



# History of the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry in Southern Louisiana

## Volume III: Morgan City's History in the Era of Oil and Gas – Perspectives of Those Who Were There



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Author

Diane E. Austin

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## **ABOUT THE COVER**

Offshore rig, vessels, and barge in the Gulf of Mexico, May 1956, Jesse Grice Collection (photo number 242-16), Morgan City Archives.

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## PREFACE

The development of the offshore petroleum industry is a remarkable story of inventiveness, entrepreneurship, hard work, and risk-taking that turned Louisiana's relatively isolated coastal communities into significant contributors to the United States and global economies. This industry emerged as local residents and returning World War II veterans applied skills, technologies, and can-do attitudes to overcome the many challenges of producing oil from below the ocean floor. Offshore workers initially came from Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, but soon people from throughout the United States were attracted to the Gulf Coast. This industry, born in the Louisiana marshes, has grown to have a key place in the modern world. Yet, it is little known, understood, or documented, and its dynamic economic role is virtually invisible.

To explore the history and evolution of this industry and the people and communities where it was born, in 2001 the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) sponsored a study to examine the historical evolution of the offshore oil and gas industry and its effects on Louisiana's coastal culture, economy, landscape, and society. The study represented the convergence of the ideas of several people who recognized that an important piece of history – the origins of the offshore petroleum industry – was being lost and that capturing it would require the use of published works, periodicals and other documents, and oral histories. The idea for the study was supported by the Social Science Subcommittee of the MMS Scientific Committee, staff from MMS Headquarters and the Gulf of Mexico Region office in New Orleans, members of the business and academic communities, and Louisiana civic leaders and educators. As a result, researchers from universities in Louisiana, Texas, and Arizona came together to trace the development of the industry from land and marsh to state waters and then out across the Outer Continental Shelf.

Research of the MMS Environmental Studies Program provides information and analysis in support of MMS decision-making and assessment. From the beginning, a principal aim of the history study was to establish a collection of audio recordings of interviews with workers, company owners, family members, community leaders, and others whose lives were shaped by the offshore oil and gas industry in southern Louisiana. The focus of the study was on the earliest days, especially the period from the 1930's to the 1970's. Interviewees talked about how this industry grew from its fledgling beginning in the coastal wetlands and inner bays in the 1930's through the frenzied activity of the 1970's and beyond. The interviews ranged from very general conversations about life in southern Louisiana to very specific discussions of particular aspects of the oil and gas industry.

The study began with a team of researchers from the Center for Energy Studies at Louisiana State University (LSU), the Departments of History and Business at the University of Houston (UH), the Program in Public History Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL), and the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona (UA). The LSU team was led by Dr. Allan Pulsipher and included Ric Pincomb and Dr. Don Davis. Drs. Tyler Priest and Joseph Pratt led the UH team and were assisted by Jamie Christy, Joseph Stromberg, and Tom Lassiter. Suzanne Mascola transcribed the UH interviews. At ULL, Dr. Robert Carriker was assisted by Steven Wiltz and David DiTucci.

Drs. Diane Austin and Thomas McGuire of the UA were assisted by many people. Ari Arand, Emily Bernier, Andrew Gardner, Rylan Higgins, Scott Kennedy, Christina Leza, Lauren Penney, Jessica Piekelek, Dr. James Sell, and Joanna Stone conducted interviews and helped summarize and transcribe them. Kevin Bulletts, Jacqueline Dorfman, Justin Gaines, Mary Good, Kris Larson, Karen Morrison, Stephanie Pagac, Megan Prescott, Sherri Raskin, Jeremy Slack, and Maisa Taha helped transcribe and edit interviews and manage the project office, website, and multimedia products. UA researchers were supported by community assistants in Houma, Raceland, and New Iberia: Lois Boutte, Charlene Broussard, Norma Cormier, Nicole Crosby, Carolyn Cummings, Robyn Hargrave, and Debbie Touns. They received tremendous support from local organizations and individuals, especially the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, Bayou Native Bed and Breakfast, C.J. Christ, the Desk and Derrick Clubs of Morgan City and New Orleans, the Louisiana Technical College Young Memorial Campus, the Morgan City Archives, the Morgan City Daily Review, the Nicholls State University Archives, Steve and Jean Shirley, and the United Houma Nation.

Over 450 interviews were recorded during this study. The tapes and discs onto which the interviews were recorded and the transcripts of the interviews are available in the archives of the University of Houston, Louisiana State University, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and Nicholls State University. Each interview provides a unique look at the offshore oil and gas industry and its impacts on workers, their families, and their communities.

In addition to the recorded interviews, six volumes were produced during this project. The first, *Volume 1: Papers of the Evolving Offshore Industry*, is a collection of analytical papers, each of which deals with an important aspect of the evolution of the offshore oil and gas industry. That volume is followed by three more, *Volume 2: Bayou Lafourche – Oral Histories of the Oil and Gas Industry*; *Volume 3: Morgan City’s History in the Era of Oil and Gas – Perspectives of Those Who Were There*, and *Volume 4: Terrebonne Parish*, all of which examine the offshore oil and gas industry through the lens of a particular community or region of southern Louisiana. *Volume 5: Guide to the Interviews* summarizes information about the interviews, including how each interviewee became involved in the study, his or her family and/or occupational history, and particular highlights of the interview. The final volume, *Volume 6: A Collection of Photographs*, is a compilation of photographs, diagrams, and other visual images that were collected from interviewees during the study.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study began as a simple idea and grew into a major, multiyear effort involving hundreds of current and former residents of Morgan City, Louisiana. In the fall of 2000, Rylan Higgins, at that time a graduate student at the University of Arizona, moved to Morgan City to conduct an oral history study of offshore pioneers there. Rylan began with contacts he had made when living in Morgan City during 1998 and 1999 as a member of a University of Arizona research team studying the impacts of the offshore oil and gas industry on individuals and families within Morgan City and New Iberia, Louisiana (Austin and McGuire, 2002). Rylan's idea was consistent with the interests of several program managers of the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) who had recommended a study of the history and evolution of the offshore oil and gas industry in southern Louisiana. The full study is described in the Preface to this report.

Rylan's initial efforts were welcomed by many people in Morgan City, and as the study grew, so did community support for the project. As a result, between 2001 and 2005, more than 100 people who had lived and/or worked in Morgan City agreed to be interviewed as part of this project. It is impossible to thank each one individually; their names are included in the Profiles sections at the beginning of the report chapters. In addition, numerous residents from Morgan City and other southern Louisiana communities shared over 1,000 photographs of the petroleum industry and its impacts on their communities. Many of those photos are included in this report. The individual who donated each photograph is acknowledged in the caption for the photo. Thanks go to everyone who willingly shared your time and stories and served as gracious hosts to the research team members.

Several people and institutions deserve special recognition, for without them this study could not have been completed. First, Steve and Jean Shirley and the staff of Morgan City's *Daily Review* were unwavering in their support for the project and the research team members, many of whom lived at the Shirley house over the course of the study. In addition, special appreciation goes to Malisa Mayon and the staff of the Morgan City Archives for their continuing assistance, encouragement, and good humor. I am truly grateful for the generosity, concern for the community, and commitment to recognizing the efforts of the offshore pioneers of these special people.

Special thanks are due to the members of the University of Arizona and University of Houston research teams with whom I conducted the interviews that form the core of this report – Emily Bernier, Jamie Christy, Andrew Gardner, Rylan Higgins, Christina Leza, Lauren Penney, and Joanna Stone – and to the reviewers – Jerry Cunningham, Pete Rogers, and Malisa Mayon – who proofread this report and helped fix errors. Any remaining errors are the fault of the author.

Finally, this study would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Harry Luton, who championed and supervised the study, first in the Gulf of Mexico Region, MMS, New Orleans, and then from the agency's headquarters in Herndon, Virginia. The unwavering support of Harry and others at the MMS ensured that this study would be completed.

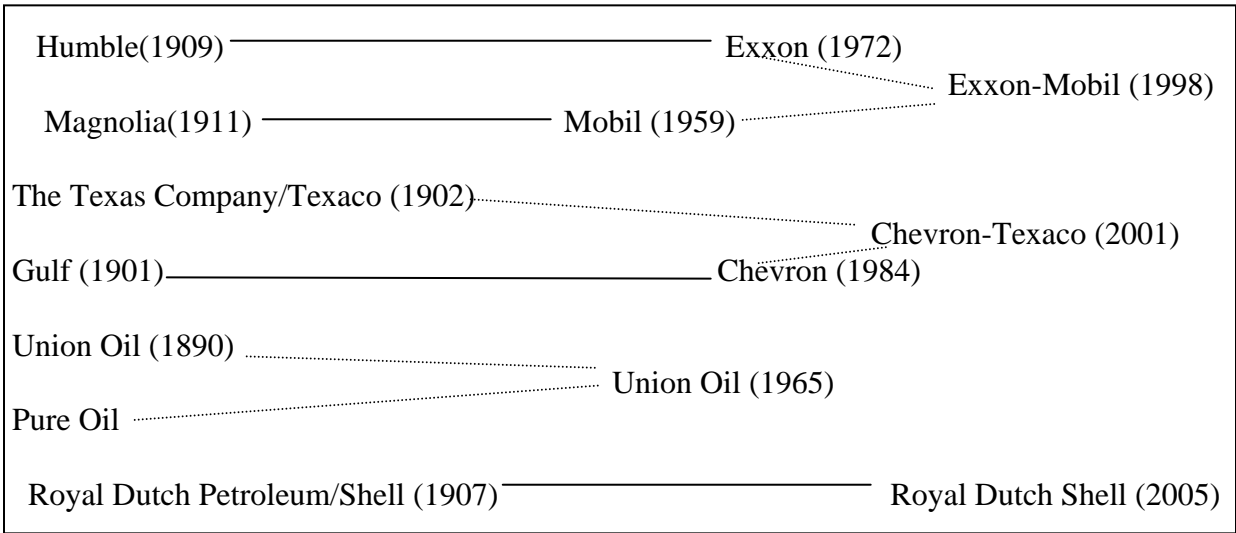
# 1. INTRODUCTION

At the start of the twenty-first century, signs of the offshore oil and gas industry dominated the landscape of Morgan City, Louisiana, and the nearby communities of Berwick, Bayou Vista, Patterson, and Amelia. Only 100 years before, oil and gas resources in the region had no commercial value. Yet, even then, the seeds for the acceptance and promotion of the petroleum industry had already been sown. The arrival and success of the industry must be examined in light of the region's past. Therefore, this document examines the history and evolution of the offshore oil and gas industry in Louisiana as it was experienced in Morgan City and the communities that surround it. The information is drawn from oral history interviews conducted between 2000 and 2005 with people who lived this history, and from newspapers and other archival sources, all of which were reviewed as part of the Offshore Oil and Gas History Project (OOGHP).

The goal of this report is to capture the history of the offshore oil and gas industry within a particular community during a particular time. Each of the individuals who participated in this project has his or her own fascinating story to tell, and it is impossible in a report of this length to do justice to any of them. Likewise, this report does not document the development of the industry or its specific technologies.

This report is divided chronologically into sections, and each section begins with profiles of people who are first introduced in the section. These individuals all lived or worked in and around Morgan City, and they describe how they experienced the offshore oil and gas industry and its effects. These individuals enrich our understanding of the way in which the industry developed and evolved in the area. The introductory profiles illustrate the diversity of Morgan City residents and provide a brief introduction to the people whose stories are included throughout the document. Quotations are taken from transcripts of recorded interviews, identified by the full name of the interviewee, unless otherwise noted.

Over the 50 years covered by this report, from the 1930's to the 1980's, the companies that searched for, found, and extracted oil and gas in southern Louisiana and the waters of the Gulf of Mexico were reorganized several times. Figure 1.1 summarizes the name changes and lineages of the major companies in the region during this period. Interviewees used both the names in effect during the periods they talk about and those by which the companies were later known, often interchangeably. Names appropriate to the time period being discussed are included in brackets where relevant.



**Figure 1.1. Tracing the Names of Major Petroleum Companies in the Gulf of Mexico Offshore Oil and Gas Industry.**

## 2. SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE 1800's

*The history of Morgan City and the communities surrounding it is closely intertwined with the ecology and geography of the region. Morgan City sits on Tiger Island, a nine by two-plus mile stretch of land at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River and surrounded by Berwick's Bay, Bayou Boeuf, Flat Lake, and Lake Palourde. As an important transportation node for people and cargo being moved over rail and water, the city developed into a center of commerce, serving the needs of first the sugar and then the lumber industry during this period.*



**Figure 2.1. Morgan City and the Surrounding Waterways. Photo Courtesy of the Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*The earliest inhabitants of what is today recognized as St. Mary Parish were Native Americans of the Chitimacha and Chewasha groups (Goins and Caldwell, 1995; Kniffen et al., 1987). Conflict over land and resources, French slave trading, and disease reduced their numbers and pushed those groups north. Other Native Americans came into the region over the next several hundred years, though none of them established large communities there.*

*In 1765, the French colonial administration established the first settlement of Acadian immigrants along Bayou Teche in what is now the St. Martinville-Loreauville area, northwest of Morgan City (Dormon, 1983). The first group of Acadians, also known as “Cajuns,” had been exiled from Nova Scotia in 1755. By 1785, several waves of Acadian immigrants had settled in southern Louisiana, and they occupied dispersed settlements up and down the Mississippi River and along the bayous to the south and west.*

*Morgan City's recorded history begins with sugar. Colonists first successfully cultivated sugar cane in Louisiana in the 1750's, but early varieties were not well suited to the region's climate (Louisiana State University, 2002). Also, not until the end of the century was cane successfully granulated into sugar in Louisiana. At that time, the industry quickly spread from its core in New Orleans, and, by 1810, it occupied a premier position in the agricultural milieu of the Mississippi River delta. St. Mary Parish became the western frontier of this expansion (Follett,*

2000; Follett, 2005). Aggressive newcomers with significant capital displaced Native Americans, Acadians, and other small landholders from desirable lands that fronted the bayous and navigable waterways of the region (Dormon, 1983).



**Figure 2.2. Morgan City in Relation to New Orleans and the Mississippi River.**

Economic success was derived from large landholdings where fertile soil, capital, slave labor and transportation were available and brought planters and merchants together in close alliance (Follett, 2000; Follett, 2005). Waterways were dredged and utilized to transport sugar to New Orleans merchants who would market the sugar. Much effort was expended draining wetlands and protecting sugarcane fields from floods. In addition to their work in the fields and sugar mills, slaves were used for levee construction and maintenance.

