agents do the same in teaching farmers new practices; differences in techniques for harvesting sugarcane; extension agents have to earn the trust of farmers, their income isn't dependent on what farmers can yield; the extension system bring everything together; conclusion.

TAPES: 2 (T4356, T4413)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: Total – 3 hours, 46 minutes
Session I: 1 hour, 41 minutes
Session II: 2 hours, 5 minutes

PAGES: Total – 55 pages
Session I index: 11 pages
Session II transcript: 44 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Photos (37); Two interview question lists (7 pgs each); Interview follow-up questions (2 pgs); Blurb (1 pg); Inventory (1 pg); Correspondence (1 pg)

RESTRICTIONS: None