Almost as soon as sugar cultivation began in Louisiana, sugar planters began to move into the Morgan City area and establish large landholdings. Thomas Berwick has been identified as the first such settler in St. Mary Parish, where in the mid-1780's he established a large plantation on land that includes present-day Berwick and part of Tiger Island (Morgan City Historical Society, 1960). Following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the Territory of Orleans, which included Morgan City, was divided first into counties and then into civil parishes (Louisiana State Museum, 2006).

Dr. Walter Brashear relocated to southern Louisiana from Kentucky around 1809 and built a home and sugar mill where he raised cane and cattle (Morgan City Historical Society, 1960). He continued to acquire property and soon had sugar plantations on both the east and west sides of Berwick Bay. Between 1824 and 1847, he served first as a state legislator and then as a state senator. In 1842 he divided his property among his three children. Two of the children, Robert B. and Thomas Brashear, donated part of the Tiger Island Sugar Plantation, which had originally been set aside for a school, as a town site to establish Brashear City (Bentley, 1876). They used



their firm of R. B. Brashear & Company to develop the town and subdivided it into lots in anticipation of the coming railroad.

Rail and steamships arrived in Brashear City at the same time. Connecticut-born Charles Morgan inaugurated the first steamship service of the Southern Pacific Company in the late 1840's, operating between New Orleans, Texas, and the Mexican coast, though the service did not reach Brashear City at the time (Morgan City Historical Society, 1960). The New Orleans Opelousas & Great Western Railroad was incorporated in 1853 and successfully crossed the swamps from New Orleans to be the first to reach Brashear City in July 1857. That same year, the Galveston and Opelousas steamship company, owned by Cornelius Vanderbilt of New York, brought the first regular steamship line to the city (Bentley, 1876). Within two years, Morgan purchased two steamers from Vanderbilt and operated them between Brashear City and Texas. By then, Louisiana planters were producing one fourth of the world's sugar and were among the South's wealthiest slaveholders (Rodrigue, 2001). The growing transportation system was critical for linking them with merchants in New Orleans and elsewhere. Plans for extension of the railroad beyond Brashear City were suspended with the outbreak of the Civil War when the railroad and steamships were taken over by the military authorities of the United States (Morgan City Review, 1952). As a result, even into the 1880's lack of reliable transportation to larger refineries meant that most farms in St. Mary Parish operated their own mills (Schmitz, 1976).

Sugar proved to be a capital intense industry and established grueling conditions for work. Steam-operated mills increased efficiency and economic success and set the pace of work to unbending regimes as cultivation had to keep up with mill processing; slave workers were cycled through cane sheds at different points day and night (Follett, 2000; Follett, 2005). The introduction of steam power also meant that plantations required significant amounts of wood. Sugar masters paid slaves to cut and haul wood and to raise corn for food. Because steam power was expensive, larger farmers and commercial partnerships had a distinct advantage. By the late 1840's, the trend was toward consolidation of estates, intensification of operations, and mechanization. From 1850 to 1860, planters seized rich levee crests, drained swamps, constructed canals and dredged rivers, and acquired their neighbors' properties. Over the decade, the average number of acres per farm in St. Mary Parish increased from 230 to 413 acres (Follett, 2005).

The rapid importation of slaves resulted in a majority black rural population outside New Orleans; most of the state's 47 parishes had more slaves than whites (Highsmith, 1955). By 1860, in St. Mary Parish, more than 13,000 slaves outnumbered less than 3,500 whites (Follett, 2005). Planters struck out violently against slaves who threatened the plantation order (Follett, 2005).

*Brashear City was incorporated by an act of the Louisiana legislature on March 8, 1860. During the Civil War, federal officials recognized the value of the region's vast sugarcane plantations, railway, and port and were determined to capture the city as part of Winfield Scott's Anaconda plan to "strangle" Confederate resistance. Confederate troops had begun preparing for war by the end of 1861 (Morgan City Historical Society, 1960). In 1862, Union forces invaded the city, though the city changed hands several times by the time the war ended in 1865. Toward the end*

*of the war, in September 1864, Louisiana's constitution formally abolished slavery (Rodrigue, 2001).*

After the war, slaves deserted plantations en masse, with women in particular withdrawing from the plantation labor force (Highsmith, 1955; Schmitz, 1976). This contributed to a labor shortage that extended for several years after the war even though laws passed in 1865 extended the police powers of the state to force blacks to work. Planters used scrip payments and wage withholdings to maintain control over laborers, and blacks began organizing themselves, alongside whites, in some areas of southern Louisiana (Rodrigue, 2001). Though southern Louisiana did not experience the level or degree of violence that plagued the northern part of the state where cotton plantations dominated, organized gangs nevertheless embarked on a campaign of intimidation and violence against blacks, and an atmosphere of fear pervaded the region. Freedmen of St. Mary Parish were among those leading efforts to demand better wages and working conditions, regardless of the threats against them. In the wake of the national financial crisis of 1873, planters in Terrebonne, Lafourche, and St. Mary parishes attempted to organize themselves to uniformly reduce wages and aggressively recruit workers from cotton regions. Such actions resulted in the formation of the first union in the sugar regions, followed by strikes and, eventually, further violence (Gould, 1984; Hair, 1969).

The stereotypical "Cajun" lifestyle, characterized by community solidarity, strong kinship ties, and love of fun and frolic, was born in the economic hard times following the war when southern Louisiana residents with little or no landholdings survived through annual cycles of lumberjacking, trapping, hunting, and fishing, supplemented by small-scale agriculture (Dormon, 1983; Brasseaux, 1992; Rushton, 1979). These residents sought to expand their seasonal harvests of these resources and sell the excess to generate income. At this time, Brashear City was a small urban area in the midst of vast wetlands and sugarcane fields. Cajun families who lived in the outlying areas would come into the city for work, school, and commerce.



**Figure 2.3. Logging in the Swamps around Morgan City. Photo Courtesy of Bernie Overhultz, Morgan City Archives.**

Congress passed the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 in an attempt at major reform of land tenure in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Florida (Lanza, 1990). Designed primarily to allow freedmen to acquire and settle on public land, the Act also restricted disposition of swamp lands that were unfit for cultivation. Its effectiveness was frustrated by political abuses, bureaucratic ineptitude, and racism. Because most of the valuable cypress forests were on swampland, those seeking to profit from these forests challenged the policy that allowed the transfer to private hands only those public lands that were fit for cultivation (Norgress, 1947). With the Timber Act of 1876, Congress opened up vast tracts of yellow pine and cypress swamp lands in Louisiana, and fine virgin cypress timber went to market for as little as 25 and 50 cents an acre (Norgress, 1947). Still, not until the 1890's after the depletion of northern forests and development of new techniques of logging, was the cypress industry developed in earnest (Mancil, 1969).

Northern capital was responsible for significant social and environmental changes as northerners invested in rail lines and steamships, established schools, dredged channels, and renamed local communities. In 1869, Charles Morgan purchased the bankrupt New Orleans Opelousas Great Western Railroad at a marshal's sale and renamed it Morgan's Louisiana and Texas Railroad (Bentley, 1876). He also financed the dredging of a deeper channel through the Atchafalaya Bay to accommodate his fleet of 17 steamboats. Captain John Pharr ran a regular line of steamboats in Bayou Teche, and in the summer of 1875 a group of residents established a pleasure resort at Lake Palourde (Bentley, 1876). The Census of 1875 reported that Brashear City contained 1,961 persons with a small majority of them being white (Bentley, 1876). Brashear City was renamed Morgan City by a February 8, 1876 Act of the state legislature.

The opening up of the South and the desperate economic situation of many planters who had lost land, equipment, and labor during the war caused some to turn to timber and brought in additional northerners who bought swamp and marshland for the timber rights and helped established the cypress lumber industry. State officials supported the Timber Act and argued they would benefit from the increased revenue derived from both sales and taxation (Norgress, 1947). In 1877, Louisiana Governor Francis T. Nicholls recommended to the state's General Assembly that the swamp lands be divided into three classes, a price be fixed on each class, and restrictions be removed on the quantities to be purchased under each class. The policies functioned as anticipated: massive acreage was passed from the public to private domain and political power remained in the hands of the large landholders who used their positions to ensure their continued success.

The story of John Pharr illustrates the interconnections between sugar, timber, and political power. Pharr was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina on March 19, 1829.<sup>1</sup> The son of a cotton planter, he moved to Louisiana and acquired steamboats, sawmills, timber lands, and sugar plantations. He lost his slaves during and after the Civil War and purchased steamboat lines on the Atchafalaya River. In 1874, when virgin cypress swamp could be purchased for 50 cents to a dollar an acre, Pharr developed an interest in the timber industry, built sawmills on his property, and became a senior partner in two major lumber companies. In 1896, he was the

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<sup>1</sup> Information on John Pharr taken from Folder 19, "Pharr-Williams Lumber Company," in Box 26, "Lumbering in St. Mary," Morgan City Archives, Morgan City, LA.

Republican candidate for Louisiana state governor. He and his sons purchased three sugar plantations, and at his death Pharr was the largest landholder in the state.

Another lumberman, Charles Richard Brownell, moved to Louisiana from Michigan in 1866<sup>2</sup>. He settled in Berwick and helped organize the Berwick Lumber Company, which was incorporated on February 26, 1889. In 1900 he formed a partnership with Gus Drews and his son, Charles Horace, and the three built the Brownell-Drews Lumber Company. His grandson, C.R. Brownell, became a state representative and served in that capacity for many years. In 1922, C.R. moved to Morgan City and assumed responsibility for the family interests.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Morgan City was a bustling center of commerce with a population of about 2,500 (Glass,1898). Sugar cane remained the principal crop of the St. Mary Parish, and fields surrounded the city. Lumber companies had been established in nearby Patterson and Franklin. In addition, the oyster and fish trades contributed to the city's economy. The city boasted a customhouse, courthouse, post office, and newspaper, as well as a dance hall, orchestra, bank, icehouse, soda pop manufacturer, three physicians, a dentist, an attorney-at-law, three hotels, and numerous merchants.

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<sup>2</sup> Information on Charles Brownell taken from Folder 4, "Brownell-Drews Lumber Company," in Box 26, "Lumbering in St. Mary," Morgan City Archives, Morgan City, LA.

### 3. THE TURN OF THE CENTURY TO THE EARLY 1940's

*The earliest years of the twentieth century were marked by rapid advances in the timber industry. Morgan City's population continued to grow, and the city began to earn its label as "cosmopolitan;" especially when compared to the ethnic enclaves that dotted the southern Louisiana coast. In 1917, the first Tarzan movie was made in Morgan City. During World War I, Mrs. M. M. Young of Morgan City leased property to the U.S. government for the establishment of a Union Bridge and Iron facility. This shipyard constructed Navy wartime vessels (Morgan City Outlook, 1917). By 1930, the lumber industry had cut over the most valuable timber and was shutting down. Workers lost their jobs, families moved away, and residents who remained were eager for new economic opportunities.*

*During the 1930's, fishing and oil development surged past the declining timber industry. Oilfield developments were followed closely in local newspapers and contributed to a new influx of newcomers to the region. By 1939, the demand for housing greatly exceeded supply, and "people engaged in the seafoods industry, in oil development and other industries that are rapidly developing in and surrounding" Morgan City were reported to be living as far away as Houma (Morgan City Review, 1939a). Efforts to increase the housing supply for both "transients" and "permanent citizens" led to a building boom in Morgan City and Berwick (Morgan City Review, 1939b and 1939d).*

#### 3.1. Profiles

**Jake Giroir** was born in 1911 and grew up hunting and trapping in the swamps around Morgan City. In the mid-1930's, he got a job working for a local sawmill. On August 9, 1936, Jake got a job with a surveying crew working in the southern Louisiana swamps. He recruited several of his friends, and their job was to cut rights-of-way through the swamps for surveyors working for oil companies. His job took him as far away as Texas. When he finally got some time off to return to Morgan City, Jake met someone from Shell's new plant in Gibson, Louisiana, and he accepted a job managing trucks for the Gibson field. In 1938, he moved on to roughneck on drilling rigs at West Lake Verret and then was transferred to Galveston Bay in 1939, where he was working when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Within a few weeks, he joined the Navy and served in the South Pacific during WWII. After the war, Jake got a production job at Weeks Island, but he returned to drilling and construction

when Shell began drilling offshore. Jake retired from Shell after 41 years with the company.

**Joe Taylor** was born in Texas in 1913 and began working for the Texas Company as a young man in 1935 and finished his career in Louisiana with the same company (which by then had become Texaco). Joe started out as a roughneck in Texas. In 1940, he was living in Morgan City when he got a deferment from the draft because of his work in the oil field. By the end of his career, he was a drilling and production foreman and had seen quite a bit of change in the industry.

**LA "Pete" Rogers** was born in Patterson, Louisiana in 1914. Pete's first job was with a timber company. During the 1930's, along with Parker Conrad, he drove trucks full of shrimp to Morgan City. He went to work for Shell Oil in 1935 as part of an exploration

crew, but following a temporary layoff in 1940 he decided to join the military. During WWII he earned his nickname, "Frenchie," by serving as an interpreter in Africa. When he got back from WWII in 1945, he joined the production department at Shell. He retired in 1976 after 35 years

**Nelson Constant** was born in 1914 and raised in Kramer, Louisiana. His childhood was unique because his mother was a teacher and ensured that he finished high school, even though it meant he had to live with several different aunts. He entered the oil field after working in his father's store for several years and getting to know a party chief who did business with the store. He began with a survey crew in the swamp and advanced quickly to surveyor and permit man, jobs which he kept for most of his 23-year career in the industry. Other than a brief trip to Georgia to shoot a well, Nelson spent his entire career working in southern Louisiana. When he left the industry, he went to work planting soybeans and then built some crawfish ponds.

**Pete Gardner** was born the son of a sharecropper in 1916 in Scurry, Texas. He graduated from high school in 1932 and went to work on a farm until he got a job in the oil field in 1934. He worked on his first drilling job based in Morgan City in 1936, living as a nomad with his wife and other members of the crew as they moved from site to site to drill new wells. He then moved to Lafayette and worked on discovery fields for Smith and McDaniel Drilling Company. In 1938 he lost an eye on a rig that was on contract to Tidewater Oil Company, was out of work for four months, and went back to the derricks. He then went to work for Dixie Drilling and was there when WWII began. Although he only had one eye, he was drafted to serve in the Army during the war. After the war, he returned to work for Dixie until 1952, when

he went to work for his brother as a drilling superintendent until 1962. He then went to work for Sharp Gulf Drilling Company in 1964 and stayed there until the company folded. He then bought a service station in Franklin.

**RD Pitre** was born in 1918 in Fletcher, Texas, near Beaumont. He graduated from Hull-Daisetta High School and went to work for his oldest brother, Leo, at Pitre Water Well Drilling Company. He attended Texas A&M in 1936 for six months and then went to work in 1938 roughnecking for Sun Oil Company at Chacahoula, Louisiana. RD worked in the seismograph department for Sun all over Texas in 1939. He married in 1941, and he and his wife moved nine times for Sun Oil. RD went to Beaumont to work on the pipeline, and was also in Liberty, Baton Rouge, Thibodeaux, and Morgan City in his 46 years with Sun Oil.

**John Dilsaver** was born in North Carolina in 1920. He moved to Morgan City in 1938 to work on a shrimp boat. In 1951, John built his first crew boat to service the offshore oil fields and started a company called Marine Construction Company. In 1952 he was hired to coordinate transportation and equipment for the movie, *Thunder Bay*. John sold his company in 1958 after suffering his first heart attack. He went to work for Houston Drilling Company from 1962-1963, suffered a second heart attack, and worked as a consultant until his retirement in 1971.

**Santo Rousso** was born in Morgan City in 1921. His father was a groceryman and amateur boxer. Times were tough for Santo's family, and Santo worked at the grocery store as a young man. He joined the Army Air Force during WWII and went to radio school. When he returned from the war in 1945, he opened a radio repair shop. A customer who worked for Magnolia Oil Company suggested

he try to get a job there, so Santo tried keeping his shop open while working part time for the oil company. Eventually, however, his oilfield job developing seismographs required him to work full time, and he ended up staying in the seismic department, working across the Gulf, in Nova Scotia, and Alaska, for 23 years. He left the company (Mobil by that time) to avoid being sent to Mississippi and took a job with Arthur Levy Boat Company, where he remained until his retirement in the late 1980's.

**Parker Conrad** was born in 1915 near Jefferson Island but moved to Morgan City as a boy. His father came from a wealthy family, but Parker struck out on his own in the Great Depression. He rode a train across the country as a hobo and tried numerous ventures before he finally went into boat building. Parker started out building shrimp boats, but the oil companies began to his lease boats for their seismographic work. He eventually made the transition to building in steel and constructed numerous oilfield vessels. His company, Conrad Industries, built mostly crew boats and barges.

**Rosalie Blum** was born and raised in Morgan City, the granddaughter of Pieta Guarisco. She, her parents, four sisters, and two brothers lived with her grandparents, uncles and an unmarried aunt in the family home on Railroad Avenue. She married Milford Blum in August 1942; in November he left to serve in WWII. Rosalie lived with her family until Milford returned in 1945, and then the couple moved over the family's restaurant until 1946. Rosalie's Uncle Victor Guarisco owned a crab factory, operated the Esso Bulk Plant, and started Twenty Grand, a boat company that serviced the offshore oil and gas industry. Milford worked at the bulk plant and at various other jobs around town. Rosalie and Milford had five children, and Milford died when their youngest was a year

old. Rosalie went to work as a teacher at the local Catholic school in 1961 where she remained until her retirement.

**Catherine Dilsaver** was born and raised in Morgan City, the daughter of Nicholas Breaux. She got her first job, right out of high school, as a typist for Chicago Bridge and Iron during WWII. After the war, she attended college at Southwestern until she met her future husband, John. Catherine and John had three children. When the third child began school, Catherine became interested in Morgan City history and helped Mrs. Lela King Lehmann, a Library Commissioner at the time, gather historical materials for the 1960 centennial. She and Mrs. Lehmann later helped establish the Morgan City Archives.

**Rene Seneca** was born in Bayou Chene, Louisiana in 1922. His parents were fishermen and moss-pickers, but his father also cut cypress timber in south Louisiana. He spent time in the oil fields as a boy, bringing water to roughnecks. Rene completed eighth grade and his family moved to Loreauville, Louisiana in 1937. He fought in the Army in World War II, serving in Panama and the Pacific. Rene went to work for Texaco in 1947, driving crews out to the rigs. He went to Horseshoe Bayou as a roustabout in 1950 and moved to Berwick in 1954. For the next 30 years he was at Texaco where he worked as a pumper at Bateman Lake. Rene retired from Texaco in 1983.

**Laurie Vining, Sr.** was born March 1, 1924 in Morgan City. He started school in Amelia, but he moved frequently growing up since his father was a trapper and went wherever he could find work. Laurie quit school after the 7th grade. He worked in shrimping and ironworks until he was drafted into the Navy in 1943. He started working for Kerr-McGee in 1949 and worked for the

company for 33 and a half years. He also appeared in the film, *Thunder Bay*. Laurie started working as a deckhand and worked up to boat captain. He retired from Kerr-McGee in 1982.

**TR Naquin** was born and raised in Morgan City where his father was a superintendent for Oyster Shell Products. He finished high school in 1942 and was drafted into the Navy the following year. After three years in the Navy he returned to Morgan City for a month but found that many people he knew had left. He went back to California and worked at a couple of jobs, spent six months in Morgan City with his wife and young child, and then worked at the Bureau of Yards and Docks in California until 1957. At that time he returned to Louisiana and worked as a clerk for Pure Oil until it was sold to Union Oil of California in 1966. He left the company rather than have to commute to work or move his family. A friend got him a job at Tidex where he remained for three years. TR then went to work for Offshore Logistics, a new transportation company opening in the Gulf. He left that company to help a friend start Briley Marine and stayed in the business until 1983 when the oil industry experienced a downturn. He then went to work for his son-in-law at McClary Offshore Construction Company, a company with pipelaying barges throughout the Gulf, but retired soon after.

**Willy “Dub” Noble** was born in Arkansas in 1926, the son of a dragline operator. His father lost his job during the Depression and in 1938 found a job helping to build the levee to the Morganza Spillway. His father moved the family to Morgan City in 1942, and Dub enrolled in Morgan City High School to finish school and play football. After graduation, Dub entered the Navy and served on submarines until 1945 when the war ended. In 1947, as soon as he turned 21, he went to work in the exploration department

for Humble Oil Company. He was quickly promoted to assistant surveyor because of his experience in the war and ran the radar program for the offshore geophysical operations. Dub Noble became a Party Chief in 1963, and in 1967 Humble Oil sent him to Mississippi to take over a land crew. He retired from the company (Exxon at the time) in the late 1970's.

**Butch Felterman** was born in a logging camp on the shores of West Lake Verret in 1927. His family moved to Patterson shortly after his birth, and his father bought his first shrimp boat when Butch was a sophomore in high school. Butch worked on the shrimp boats during the summers until his graduation. He went to the Louisiana State University (LSU) for two years, then returned to Patterson to buy a shrimp boat and become one of the youngest captains in the region. He began to acquire more boats and in 1965 converted a steel shrimp boat into an oilfield service vessel. His company, Galaxie Marine Service, grew rapidly and had 26 boats when he sold it in 1996.

**Leonard Aucoin** was born in Little Bayou Long, Louisiana in 1927, the son of a fisherman/shrimper. Leonard worked on a dredge boat, as a dishwasher on a houseboat, as a deckhand, and then as an oiler. In 1946, at the age of 19, he went to work for Sun Oil. Leonard was most often working with seismic crews and he traveled with them all over Texas and Louisiana. He also worked for Geotech and Apache Oil for very brief periods and took a job with Band Marine of Berwick in order to return to his home near Morgan City. On his off days, he drove a cab. Leonard was adept at operating boats and convinced Band Marine to promote him to captain. He retired with Tidewater Marine in 2000.



**Eldridge “Tot” Williams** was born in Morgan City, Louisiana in 1927. His father, George Williams, was a shrimper/trapper turned crew boat owner who grew up on Bateman Island (across Bayou Shaffer from Morgan City). His father had a second-grade education and became one of Morgan City's wealthiest citizens because of the oil fields. Eldridge worked as a deckhand on his father's crew boats and then went into the family business as a crew boat captain. He also took out seismograph crews and invested in tug boats and moving rigs. He worked for large companies like Shell, Texaco, Mobil, and Exxon, but also for smaller companies like Mallard and General Geophysical.

**Dolores Henderson** was born and raised in Morgan City and at 18 married her childhood sweetheart, Caleb Henderson, also from Morgan City. Caleb served in the Navy during WWII and worked at the oyster shell crushing plant in Morgan City prior to getting a job at McDermott in the 1960's. After graduating from high school, Dolores went to Baton Rouge to live with her uncle and attend college. She fell in love with literature and became involved in oration, so she studied to become a librarian. When she finished school, few schools were hiring black librarians, so Dolores became a teacher and librarian. She worked in Slidell, Houma, and Thibodaux and then got a job at Hattie Watts High School in Patterson, where she stayed until she retired. Dolores and Caleb raised two sons and one daughter, and sent them all to college. Dolores began storytelling after the schools were integrated and the high school was turned into an elementary school. She organized a library and reading program in her home and remains very active in community service.

**Roussell Ruffin** was born in Siracusaville in 1929. He graduated from Morgan City

Colored High School in 1946, where he was captain of the basketball team. Roussell went to work in the cane fields and held other odd jobs until 1959 when he was hired as a crane operator in a local lumberyard. In 1961, he went to work as a crane operator for Brown and Root, becoming one of the first blacks to work for the company and the only one doing skilled labor. He was hired by Ed Kyle to work at a loading dock but left when the yard was sold. Caleb Henderson, a black supervisor at McDermott, helped him get a job with that company, but he left to start his own business operating tractor-trailers for the oil industry.

**Marcelle Ordogne** was born in a small town in east Texas. In 1947, when she was 17 years old, she moved to New Orleans with her sister. She enrolled in business college and began looking for a job. She applied at several places, including the telephone company and several oil companies. At that time she did not have a telephone, and she remembers getting a fax from Shell Oil Company telling her to report to Mr. Williams for an interview. In 1947, Marcelle got a job with Shell doing clerical work such as pasting up drilling reports and typing. She worked there for three years until she married and moved with her husband to Morgan City. Her husband was an only child, and he began working with his parents at a motel and restaurant they had established in Morgan City. The restaurant was open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, and Marcelle and her husband worked there for many years where they got to know many people involved in the oil field. Marcelle also became active in civic service and was named Citizen of the Year in 1967.

**Wallace Carline** was born in Plaquemine, Louisiana in 1931 and moved to Morgan City as a child. He began working in the oil field during the summers when he was still in school. He served two years in the Korean

War and returned in 1953 to work for his brother in his oilfield contracting business. In 1961, Wallace went into business for himself and continues to operate Diamond Services Corporation. In the 1970's and 1980's his company's primary business was dredging. In 1973, Wallace took his company to the Amazon to perform work for most of the major oil companies that were drilling there.

**Charles Pearce** was born in the Atchafalaya Basin and grew up on a houseboat. His father was a commercial fisherman who moved to Morgan City in the early 1940's to work in the oilfield. His father roughnecked for Humble Oil and then transferred to production at Duck Lake. Charles went to work at Chicago Bridge and Iron Works and learned to weld at the age of 16. Charles worked for Sun Oil's seismograph department in the early 1950's. He was first part of a "water crew" that worked in south Louisiana and then he joined a "land crew" and went to Brownsville, Texas. He quit Sun Oil to be able to stay in one location and went to work as a welder in Morgan City for companies such as LeBlanc Welders and South Coast Welders. He did rig welding for Brown and Root, Kerr-McGee, Texaco, Shell, and other companies out of Morgan City.

**Lester Fryou** was born in 1932 and moved to Bayou Chene when he was four years old. His father trapped and fished for a living, and Lester traveled to school by boat. At the age of 18, Lester went to work for McDermott as a general laborer on a dredge barge. In 1956, he transferred to fabrication and went to work at the company's new yard in Amelia in September of that year. He worked as a crane operator until the 1980's when he was promoted to rigger-leaderman, then foreman, and finally superintendent, the position he held when he retired.

**Cecile Grow** was born in Patterson in 1933 and grew up as one of nine children on a houseboat without running water, lights, or gas. Her father was wounded in WWI when shrapnel hit him in the back, and his breathing was hampered for the remainder of his life. Cecile trapped and fished and, then, during WWII went to work for Chicago Bridge and Iron. Cecile's mother died in 1941, and her father died in 1947. Cecile married her husband, Ira, in 1955. At the time, her husband was operating boats for Kerr McGee, working 21 days on and 7 days off. Cecile raised the couple's children and took care of the household.

**Susie Sanford** spent her earliest years in the Belle River area with her father's family. Her mother was from Franklin and moved her five children to Morgan City to live with their grandparents when her oldest child started school. Her father worked as a crane operator for 50 years, taking time off each fall and winter to trap in the marsh. Her mother encouraged her children to finish their education; all five completed high school and two went to college. In 1959, Susie married Joe Sanford. At the time, Joe and his brother, Tom, had come to Morgan City to work for Sea Engineering and Salvage. They bought out the owner and formed Sanford Brothers Diving Company. In 1967, Joe and Tom sold the company to Westinghouse, and two years later Westinghouse sold it to Santa Fe Drilling Company. Joe and a former employee purchased Morgan City Rentals, which Joe sold to his son in the 1990's.

**Bob Long** was born in Morgan City in 1934, at a time when blacks were barred from working in the Gulf of Mexico as fishermen, shrimpers, or in the oil field. His father was one of the first to enter the oil and gas industry when he began working as a diesel mechanic on boats in 1954. Bob followed suit

and began doing contract work as an electrician in 1961. He continued to work in oil-related jobs for local companies such as Cameron Iron Works and Service Marine until his retirement in the mid-1970's.

**Walter Daniels, MD**, was born and raised in Gueydan, Louisiana where his father, one of the original West Texas rig builders, worked for Pure Oil Company. He decided to become a physician because he disliked his early experiences working on the farm and in the oil field and because of the positive influence of the physician in his hometown. Walter completed medical school and, in 1961, joined the practice of Dr. Brownell, Morgan City's mayor and one of its two town doctors. He remained in Morgan City throughout his career, becoming active in civic affairs of the community as well.

**John Henry "Dickie" Written** was born in Morgan City in 1937 and was raised in Texas. His father worked for Shell Oil on an exploration team, so Dickie moved around a great deal. He moved in with his aunt and uncle in Morgan City to finish high school and graduated in 1955. Dickie began to work for Shell Oil in June 1955 and continued to work part-time in Baton Rouge, Louisiana while he went to LSU. He was drafted in to the Army in 1956 and served 13 months in Korea. After returning from Korea, he returned to work for Shell at East Bay, West Lake Verret, Gibson, and New Orleans. Dickie began working for Shell as a roustabout and moved up to lease operator, operations foreman, production foreman, and finally maintenance foreman for the entire East Coast and Gulf of Mexico. He spent 30 years working for Shell Oil prior to his retirement.

### 3.2. The Timber Industry at the Start of the Century

*Morgan City became home to several lumber companies during the early 1900's, and company executives were influential throughout the community. A 1909 pamphlet on Morgan City Industries boasted that the average daily output of the Brownell-Drews sawmill was 50,000 feet, with the mill turning out 80,000 shingles per day.<sup>3</sup> The company owned large tracts of valuable cypress timber lands, a steamer, and a fleet of pull-boats. Mr. C.R. Brownell was president of the corporation, a director in the Ship-Channel Company, director of the First National Bank, and president of the Berwick Lumber Company of New Orleans. Mr. Gus Drews was Secretary of the Corporation, president of Morgan City Bank, and a director of the Louisiana Cypress Lumbermen's Association. The Cotten Brothers Cypress Company plant was credited with an annual production of 15,000,000 feet, ownership of large timber holdings, and a large shipping business with direct shipments to Baltimore, New Haven, New York, Galveston, the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico, and Central America.<sup>4</sup> The cypress was used principally in making tanks, doors, window and door frames, and blinds. The president of Cotten Brothers Cypress, Mr. H.M. Cotten, was also the Treasurer of the Ship Channel Company.*

*The timber industry required extensive operations, and lumber companies established camps and communities so laborers could be closer to their work. Fallen cypress trees were removed by*

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<sup>3</sup> Information on Brownell-Drews taken from Folder 4, "Brownell-Drews Lumber Company," in Box 26, "Lumbering in St. Mary," Morgan City Archives, Morgan City, LA.

<sup>4</sup> Information on Cotten Brothers taken from Folder 7, "Cotten Bros. Lumber Co.," in Box 26, "Lumbering in St. Mary," Morgan City Archives, Morgan City, LA

*pull boats and skidders, and spider-web trails are still visible in some areas where the trees were dragged through the swamps (Wurzlow, 1976). Workers, primarily black and Cajun men, received low wages for long hours of hard work. It was not unusual for workers to be injured or even killed from falling trees, poorly aimed axes, rapid currents, and malaria, known locally as “swamp fever” (Norgress, 1947). Workers were paid in scrip and frequently remained indebted to the company store. Sawmill work was equally difficult and dangerous as mill workers labored to move the timber as quickly as possible, both to increase profits and outdo competitors.*



**Figure 3.1. Timber Workers Pulling Logs in the Swamp. Photo Courtesy of CB Dilsaver, Morgan City Archives.**

*Many Louisiana lumbermen experienced financial losses during the depression of 1907 and 1908 (Norgress, 1947). Then, a booming market in 1910 and 1911 turned the industry around and led to the creation or expansion of several companies and to increased exploitation of the cypress forests. Already by 1913, lumber camps were being located farther and farther from Morgan City as companies abandoned cutover timberlands and went in search of virgin timber. Unchecked exploitation led to tremendous wealth for some. Wealthy lumbermen entertained clients, business associates, and friends on a lavish scale. In early December 1913, for example, the F.B. William Cypress Company of Patterson and the Shingle Company of Plaquemine hosted a four-day hunt attended by 45 lumbermen, judges, and state officials and costing an estimated \$10,000.<sup>5</sup> Yet, workers’ wages did not increase significantly, even in the post-depression years of huge industry profits, and in 1919 mill workers organized and went on strike. They won a slight reduction in hours and a pay increase, although not benefits such as insurance, workmen’s compensation, and retirement. As a result, as Jake Giroir describes, work-related injuries forced men out of the workplace and compelled their sons to become the family breadwinners.*

*Jake Giroir: I guess I was in about fourth grade when we moved to Morgan City. Then, after we got there, my grandfather died. We moved back to Gibson, and we took the farm over, see. And then my grandmother, she was kind of funny and all of that. She wanted a house and all. So we stayed in Gibson and I went to school in Gibson. And then I went to school in Houma. And so then we’d move to Morgan City. That’s when we moved there. We decided to move back to*

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<sup>5</sup> Described in *Southern Lumberman*, January 3, 1914, p. 27, cited in Norgress 1947, p.1039

Morgan City. And so everything went fine. Got in school. I was [in] the eighth grade, I believe, eighth or ninth grade. Eighth grade... that's when Daddy broke his arm and everything, got hurt. And in those days, you get hurt in the swamp, they don't- You didn't have insurance. Nothing. You're on your own. And so that was it. So, I had a little summer job and kept on working. So I worked all my life.

### **3.3. Other Livelihood Strategies: Trapping, Fishing, and More**

*Livelihood strategies adopted after the Civil War, such as moss-picking, hunting, and trapping, persisted into the twentieth century (Brasseaux, 1992). Though jobs in the timber industry offered the best wages, the work was dangerous and regimented, and some avoided it. Those who lived and worked in the swamps were accustomed to hard work and spent the majority of their time outdoors. They also possessed a thorough knowledge of the wetlands, bayous, and rivers. Most of the area's residents knew how to operate flat-bottomed pirogues and other boats and recalled spending much time on the water. Many could navigate the region's treacherous waterways and currents and all were familiar with the severe storms and fog that would bewilder outsiders.*

*Similar to other resource-extractive industries such as timber, trapping generally provided limited benefits for the people of southern Louisiana. Although some people were able to earn enough money to invest in their own businesses, landowners and middlemen received much of the profits while those in the swamps worked hard to provide food, shelter, and occasional luxuries to their families. Trapping was generally a seasonal occupation and was combined with hunting, fishing, moss picking, and small-scale agriculture, especially for those who lived outside the towns and cities. Trapping required being out in the swamps and marshes for long periods of time, and often families went out together, establishing bonds that could last a lifetime.*

*In 1916, the Land Trust Company, headed by a bond and investment broker of New Orleans, was formed to carry out a large-scale reclamation and colonization scheme eight miles south of Morgan City in an area encompassing what is now Avoca Island (Morgan City Review, 1916). The marsh and swampland proved to be too harsh for settlement and the project was abandoned. Through the 1920's, while people in many parts of the United States were enjoying prosperity, many southern Louisiana residents continued with their earlier close-to-subsistence patterns of hunting, trapping, and moss picking. Laurie Vining and Rene Seneca recalled moss-picking.*

*Laurie Vining: My daddy was a carpenter. He trapped fur. He fished. And he floated timber...When I was old enough, I went trapping with him. I was always with my daddy... I'd go in with the pirogue. I'd just fool around, but I would pick a little moss out of the trees . . . My grandfather and them, after it was dry, [they would] pile it up, wet it, and pile it up till it turned black, and they would dry it and then they would bail it. And then [my grandfather] would bring it to town. It was a moss gin here. Right across the sea wall from inner Sixth Street . . . I guess to break it up and get the sticks out or whatever . . . They used it for stuffing in furniture and mattresses... I slept on it. I helped make them. Helped wash the moss... I guess I was probably seventeen years old as far as I remember still had moss mattresses.*

*Rene Seneca:* I was born in Bayou Chene, Louisiana, in St. Martin Parish, May 16, 1922, Rene Joseph Seneca. My parents, like a lot of people from Morgan City, were fishermen, moss pickers. My daddy worked in timber mostly. That was the best money. He did pick moss. Cut timber. Cut cypress timber.



**Figure 3.2. Cut Timber in the Southern Louisiana Wetlands. Photo Courtesy of the Morgan City Archives.**

*A livelihood based on the seasonal harvesting of natural resources required that families move frequently from place to place. Since this made it difficult to participate in community activities, the family was the primary social unit. Also, many southern Louisianans were skeptical of formal education and the influence of outsiders which also contributed to uneven school attendance. Even children who attended school were often absent, as Laurie Vining describes. Some, like Nelson Constant, were able to live with urban relatives to take advantage of schools there.*

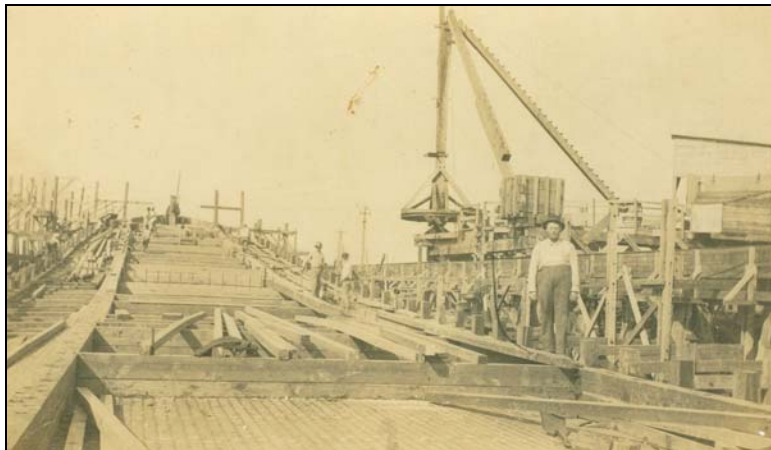
*Laurie Vining:* I went to school in Ponchatoula. Through the second, third and part of fourth grade... I had an uncle, my daddy's brother, that lived in a camp boat, too. And they decided we'll go do some trappin' you know, before the trappin' season. They wound up in Mississippi with those camp boats, two of them. I was out of school. And then I remember when they finally came back to Bayou Mellon in Stephenville, way up the Atchafalaya River, of course. [They] towed the camp boat because it was almost school. That really put me behind in school. And then we wind up coming back, I don't know when, but to Bayou Long, Bayou Mellon. And they had started a one-room schoolhouse up there. So I started fourth grade again. Well, I didn't go long enough to do any good. Every time that they decided that they had to go somewhere to work or trap or whatever. So I wound up two parts of two school years, [but I] didn't pass because I didn't go long enough. And I wind up going to school in Berwick for a few weeks at the end of one of [the] school years. I finally passed from the fourth grade, but that put me way back in school. And then I went to the fifth, sixth and seventh here in Morgan City. And then I figured when I got through the seventh I'd stop, me, and go to work.

*Nelson Constant:* I was born and raised in Kramer, Louisiana. It was a very small community, about 55 of us. We didn't have any ins and outs. All we had the woods to go out in and out, and

to do anything by boat, so that gave me experience in boating and walked me into the type of work that I later on went into. And we had a grocery store that I was working in with my father. I graduated in '35... I had to get an education, a high school education. I had to board at my aunt's in New Orleans. I went to school in New Orleans, and boarded out there. I was in Raceland, that's all in Louisiana. And also in Reserve and finished up here at Thibodaux College. Just before I finished at Thibodaux College, I took a year off helping my father in the store and all... I had a lot of experience, 'cause my father, we had a lot of fur trappers that he leased lands to. We had to keep up the property lines, so I got a lot of experience from my father for that.

### 3.4. World War I and Postwar Industrial Expansion

*By World War I, Morgan City was home to 5,000 residents. Demand for lumber increased during the war, though it did not reach the heights it had achieved during peacetime. The city supplied electricity, sewage, and water to its citizens, possessed a municipal filtration plant, and hosted three large sawmills and several other manufacturing industries. City leaders advertised these amenities as well as the city's, proximity to cypress timber lands and oil fields, and its outstanding transportation features as they actively pursued first an army post; then naval yards, submarine stations, and airfields; and finally shipyards.<sup>6</sup>*



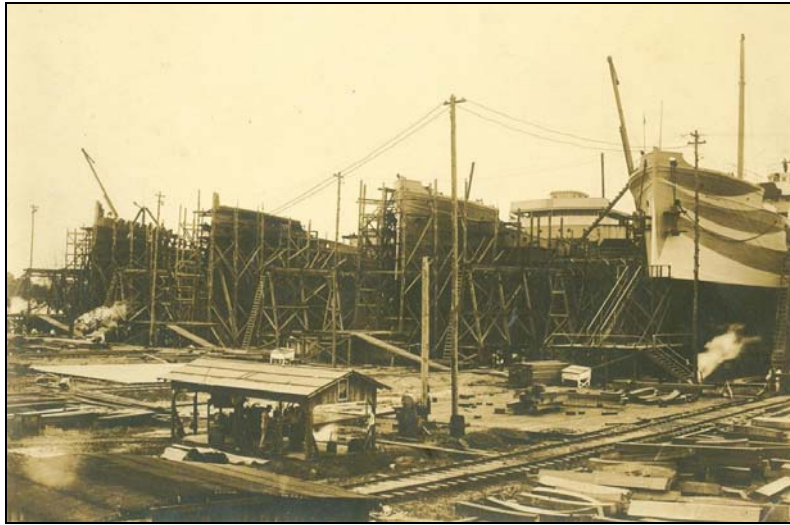
**Figure 3.3. Union Bridge and Iron Company in Morgan City. Photo Courtesy of the MP Palmer Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Because Morgan City was the only port in Louisiana outside of New Orleans that possessed flat topography and had a channel connecting the Atchafalaya River to the Gulf, local officials considered it to be ideal for massing U.S. troops and conducting aviation experiments and practice. Local efforts paid off, and several shipyards, including the Atchafalaya Shipbuilding Company in Berwick and the Union Bridge and Iron Company on Bayou Boeuf, were built or expanded with government resources. The latter was a shipbuilder for the United States Emergency Fleet Corporation. According to local news reports, community leaders cited jobs,*

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<sup>6</sup> Information on local leaders' activities taken from Folder 2, "Clippings – Morgan City Papers 1916-1918," Box entitled "World War I," Morgan City Archives, Morgan City, LA.

*profits, widespread advertising for the city, and the opportunity to participate in patriotic work as benefits of the shipyards.*



**Figure 3.4. Union Bridge and Iron Company Drydocks.**  
**Photo Courtesy of Mrs. Lela Lehmann, Morgan City Archives.**

*The ready access to the Gulf, the availability of vessels for transporting marine products to shore, and existing roads for hauling goods to distant markets, also made the region a center for shell crushing plants (Morgan City Review, 1922a). In 1920, the Oyster Shell Products Corporation was established at the port of Morgan City. Two years later, Morgan City granted and leased land to Alfred Mead to establish another shell crushing plant; the city retained rights to a supply of the shells to use in paving and repairing streets and alleys. The shell was also a valuable source of lime for chemical plants and was used in poultry feed. In 1924, Louisiana produced more than one-fourth of the nation's total supply of shell for that purpose. As Marcelle Ordogne and Jake Giroir indicate, the use of shell roads and the impacts of the shell dredging persisted well into the second half of the century.*

*Marcelle Ordogne:* [When I moved here to Morgan City in 1949], there were shell roads, oyster shell roads, no paved, very few paved streets... I remember one man that told us a story about the shell crusher that was situated on Front Street. He said that he used a wheelbarrow to push those shells up into a conveyor that would go down and crush those shells, you know. And he said when he got home at night, from the dust, he wore coveralls and when he got home at night, they would be stiff. They would like stand up by themselves. It was hard times then. It was really hard times. As far as my in-laws who got this restaurant and motel, they built it.

He worked as a shell crusher, my father-in-law, and they opened this restaurant with the turkey that they got Thanksgiving Day, the first day [they were here] and they went on for 30, 40 years.

*Jake Giroir:* When they took and dredged all the shell reefs, that's when the erosion started... [They were getting shell] to put in highways and all. And they had a two shell crush[ers]... In all they had three. They had one in Amelia.

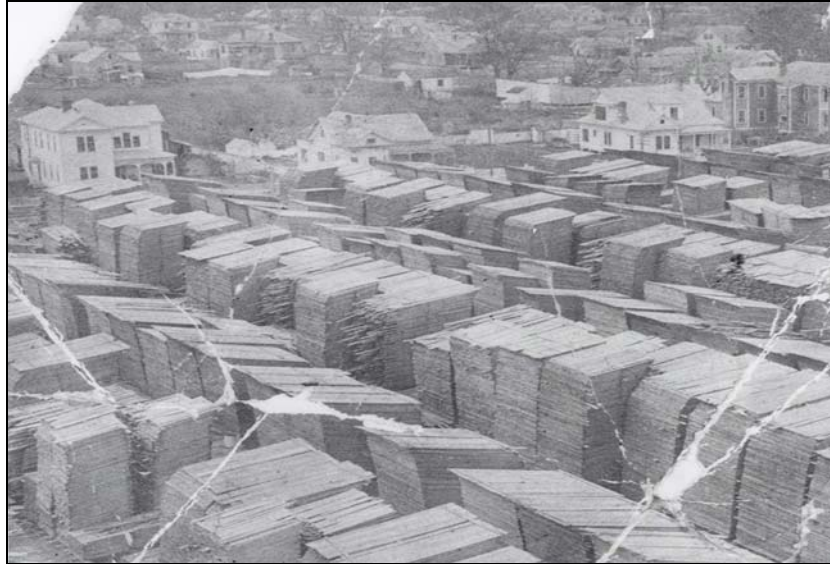


### 3.5. The Great Depression

*The Great Depression affected communities across the United States, and those in southern Louisiana did not escape it. The lumber mills that had been a mainstay of the region's economy in the early part of the twentieth century were in serious decline by the 1930's, exacerbating tough economic times. For the following men and women, born in the teens, twenties and early thirties, the timber industry and then the Depression formed a backdrop against which the rest of their lives would be lived.*

*Jake Giroir:* The Depression... they had the hobos then. That was in '29. Yeah. '29. And everybody was looking for jobs. So, I had an aunt. She worked with Roosevelt Hotel, and them people leaves clothes and all. Well, she always fixed me- brought- sent me a box of clothes. And my mother could sew anything. She could look at a pattern, and then *psh*, or a dress, and fix it. So, I used to go fish crabs. And I'd catch maybe one of them great big blue clawers (large crabs), and I'd [take] maybe three, four dozen, put 'em across my back, go to the house. And we didn't have refrigerators in those times, you know. So, momma would take about dozen or half a dozen. She'd smother 'em down and make gumbo. Then I'd have to take bags and go to all the kinfolks and give them some... I was working for Public Utilities. And then, I don't know something happened, and they changed numbers, and then they put a fella ahead of me. Then I was an iceman. I bought me a truck, my aunt and I. And I started selling ice... It was about 1936 when I went to work for Shell. That's when I was working for that lumber company... I was catching wood planks behind a planer. They bring the planed in, then load... and I didn't like that. So, I got that job. And then that's what I was doing when I went to work [for Shell, working for] Norman and Breaux [Lumber Company].

*Pete Rogers:* Well, when I was a boy, that is, in the teens, I guess it's just like it was all over the country. We had it pretty hard. It was during the middle of the Depression. I had one pair of pants. My mother would wash my pants behind the wood stove. We used wood for the fireplace and for the cooking stove. And she'd hang my pants behind the woodstove. The next morning they'd be dry, and I'd go to school. And most of the time, wintertime or summer, barefooted, even up until high school. I'll tell you what. Up until that time, we had a veneer mill here in Patterson, and the men who worked in that mill were making eight cents an hour. So you can imagine what it was like during that time. And then I worked for a timber company when I got out of high school in 1933, but I learned a dying business. The timber business here in south Louisiana was dying at that time. Our sawmill, one of the biggest cypress sawmills in the world, cut out in 1929. My father worked for those people. He was a night engineer. He started off as a night watchman, then he went to being a night engineer, but he managed to put three kids through school. That was pretty good at that time.



**Figure 3.5. Ramos Lumber Company. Photo from the Collection of Mrs. Mary Lou Duffy, Lumber Industry Files. Courtesy of Morgan City Archives.**

*Butch Felterman:* [I was] born in 1927 at a logging camp near the shore of Lake Verret which is in Assumption Parish, Louisiana. The logging camp was owned by F.D. Williams Cypress Company. My father worked there, and the lumber company had built a camp. They had built a number of houses. We lived in one of them. My dad's job primarily, [he] built a little railroad out in the swamp [to] bring the timber out to the shore of the lake. His job was primarily repairing those rail cars... I was one year old when we moved away from there and moved to Patterson, where my dad was from originally. We had a car. And we kept it at the canal landing as did some of the other workers, had a garage out there to keep it in.... [In Patterson] there were several sawmills. One was located on this property where we are. In fact, you can still see some of the brick foundations out there where some of the machinery was mined. This was the Riggs Mill here and before that it was the Trellue Lumber Company. The biggest mill was the F.D. Williams Cypress Company, the company my dad worked for. It was up a little more north. The railway and the bayou run north and south here at Patterson, as does the Main Street. And there were some other saw mills on the south end of town. They all shut down and the people were moving away, trying to find work. There was none here. The only thing left was agriculture and the farmers they weren't hiring here. Most of them had big families, and they weren't making any money either. Often people would come in and buy these old cypress houses for the lumber. Tear these houses down and move them away, and just give up the lot. The lot would sell later on. The sheriff would sell it for taxes. That happened in a lot of instances.

*Lester Fryou:* I was born and raised in Simmons Pass - that's in St. Martin Parish, approximately ten miles west of Morgan City - August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1932. And we moved from Simmons Pass when I was four years old, and we moved to an area, Bayou Chene. That was an area you could get there only by boat. And went to school in Gibson, Louisiana. We had to get there by boat. We had different school boats would take us there. And I went to school 'til I was in the eighth grade. Then my daddy was a trapper and fisherman, and I had to get out of school to help him take care

of running the traps and running the hoop nets that we had out. And also he had a fish dock and a grocery store down there.

*Cecile Grow:* My mother had nine children, ten really, one had died in between, but we all was raised on a camp boat. It was a three-room camp. They had beds from here to yonder, stacked in there like soybeans, because they had so many kids. Of course, my mother and father had a bed of their own. They had their own place. The kids had all the other beds, but there was no running water, no light, no gas. All the good luxuries we have today, we didn't have. We had to wash dishes in a dishpan or scrub, wash our clothes on a scrubbing board in a tub. As I say, it was tough, but we were lucky because we all were happy, you know.

*The lumber industry left a legacy of large landholdings from which natural resources could be extracted and sold for profit. As Wallace Carline describes, when the timber was gone, the land was deemed to have little value and land companies were able to buy large tracts at very low prices, setting the stage for rapid expansion of the petroleum industry.*

*Wallace Carline:* In this part of the country now, mostly you have big landowners anyhow. LL&E (Louisiana Land and Exploration) is probably the biggest one. They had, I forget how many thousands of acres they had in '65, well over 600,000 or something like that. Continental Land and Fur, 140,000 contiguous acres, but LL& E had, they were big leases as far as landowners. But you had a lot of big landowners, LM Company, Bouree Lumber Company. It depended on where you were in the Basin and most of this property was bought for timber rights like in the Atchafalaya Basin. They bought it for the timber and of course, they cut the timber and after that, of course, they found the oil, so it was more valuable for what was underneath it... And other people like LL&E, they bought this stuff for like a nickel an acre because nobody wanted it. People didn't want to pay tax on it. I mean, it was almost given to 'em.

### **3.6. Shrimp**

*Already as the timber industry was declining, another natural resource-based industry was expanding. In the 1930's, large quantities of shrimp were discovered off of Louisiana's coast, and shrimp was recognized locally as the major economic force for Morgan City and Berwick. Shrimping brought outsiders to the area and attracted local fishermen who built and acquired wooden boats. The demands of shrimping kept many people at work for long periods. Youngsters sought to acquire boats for their recreational as well as functional value. They were drawn to shrimping vessels out of curiosity and for the money they could make. In the summer of 1935, in recognition of shrimp's contribution to the local economy and to capitalize on the opportunity to make money, the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association held the first "Blessing of the Fleet" ceremony in Morgan City (Lehmann, 1954). That celebration was to become an annual event, linking commerce and religion and calling attention to the importance of the fishermen and their industry to the region. The following men offer their perspectives on the early shrimp industry.*

*TR Naquin:* Morgan City started out with the lumber business, and in those days when they had the cypress swamps, they had all the swamps and all the timber in the swamps. And once they depleted the lumber business in a sense, why then this old boy from Florida sent one of his

shrimp boats down here to fish out of Morgan City, and, shrimping, he made one-day trip and was about to sink his boat with the shrimp. So he calls back to Florida and tells his boss. "I made a one-day trip and almost sank the boat." And the next day, you know, there was about 10 or 15 boats coming from Florida to Morgan City and that was the start of the shrimp industry. And that was in the '30's, late '30's and '40's. And then [it was] in the '50's, when the oil field took a hold. So it went from lumber to shrimp to oil...

*Laurie Vining:* My daddy was working for this shrimp dealer, buy and sell shrimp, and whenever there was some shrimp boats come in there, I'd miss a day of schooling to make some money unloading. They paid so much a barrel to shove them in the basket. That's when there was a lot of shrimp in those days. That was back in the '30's.

*Leonard Aucoin:* I was born in Little Bayou Long in 1927. We were fishermen for a living until I was nine years old, then I went on the shrimp boat for a while. Then, I got off the shrimp boats and went back to school for a while... They had a little school on the levee up here. It was just a little one-room schoolhouse, and all the kids went in that one room. I do not know if they had first, second or third grade or not. But I never did finish first grade. When I was 14 years old, I was expelled and I was still in first grade because I would start work a while and I would go to school a while... I was expelled because I did not want to go to school...

*Butch Felterman:* After that Great Depression thing and all the people moving away, 1936-1937-1938, the shrimp industry moved in. They discovered jumbo shrimp off the coast. And a lot of boats came here from Florida because they had fished out the area out there on the East Coast. They had moved in and so that gave us some new life. People started moving back in. There were some jobs. Both at the processing plant [and] the fish houses, as they were called... For recreation we did have a movie theater in Patterson. In fact, I worked there for a good while. Two dollars a week, seven days a week. On Saturday I'd work in the afternoons because they had a matinee. The rest of the days of the week I'd work at night. Saved about two dollars a day because I wanted to buy a boat. And I did. I still have the engine out of that little boat. It was an old four horsepower engine that we bought. My daddy repaired it. It was a used engine. He found a skiff to put it in and he installed the engine for us. On the recreation, my recreation was mostly in the river. I'd go to the river every morning. The shrimp boats were down there loading. ... In 1937 the boats from Florida started coming to the area in search of jumbo shrimp. They built this fish house across the way from our house. I was just a kid, but before and after school, I would hang out there. I got to know the skippers and the crew and even the boat names... I usually could tell which boat it was when it come in during the night by the sound of the engine... Eventually, I got a job building the wooden boxes. That's what they used to ship the shrimp. ... I think it was when I was a sophomore or a junior when my father bought a boat. That's when I went out on my first shrimping boat.

*Morgan City saw a significant influx of people from the East Coast determined take advantage of the new deep-sea shrimping industry. By end of the decade, freezing houses were built to meet the needs of this expanding sector. Several new shipyards were established in the area as well. In 1938, Klonaris, a native of Greece, moved to Morgan City and established the Klonaris Shipyard. Increased river traffic also required infrastructure improvements. The channel to the Gulf was re-dredged when city officials convinced Congress to designate it an emergency*

*project, and the work was completed in 1940. Butch Felterman and Pete Rogers describe how they took advantage of new opportunities.*

*Pete Rogers:* I drove a seafood truck to New York City in the mid-'30's. Twenty-five dollars a round trip. It was 1,600 miles one way. And it took us a week to go there and come back. A semi-trailer. No sleeping at that time. Two drivers, and you had fresh shrimp, iced up, and went to New York City, 25 dollars a trip. ... Parker Conrad drove at the same time I did... His father had a rice farm right by where Bayou Vista is. His father had all of that area in rice. We used to hunt ducks when I was a kid. We used to walk down there, hunt ducks out in the rice field.

*Butch Felterman:* There was work. There was work on the boats. And during the summer I'd go out on those boats and earn money because I liked it. I went on to LSU and I really wasn't very happy over there. And I decided to come back. And I got a job on the shrimp boat, worked for less than a year. And then I got a job as captain of a boat and stayed with that for about a year. And then I was able to, had saved a few dollars, went to the bank. [The] bank will loan me the money to buy a boat. [I] was one of the youngest guys to ever own a shrimp boat in this area. Also one of the youngest captains. I got that first shrimp boat 1949, I believe it was.

### **3.7. Integration of Oil and Gas into the Local Economy**

*From lumber to fishing, Morgan City was tied economically to the resource-extractive industries that dominated southern Louisiana. Even as the shrimp industry was being crowned king, the oil and gas industry was establishing its presence. "Oil fever" was reported in Morgan City in 1900, the year of the Spindletop discovery. The first oil companies in St. Mary Parish were formed in 1901, the year oil was discovered at Jennings, Louisiana. LL&E conducted extensive seismic operations in the area in the mid- to late-1920's. However, oil and gas development did not take off until the discovery of the Jeanerette field in 1935.*

*Many residents were accustomed to employing diverse livelihood strategies that were adapted to both natural and economic cycles and driven by forces largely beyond their control. When oil was discovered in the region, the new industry was shaped to fit within established patterns. Owners of large tracts of land, such as the timber companies, took advantage of the new opportunities to profit from their holdings. Due to its size and labor needs, the oil and gas industry attracted oilfield workers with experience elsewhere, initially bringing with it people from Texas, Oklahoma, and northern Louisiana. Yet, locals were also needed. As the industry moved into the woods and later into the swamps and marshes, trappers, lumber workers, and others with intricate knowledge of the terrain were recruited to guide seismic crews, lay roads, and carry equipment. Many of them simply incorporated oil industry jobs into their seasonal occupational patterns. Accustomed to hard work and long hours, they readily applied their work ethic to the new circumstances. Used to working for others, few questioned what they were being asked to do. At first, laborers hauling pipe worked alongside those cutting trees. However, timber's decline hastened the shift from one industry to another for many workers. The following stories illustrate the links between timber and oil, some of the paths by which men got into the industry in southern Louisiana, and how the locals mixed with the outsiders, universally designated "Texiens."*



**Figure 3.6. A Crew Loading Pipe onto a Barge on the Atchafalaya River, to be Floated to a Texaco Rig, 1924. Photo Courtesy of Doughty Dominique, OOGHP.**

*Eldridge “Tot” Williams:* My father was George Williams, III. He started in the trapping business and from there, in 1926, he built his first boat, the Seagreen... A man by the name of Mr. Rhodes built it over by the Old Shell Crusher on Bayou Boeuf, at the intersection of Bayou Boeuf and Atchafalaya River. He built it there on the bank. My father, from there in 1926, started with Shell Oil, leasing the boat to Shell Oil, and from there, he started building other boats and servicing Shell seismograph work. At one time, he had four quarterboats. They were about 110 foot in length and were capable of housing about 20 people and they used the quarterboats to tow into the marsh, into the bayous where they started doing seismograph work in early 1930’s. After the fields were developed, West Lake Verret, Orange Grove Field between Houma and Morgan City, Bayou Pigeon, Atchafalaya Bay, West Cote Blanche Bay . . . started with boats supplying the drilling rigs, bringing supplies to the rigs, barges.

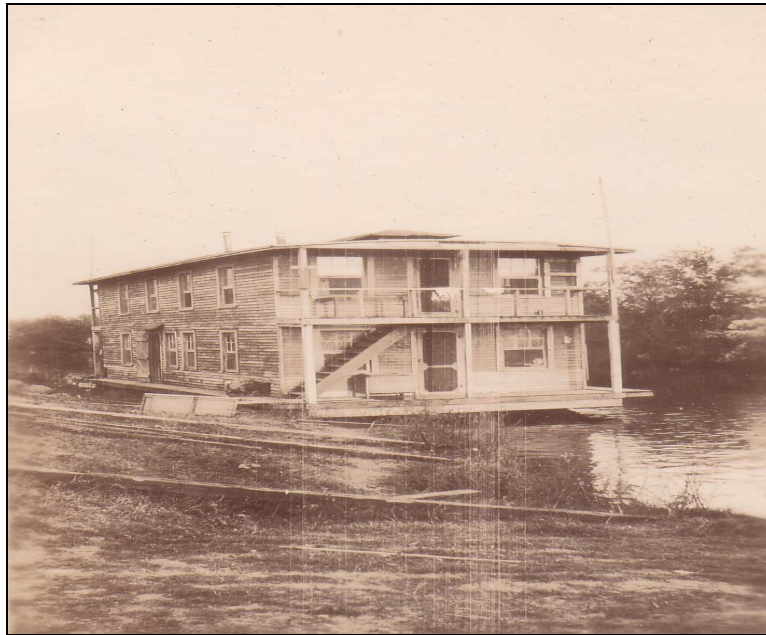
*Pete Gardner:* I was born in Scurry, Texas in 1916, May the 19th. [My father] was a sharecropper, cotton farmer... I graduated in 1932. [During the Depression], we were all poor. But we all just alike, so you really didn’t realize it, everyone was in the same condition. Now, I never owned a bicycle, I never owned a pair of skates, and [pause] we ate, we survived. There was no luxury. I can remember only one short period in my lifetime when we was growin’ up out in the country where we had a telephone even. And it was party systems. And it was usually an old, two old biddies would get on it and start talkin’ and you couldn’t get on the line. [After graduation, I did] just odds and ends. Workin’ on the farm there for different people, hiring out and working in our own fields, baling hay, whatever there was. There was hardly anything to do where you could make money... I got into the oil field in 1934. I had a brother that had left home when I was about six years old; he was about 12 years older than I. And it just so happened he was workin’ up here out of Lafayette. I don’t know if you know anything about the old Boscoe field or heard of it... Well, he was a driller. Well he came home one time and I was 19 years old then, no 18. And I came back to visit with him in Lafayette for a few days. Well one morning he

got ready to go to work and one of his crew decided to quit or wasn't there or something. Apparently they scrounged up a bunch of used clothes and he took me out there and put me on the rig. But I worked two days and made 13 dollars, until he get someone else... [In the oil field], everything seemed kind of strange, you know. All I remember, they sent me and this other guy who didn't know more than I did over to overhaul a pump. And neither one of us knew which end of the pump was the power end. Well, we made it. And they was really makin' fast holes then. And that was the days before power tongs and all that. You made your pipe up with what they call a spinning rope. Usually this stuff'll [be] flowin' back when you were makin' connections and all that. And this old boy on the derrick, derrick man, he did his best to whip me with that spinnin' rope. And fortunately, I don't know how I knew this, I had enough sense not to run from it. Instead I'd grab it and hug it. Of course if I'da run he'da beat my tail end off with that thing... You had to be tough. If you weren't tough, you wouldn't have made it. [This was in] the old Boscoe Field which actually opened up the oil field in south Louisiana. From that point on, it started booming more or less all along the coast... That was Superior Oil Company, out of California. They had 13, no, let's see, 11 rigs running out there. It was at one time, it was a little boom. [In the mid-1930's I was] workin' for contractors, I worked mostly on wildcats. I didn't do very much work in producing fields.

*Joe Taylor:* I grew up in East Texas, a little old place called Pittsburg, Texas [in] Camp County, the smallest county in the state of Texas... It's about 30 miles from Gladewater. Gladewater was a boomtown... that's where it was booming, and I went to work for Texaco there in 1935... I was 22 years old... That was right after the Depression. Hard times was then. It was still plenty tight, times was tough, even in 1935. In fact, when I went to work I went to work for 65 cents an hour, and they wouldn't let you work but 36 hours a week because Roosevelt had declared an NRA (National Recovery Administration), which let everybody have a job. You worked 36 hours a week, then you take off and let the other man work the rest of the time. And I worked there about ... '35 to the 23rd of May, 1936, then I came down to this district... When I left east Texas in 1936, it was estimated at 19,000 wells in east Texas, and that's not a dome up there, that's a pool, so to speak. Just drill around there and you got a pool. Down in this country, why, mostly it's domes. You're drilling on a dome, a salt dome. But that's the difference between that and this place up there. I mean, in formations...

*Pete Rogers:* These companies had been exploring, and there was quite a number of oil fields. I know one in particular. When I worked for this timber company, we pulled timber with a pull boat back of White Castle, and Shell Oil Company at that time - I think it was back in the early '30's - Shell had a field in back of White Castle, and the oil was loaded in wooden barges. ... It was a torsion balance crew that was operating in and around Morgan City in the swamp, the lakes. I think there were four of us. They hired us at two dollars a day, but we had to supply our own transportation and our own food. So a friend of ours had a camp boat he wasn't using. He rented it to us, five dollars a month. And we followed these exploration people, torsion balance, and we did the bulk of the work, the cutting of the right-of-ways, for survey, and their equipment and everything. That lasted about, oh, I guess several months, and then we finally got on regular, and we got to live on the quarterboat with the regular fellas, and we made a bit more money. But then the war scare came up in the early '40's. We used to listen to Mr. Caltenborne on the radio. Boy, it looked bad, and Shell laid us off. We were seismograph at that time. We were in Lake Verret - we were shooting Lake Verret, and we got laid off, and I volunteered for the service... I

guess the best way I could explain [torsion balance], it's like a gravity meter. It picked up on a photographic plate, it picked up faults and anticlines below the surface of the earth. I was never exactly able to read one, but we had some experts who did. All we did was put the instruments in operations, and the locations of where they were, and these experts could determine where the fault and anticlines were. ... They were people mostly from other places. We were just fortunate to get hooked up with them, because we did all the labor part. That was a considerable amount of work.



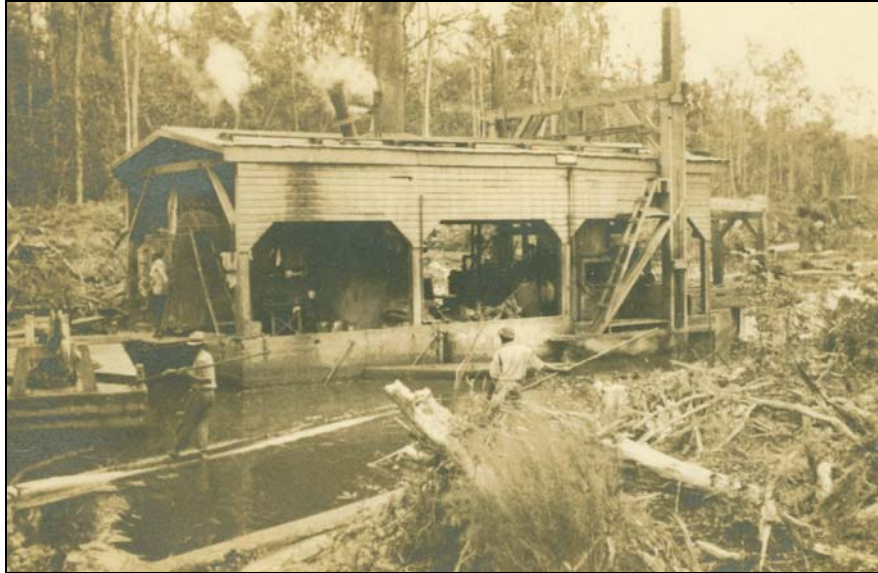
**Figure 3.7. Crew House Boat at White Lake, Louisiana, Built on a Cypress Barge. Galley and Crew Chief's Quarters, Office, and Meeting Room Were Downstairs, Sleeping Quarters Was Upstairs, 1935. Photo Courtesy of Jerry Cunningham, OOGHP.**

*RD Pitre:* I went on the first [Sun Oil] well here in Chacahoula. I went to work here June 10, 1938 in Chacahoula. We made a well there. The DS&B. That is Deibert, Stark and Brown from Orange. They owned that Cypress Company and Sun Oil Company got the mineral rights to start drilling wells. It was a big field at one time... I had my first job with Sun Oil Company. At that particular time, we were working six hours a day, six days a week. That way, we put more people to work. Sun Oil Company, they were one of the few that hired more people because – during the Depression era and everybody else was working eight hours – we were working six. We were working 36 hours a week. Everybody else was making 40. And seniority counted with Sun Oil Company. If you shut a rig down here today, if somebody else had a rig running over here and you had more seniority, you moved in front of that guy. My wife and I moved . . . we were married in 1941 and we moved nine times the first year we were married... We did not get any moving expenses, mileage, pay or anything, but I had a job. They would say, “You will be over here tomorrow night to go to work at such and such,” and I was there or I did not have a job.



*Charles Pearce:* I came out of the Atchafalaya Basin, born and raised in the Atchafalaya Basin. We lived on a houseboat. My dad was a commercial fisherman – catfish, horned frogs, trap coon – whatever was in season, to make a living. And when the oilfield business started coming into being in the early 1940's, my dad moved to Morgan City and started working in the oil field. He actually started working on a boat, driving a boat for different companies and then went to work for the oil companies in later years... He roughnecked for Humble, which was Humble Oil Company then. He roughnecked for, I do not know, five or six years, and when they made the found up in what they called the Duck Lake area, started drilling up there and he finally had a pretty good sized field at one time. And so, my dad transferred into production and worked out of there until he retired. So, it worked out something real good for him.

*Leonard Aucoin:* After I got expelled from school [in 1941], I went back to work on the shrimp boats for a while, and then I worked for a company by the name of Bozeman and Gray. They were a dredge boat company. I worked for them for maybe, I guess two or three months. At that time, I think I was 14 by then. And they paid me 15 cents an hour, 12 hours a day, 21 days on and 3 days off. That is how we worked. I worked a while. I was a dishwasher on the houseboat and then after that, I went to being a deckhand and then an oiler. The oiler then was the same as the engineer nowadays but you did not have to know how to read and write. All you had to do is know how to wipe up grease. You know, I loved everything. But I did that and then, I guess, from dredge boating, I went back offshore shrimping. I shrimped with Mr. Buster Saul. When I was 10 years old, I shrimped with him on an old boat they called a Crone, and then I fished with him some when I was about 15 on the Doctor Guy; a boat by the name of Doctor Guy was his boat. For two or three years, I just went from dredge boats to shrimp boats, and fishing crabs and catfish out there in Flat Lake. And then, one day, I was sitting in the city park in Morgan City... and this guy came along, we called him Big Eye. He had big bug eyes. Everybody called him Big Eye. By then, I could speak English. I had learned how to speak English pretty good. He and I got to talking and he asked me, he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am looking for a job." He said, "I heard that Sun Oil Company was hiring some people." I said, "You did? Where is their office at?" He said, "They have got an office right over there by the steps of the bridge. You go upstairs in that building. It is a yellow building. They have an office up there." Boy, I took off right away. I went over there. I went upstairs and when I got there, they were having a safety meeting. So, they were fixing that this guy – I do not know where he came from, Texas or something, but he was to show us that he could put the dynamite in a box and blow it up right there in the room without anybody getting hurt. Of course, I could not watch it because I was not working for Sun yet. So, he told me to step out in the hall and he showed the rest of the guys. I heard it when it blew up. I do not know how much of it it was. It could not have been too very much, I guess. But it did not hurt anybody. And after the safety meeting, Mr. Frances Noble, he was the party chief, he was doing the hiring and everything, he opened the door up and he said, "You can come in." So, I went in and he got my name, address, everything. He said, "Yes, we need somebody. Are you willing to work?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "OK, we will send you to the doctor and get you fixed up. We will put you to work." So, he gave me this paper, sent me to the doctor, I passed the physical... I was 19 years old and just a few months. So, the party chief said, "Ok, you be right here tomorrow morning at 7. So, the next morning, I was there at 7 o'clock, went to work. We were living on a houseboat.



**Figure 3.8. Working from the Pull Boat Erie While Cutting Timber in the Marsh. Photo Courtesy of Bernie Overhultz, Morgan City Archives.**

*Nelson Constant:* Those workers was poor people. They were cuttin' trees and everything else before that. And they could take it, they knew how to handle it. When you'd walk out there, you had to know the type of grass that was ahead ya', to where which foot to put there, you know what I mean. Or not to put it on that other type of grass or you sink in over your head. So those people were used to – it wasn't as hard on them – working in the swamp, because they knew and they knew what pace to go. They had a little forked stick that they'd use to walk with, to keep their balance. So all that. Whereas we had quite a few of these Texas college graduates that they'd have hire[d]. They'd bring 'em out there and they'd be on the boat and everybody go back home, they wouldn't even put their foot on the shore. We used to have a kick out of them.

*Jake Giroir:* I started working on August the 9th, 1936 on a Sunday morning... The funny thing is how I got that job. That was during the Depression. I was working at the sawmill, or the planing mill, and Slim Wells came over and he talked to [my cousin] and said he was looking for some hands. "You know anybody that knows the swamp and everything around here?" "Oh," she says, "Sure, I guess so," said, "I got my cousin across the street. He's a big hunter and he knows all the-." "And so I went over and I spoke to him, and he asked me all kinds of questions. He says, "Well, we're getting ready to run a surveyor behind Berwick, and we're going to a place called Bayou Louis." He says, "You know anything about Berwick?" I says, "Yeah, I know all of the woods, uh-huh, back there..." I said, "That's a bad swamp." He says, "Well, that's where we're gonna start off..." "And how about Amelia?" He wasn't just calling me about Bayou Louis. I say, "There too. I can take you all over that woods there." So he says, "Well, okay, you're hired," and he told me where to meet him, right there on Brashear Avenue. There was a restaurant there. And so I went over there. He said, "Do you know a couple other guys?" I told four or five of the boys, you know, workers, trappers. You see, I trapped and everything. So anyway, we went out. He lined us up. It was on a Sunday morning, I'll never forget. Hot! Boy it was hot. So we had the bridge here, and then we had to go to the old road and walk across, and

all of that where you see the new road is, that was all wooded trees and forest and everything else. So we started a line... [My first day of work I was] in water, cutting right-of-ways. Boy, and it was hot... We was cutting right-of-ways with a sweeper and an axe, cut trees like that down! I was in the survey department. And of course, the surveyors were first, and after that, that's when the shooters came behind us, you see, for the shot points. They run out of water. Didn't bother me. I get that [water off the ground]... water was clear, I just wet my mouth. "You're drinking that!" I say, "No, you don't have to drink. All you have to do is rinse your mouth. You're not going to get poisoned!" Boy, they couldn't understand that. ... The next day we run out there, and they had a – it was funny – a big Texan. He was kind of smart, you know what I mean, because he was big and everything. So I told him, "I'll tell you what, big boy ... I'll bet you're not going to last a week." He said, "Why's that?" I said, "You think this is hard? Let's go about another quarter mile back there. I'm gonna show you where it's hard." And I told that to the boss. And he said, "I don't know. They're pretty good workers – they're good workers." He was big and muscular. That weekend he quit! Yeah, about three of them quit. And we had a lot of our boys right from Morgan City, you know, a few of them, and they would transfer some in and out... And before you know, we had a lot of frenchmans working for us, a lot of my buddies. Some stayed and some didn't. I don't know why. Well, I kept on... After all the right-of-way was fixed, we walked through that, and oh Lord, we had to carry our pipe. Pipe was 12-foot joints, about three and a half inches around, but it was light pipe. We carried our dynamite out there on our backs. We carried, well, everything we needed, and we had a little portable engine that we used as a pump to drill the shot points, and we'd go down maybe about 50, 60, sometimes 80 feet – as far as we could drill, you know. That's what we used for the dynamite. And we had to run a line on the survey. Some of those trees, actually when you got there, were too big. They'd make a shot in front, and they'd take a circumference and go into the back and then keep on straight. Maybe sometime we'd get four or five feet off, but I'll tell you what – that was some hard work. We worked, went to work at seven, left about seven-thirty, eight o'clock. About the time we got everything straightened out, we hit there about eight. And sometimes it would be dark before we'd come in. Just before dark we'd come out of the woods. [When I got that job], you know what I was working? I was working at the sawmill. At one time I was making 15 cents an hour, and then I believe they raised it to 25 cents an hour. But this here [job with Shell] wasn't that much more. It was twice as much, I would say. I went to work for three dollars a day, and, well, that was good money, three dollars a day in those days.... We left [south Louisiana], and we went to Texas... I'd been with them about a year and a half, something like that. So they broke the party up. Some went one way, some went the other way... But in the meantime, right here in Morgan City, they started construction work over in Gibson Field. So I was out at the restaurant, and the boss was out there, and he asks me, "Well you sure been hanging around here. What you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm waiting on my transfer to go on a survey crew with Shell." "You work for Shell?" "Yeah." In those days you could transfer to work anywhere you wanted to when they hire you. "You wanna come to work with me?" I said, "Sure, let's go. Let me get a sandwich here." The restaurant was right there, and I had work clothes on, you know? So I went to Gibson, I worked there, in and out. [In Gibson] they was just beginning to drill some wells. [They were drilling with steam rigs], land rigs... So I went with what they call a construction crew, and I was working in that. That's what we were doing, building board roads for the rigs. But I still, if they needed anybody on the trucks, they'd always get me out, being I was right here. So they drilled the first well at West Lake Verret. The first well was on the Adams' land... The canal was already there, because Union Oil Company had

drilled a well way in the back, but it was a gas well, and they were transporting the gas line through there, and we used that canal. And the well was on the bank. We used pilings and everything else, and everything was by barges, and we was working 12 hours a day.

*Parker Conrad:* The reason why I came to live in Morgan City was because my father was a sugarcane planter. He moved from Jefferson Island, which is right near New Iberia, where he was farming rice over there for many years, and decided to start planting sugar cane. So when he moved over here to this area, well, that's how I happen to be here, because I'm one of nine children, and the second to youngest, so you might say that I grew up on the plantation. As a matter of fact, I even farmed rice myself for a couple of years – some of the many ventures I tried that I didn't succeed in. But, with no money to start a business and no place to go, the only thing you could do is try to find something to do to keep yourself busy and make a dollar or two. So if planting rice wasn't good, I tried trapping. Well, that wasn't so good either. Fishing in the rivers wasn't so plentiful either. Trying to raise frogs wasn't a good venture either. I worked hard at it ... Hauling logs from the swamps wasn't a moneymaker, so I can go on and on with all of the things I tried and didn't succeed at, but I didn't mind. There was nothing better to do at the time anyhow. So instead of just sitting around twiddling my thumbs, well, I just tried whatever I could without any money. ... I could see [the oil industry coming into the area] because, on the plantation that my father operated, the seismograph people would explode huge amounts of dynamite, and they would blow holes in the ground that was probably – maybe I might be exaggerating – maybe anywhere from 30 to 50 feet in diameter, and maybe 15 feet deep or so, and they would never refill them. They had holes like that on the back part of the plantation ... It made pretty good fishing later on, you know? ... Now these people who go after fishing and shrimping are the kind of people who work for themselves. They're ambitious. They work hard. Time doesn't mean anything to them. If they have to work around the clock, they do. So the background of most of the people here has been very good, because they've made a living trapping, fishing, or whatever, worked for themselves. So when they become welders, they're still hard workers, and I would say that almost 95 percent, if not more, of the people that work in this yard are all local people, within a circle here of not over 50 miles. Of course, you know, in Morgan City, we don't really have a lot of area for farming, because we're in the middle of swamps and rivers and lakes...

*Many men incorporated oilfield work into their cyclic livelihood patterns. The companies adapted these local patterns as well by allowing the men to take off from work during fishing and trapping seasons, as Susie Sanford discusses.*

*Susie Sanford:* My dad worked till he was 90. He was a crane operator for over 50 years. He was upset when they instituted mandatory retirement at age 65. He was 80 years old. He did not want to retire. Every November he'd stop working and go in the marsh and trap. All my dad's people lived in Belle River. My mom would not stay out there. She wanted all of us to go to school. When her first child started school, there were five of us, she moved to Morgan City and would not go back to the swamps. Every November to February they would let him off work and he'd go trap. All my mom's kids graduated from high school, and two went to college... I grew up when work was hard and jobs were few. We never had a vacation. I never left the city until I met [my husband]. It was a frightening thing to me to meet all these people who were more learned than me, more experienced than me.

*Though the emerging industry caused visible impacts to the environment, these did not cause general concern and for some, such as the young Tot Williams, the activities were a source of excitement.*

*Eldridge “Tot” Williams:* During the summer, on one of these boats, I would go as the deckhand working on the boats and bringing supplies to the rigs and drill pipe and mud. These boats were 45-foot boats. At that time, they could carry about eight tons of supplies on the deck of the boat. In those days, most of the boats were wood... [I was] about 14 years old. It was about 1935 when I started. Well, there was a lot developing then, especially West Lake Verret. They had a big gas field there. In the bayou, gas was coming up in the bayou so bad, they were drilling one place and gas was coming up into the bayou. And when you would pass with a boat and a barge, it would really rock the boat and the barge, it was really making a big swell bubbling up, coming up. And it was real exciting to pass . . . I was a young kid and it was exciting . . . could not wait to pass that spot! When you were a kid, you would get a thrill out of things like that.

*Shrimping and oil evolved side-by-side – before long oil exploration in and around Morgan City meant working in marshes and water. Seismic crews had to develop techniques for finding deposits offshore. Drilling crews and service companies had to figure out how to work on water. Since boats and barges came to play a major role in the industry, shipyards were faced simultaneously with the construction and repair for two major, expanding industries. As shrimpers witnessed the activity associated with exploration in the late 1930’s, they began to express concern about its effects on their livelihoods.*

*Butch Felterman:* In the beginning, the oil companies started in the shallow waters. At that point they were hiring wooden boats with gasoline engines. But that changed. They went to larger, steel boats, first with Chrysler motors and then with diesel engines. Early on, they used to mark the routes for the seismic boats with cane poles stuck in the mud below water. Further offshore, they had to develop and use position systems. Seismic crews operated with three boats: one for recording, one for shooting, and one for supply. ... As this was taking place, the shrimpers thought that it was harmful to their business. Those seismic crews used 50 to 200 pounds of explosive per blast. I mean those shots would send geysers 50, even 100, feet in the air. The blast would also leave craters in the ocean floor. The blast would chase off the shrimp, but the craters would also cause problems. Shrimp trawls would get stuck in the craters, and nets would tear. The blasts chased the shrimp away. In areas with lots of seismic activity, the shrimp would disappear. Too often, there would be a fleet of shrimping boats in an area, and a seismic crew would be working a line that went right through the middle of them. It was not customary for the seismic crews to go around either. They would blast right through. ... There was also a shortage of crews. Some of the shrimpers decided that if they could not beat the seismic crews they would join them. This made their wives happy because working for oil meant steady employment. ... That was the demise of shrimping in this area. It continued in places like Delcambre, but not here.

*Parker Conrad:* Matter of fact, back in 1939, one of the ventures I started off with was buying a shrimp truck and hauling shrimp to New York – fresh shrimp. I drove the truck myself, about a year to New York, all them fresh shrimp. Then I started buying shrimp after that, with other

people in New York furnishing the money to buy them. ... It was exciting! Very exciting. Of course, the truck that we had – at that time there was a lot of shrimp here, and a lot of trucks leaving out of Morgan City, and I had one that I drove. A little later on I had a couple of others. But it would take 60 hours driving night and day to drive from here to New York. We had a sleeper cab, and we only stopped to gas up or grab a sandwich on the road. The trucks were underpowered, the roads were bad, and going up on some of the hills like in Virginia, we'd almost put the truck in low gear where you could get off on the side of the road and walk as fast as the truck was going. But anyhow, later on, we were able to buy trucks with a little more horsepower, but to start off with, this is what we had. And these were all fresh shrimp. I'd carry about 160 hundred-pound boxes of shrimp on the truck at one time, and they were all iced down, fresh. Delivered in New York, the shrimp were selling for around 12, 13 cents a pound. In other words, a hundred pounds of tailless jumbo shrimp – twelve dollars.

*Even though the oil and gas industry was well established in Morgan City by the end of the 1930's, it did not immediately benefit everyone, as Bob Long recalls.*

*Bob Long:* [I was] born and raised [in Morgan City, born in] '34... It was a rough time... It was rough in the '40's. 'Course then we didn't realize it. We pretty well got along in Morgan City... When I was a boy coming up in the '40's, the early '50's we didn't know anything about the oilfield. We [blacks] wasn't allowed out there. We wasn't allowed in the Gulf, period. Doing anything. Shrimping, they'd shoot at us... Well, it wasn't all bad because, like I say, we was indoctrinated. You understand? And we just thought that was the way it was supposed to be.

### **3.8. Environmental Changes**

*Significant environmental change had been occurring in and around Morgan City since the development of the sugar plantations in the 1800's. In addition to the cultivation of vast areas of land, the sugar industry required canals to be dredged through the swamps to enable planters to get their sugar to market. Then, the timber industry caused massive change as trees were cut and dragged through the swamps and marshes. During 1927, a huge flood on the Mississippi increased efforts at building levees and controlling the flows of both the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers. Consequently, some areas, such as the southeastern portions of Louisiana, experienced coastal land loss while others, such as the Atchafalaya Delta, were subjected to increased deposition. High water levels in Bayou Chene forced Rene Seneca's family to move from there in 1937.*

*Rene Seneca:* It was a nice place at one time but the water kept coming up on us. They could not raise a garden anymore. And you could not have any more chickens. And in those days, you had to raise a garden, you had to have chickens, you had to have a milk cow. You could not just depend on that dollar because you did not get that many dollars like you get today. So, you had to have a little something to bring you along. So, the chickens and the eggs and the milk and hog lard, and the pork. You salted that down, carried you on through the year. You were raising a family and had 8, 10 kids, 7, 6. So, when it got to where you could not have any more cattle and have no more garden and no more chickens, my daddy said, well . . . and then my two sisters and I, two farmers, we were looking better in Loreauville on the west side of the levee anyway, he said we were going to move. So, we moved in 1937.

*The expansion of deepsea fishing contributed to pressure to dredge ship channels that would allow access to the Gulf of Mexico. In March 1939, city leaders from Morgan City and Berwick successfully lobbied the projects committee of the Rivers and Harbors Congress to dredge to a depth of 10 feet; the project was completed by July of that year (Morgan City Review, 1939c and 1939e). Exploration and production of oil and gas led to additional environmental changes during the 1930's and early 1940's. Canal dredging accelerated to facilitate the movement of drilling rigs and access to rigs and platforms once oil was discovered. Construction of supply bases and other infrastructure to service the industry furthered the commitment of waterfront property to industrial use (Morgan City Review, 1940).<sup>7</sup> Inadequate control of high pressure wells led to blowouts and the release of large quantities of oil. In 1944, the Texas Company paid \$211,000 to oyster fishermen for oil pollution damages to oyster beds in Terrebonne and Lafourche parish waters (Louisiana Conservationist, 1944); the 19 lawsuits that resulted from the pollution led to regulations throughout the Louisiana coastal region.*

*Concerns about the impacts of seismic exploration on aquatic organisms and the industries depended on them led scientists at the Louisiana Division of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Division of Oysters and Water Bottoms to study of the impacts of dynamite shock waves on shrimp, oysters, and fish in the Gulf. The results of that study were reported in 1944 in the Louisiana Conservationist: "Satisfactory indeed were the results that, clear cut and repeatable, demonstrate without doubt that speed-up in the oil search, essential in hastening the war's end, can proceed, accelerated fourfold, without damaging one iota the shrimp industry that brings bread and butter to so many of our Louisiana citizens (Gowanloch and McDougall, 1944)." Still, concerns about the impact of petroleum activities on the shrimping industry continued into the next decade.*

### **3.9. Community and Social Organization**

*Economic growth brought many changes to Morgan City and the surrounding communities. Industrial development was concentrated on the natural levees in the Morgan City area, linked by waterways, rail, and roadways. People and industry also extended out from Morgan City into Berwick, Bayou Vista, Patterson, Bayou Boeuf, and Amelia. Still, the region's physical geography contributed to persistent infrastructure challenges, especially for transportation and housing. During the 1920's, after passage of the Federal Highway Act and the creation of the Joint Board on Interstate Highways, a highway numbering system was developed. The Old Spanish Trail was renamed U.S. Highway 90 in southern Louisiana and served as the only east-west arterial between Interstate 10 and the Gulf of Mexico (Collins, 1995). Built along the banks of Bayou Black, the undivided, unlimited access roadway connected Morgan City and Houma. Still, though various efforts were made to improve the road, locating a highway through the southern Louisiana wetlands proved to be a formidable challenge.*

*Coupled with the lack of land, a concern about the transitory nature of some Morgan City residents led some to resist infrastructure expansion. A front-page story in the November 22, 1922 edition of *The Morgan City Review* reported, "There are five or more families who are*

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<sup>7</sup> The first general oil well drilling supply company was established on a waterfront site in the northeast corner of Berwick in July, 1940.

*unable to secure houses... This shortage is proving not only unpleasant to the families concerned but truly hurtful, as well, to Morgan City, and steps should be taken at once to remedy this state of affairs,” and chastised the “(s)everal moneyed citizens [who] are hesitating to build because they are apprehensive that these new families may prove to be but ‘transients’ (Morgan City Review, 1922b).”*

*As with its earlier industries, Morgan City worked to accommodate and then to attract companies associated with the oil industry. Though the initial push was for oil companies drilling on land, it was not long before local entrepreneurs and civic leaders recognized the unique potential of the city – both its geography and its population – to play a major role in the development in wetlands and water bodies. City officials and residents boasted about the number of paved roads and lobbied for projects to deepen canals and put in protection levees, these projects, too, brought new people to the area. Both the shrimping and oil industries attracted locals and people from small communities throughout southern Louisiana who relocated to the city to get access to jobs, schools, and other amenities. In addition, workers and their families moved in from northern Louisiana and from other states, especially Texas and Oklahoma. The Morgan City Review carried regular stories of newcomers, housing shortages, and other impacts. These stories mirrored news reports from the previous decade when lack of infrastructure was a concern for community leaders and residents.*

*Dub Noble: My dad was a dragline operator for a construction company building the levees along the Mississippi River. And, at that time, the Depression had caused the construction business to go out of business... We stayed in Plaquemines until 1937, '38. Then we went back to Hamburg, Arkansas, [where I] finished my 11th year in school, and in the meantime my dad was working here in south Louisiana around Morgan City, building the levee along the Morganza Spillway. ... We were not going to have football in the year of 1942, the fall of '42 in Hamburg because of the problems of getting fuel and transportation to and from the football game because of the war effort. Morgan City was going to have [a] football team that year, so I came to Morgan City to finish my last year of high school. I got here June the second of 1942.*

*Charles Pearce: We were living on a houseboat when we came to Morgan City [in the early 1940's]. We moved in to what they called back then was “the pit.” A lot of folks lived in houseboats in that period back then. And we stayed in a houseboat there for a few years and my dad bought a house on Second Street in Morgan City. We lived there a number of years.*

*Morgan City also developed a durable social infrastructure. Business organizations and social clubs were established. Local churches, guild-like groups, and benevolent associations provided help to community members in need. The Catholic Church was a major force in the community, but the Jewish population was significant enough to warrant a synagogue. Local acceptance of marriages between Catholics and Jews reflected the social integration that was occurring there. Still, Morgan City was part of the U.S. South, segregated by race and ethnicity. Blacks, Italians, and even Chinese residents lived and operated businesses across the railroad tracks from the main part of the city.*

*Rosalie Blum: The Italian custom was the first son that was born was named after the father's father. My grandfather was Petro Guarisco and everybody had a Peter except Uncle Rock and*



the only reason his son is not named Peter is because Grandpa was dead and he didn't have the nerve to name him after himself... The Castellanos (my mother's family) lived on the track. Across the track they had that house and then they had a double next to it and then two hotels... Then across the street there was another big house. And then if you went back down behind the hotels, there was this other great big house. White people lived in that area and then you went around and behind our house was another big house... The Castellanos moved from Amelia, from the farm... So they came to town and they bought a grocery store and it was on the corner of Second, it was just right a block away from us... And at one time there was a Chinese laundry right next door to us... There were a lot of black people in that area on that side of the track too, but I mean, it was nice. It was a friendly atmosphere, you know. I never even gave it a thought, to tell you the truth. Oh, in fact, later on after I had grown up, they opened a bar, somebody on the same street that that house is on and it was a black bar, but you never thought a thing of it... [My husband's] mother was very Catholic. His father was Jewish... [There are] some Jewish people here, but not as many as we used to have.

*Dolores Henderson:* You lived separately when I was young, when I was a kid, but you respected each other. The reason in Morgan City that that happened was that people lived by each other. Across the track in most places would be just black people. Across the track when I grew up was not [just] black people. It was black and Italian people. Italian people had stores and barrooms on the corner and they all knew each other. And in town around that Fifth Street area there were some Italian stores and on Railroad Avenue there were some Italian stores. As people grew up and went to school, they didn't want to come back home and many of them couldn't find a job back at home, so they went someplace else. As the houses got older and the people got older and they couldn't stand them any more, they started turning into slum houses and then they started renting them to black people. And they started to move into the suburbs. I lived in the center of town there around near Federal and the like in there. It was in the alley, and I think that Morgan City was kind of built on the order of New Orleans and those alleys were for the servants of the people who lived on the outer sides. See, they had their servants close to them where they could get to work easily. Now that is just our assumption, as we do the storytelling and we kind of draw on each other we came to that conclusion. I really think it is what had happened so that really made you grow up around each other, know each other. Of course, there was that distancing, but then there still was a kind of tie that – you want to see me do well and I want to see you do well. And when I grew up you were still having midwives deliver the babies and in my younger years, it was all black women who were delivering them and then somewhere, maybe by the time I became a young adult, there were some white women who delivered babies. So a lot of the young people, too, remember these women who had delivered them and they had a kind of a special affinity, you know, for them. ... Then there were those women who worked at the restaurant, the black women who worked at the restaurant and generally had food that they could bring home... So all this, this made people kind of depend on each other.

*As the largest city in the region, Morgan City had both the White and Colored high school, was the hub for social activity, and provided a place to find lodging and entertainment. Butch Felterman and Roussell Ruffin talk about going to school in the communities around Morgan City, and TR Naquin recalls the less wholesome elements of community life.*

*Butch Felterman:* Where we lived when we first started going to school [about 1933] we were about six blocks from school. And you'd walk to school in the morning. You'd walk home. We ate what you'd call dinner at noon. And walk back to school. There were no school buses. It wasn't far...I had friends who lived at least two miles from school, particularly on the north end. And they would walk. They'd bring a lunch to school, but they would walk to school, and walk in the afternoon... School was...I guess it wasn't bad; it was a three-story building. It had a boiler down in the basement. We had steam heat. That was the only steam heat in Patterson, had boiler oil. For recreation we did have a movie theater in Patterson.

*Roussell Ruffin:* I was born September 3, 1929 in the Siracusaville area, which is the outskirts of Morgan City, and they taught up to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Well, the place is called Greenwood actually, Greenwood, Louisiana. They taught up to sixth grade where [they had] one big Masonic Hall and one schoolteacher and she taught up to sixth grade. Then when you passed to the seventh grade, you have to come to Morgan City which is three miles away. Okay, they had a bus to pick up the white kids, but the black people had to walk... But I was lucky. We moved to Morgan City in 1941 and that's the year that I had passed to the seventh grade, but my older brother and my two older sisters had to walk. They would leave at five a.m. in the morning and walk to Morgan City, freezing cold or whatever... I graduated from Morgan City Colored High School in 1946. I was the basketball captain for two years and that was during World War II and there wasn't too many black people, boys, going to school. They had to work in the [sugarcane] fields. When you got to 14, 15 years old, you got to go to work, and so you go to work in the field. I did some of that too when I was 11, 12, 13 years old. Make a dollar twenty-five a day... We had 10 kids in the family, so my dad was making eight dollars a week. So back then, a boy, if you wanted a new pair of shoes, you had to go buy 'em yourself. Daddy couldn't afford to buy 'em for you.

*TR Naquin:* [The lumber company] had the mill down there [on] River Avenue. They floated the logs in here and processed them right there. Local people. ... If you wanted ice water, you used to have to pay 'em a nickel to help pay for the ice. That's how tight they were. People working for 10 cents an hour, 15 cents an hour. ... [When the shrimpers came in], that's when you had the bars on First Street and there were boys, there used to be a lot of fisticuffs going on sometimes. ... There was the First and Last Chance Bar, and I can't remember the names of all of 'em, but in the late '30's, early '40's, that's when you had a lot of fishermen. And these guys would go out for three days. In three days time they had enough shrimp to sink the boat. They would come back in and then they didn't know nothing but the poison. They would get up on First Street and drink all their money up and next day or two they would go out again. ... They had a running start on the oil field. That's in the days when they had the gamblin', and they had slot machines wherever you walked, and they had these card rooms where they played cards, and they had the Chicago gangsters down here. Used to have these rum boats that they run out in these bayous that they had hired.

*Morgan City stood in contrast to the small rural communities surrounding it; within St. Mary Parish, agriculture was the principal source of employment throughout the 1930's and into the 1940's (Gramling and Joubert, 1977). As the oil and gas industry developed, it drew workers from throughout the region. While many young men were drawn into the industry by fathers, uncles, and other relatives, others quickly discovered that they did not want to work in the oil*

fields. Dr. Walter Daniels, who grew up in Gueydan, located in rice country northwest of Morgan City, describes how he came to choose a medical career.



**Figure 3.9. Oilfield Wives at a Company Camp.**  
Photo Courtesy of Jerry Cunningham,  
OOGHP.

*Walter Daniels:* Very early in life [I decided I wanted to become a doctor.] I was fortunate. My dad worked for Pure Oil Company until I was probably 11 or 12 years old. He also had a few cattle as a sideline and a couple of horses and so we had a milk cow; I milked cow until I was 12, 13 years old and then [my dad] quit working for Pure Oil Company and went to work for himself. He had a small dirt contracting business. He had a couple of draglines and a bulldozer and so I was involved in all of this. And early on, I hated getting my hands dirty either working in the farm job or getting oil and grease on my hands tending to these draglines and bulldozers that we had and in fact, when he first bought the bulldozer, I was the first operator 'cause no one in our area knew how to run a bulldozer. So he told me that he wanted me to run it for that summer and then I could teach someone else. It was one of these things where you got on and learned how to run it on your own, but I knew early on that I didn't want to be a farmer, didn't want to work in the oilfield. I wanted a job where I could keep my hands clean and was quite an ambitious young man. We had two doctors in my hometown... and I admired both of these gentlemen very, very much. And I guess they were my role models because I decided early on, probably by the time I was 14 years old, that I wanted to be a doctor. So I proceeded in that direction until I became one... The doctor in that little small town was held in high esteem. ... My father told me this story about how one of the men working in the oilfield with him hurt his thumb and my dad took him up to the doctor's office and the doctor looked at the thumb. He said, "Well, we're going to have to cut this thumb off. It's just too badly injured to save," and the injured man said, "Well, is it going to hurt me?" and he said, "Well, I'm going to put you to

sleep so it won't hurt you." So, in the doctor's office, the doctor had the man lay down and he asked my father, who was the foreman, if he would put the man to sleep, he would tell him what to do. And my father said, "Well, if you can tell me what to do, certainly, I'll do it." Well, that was the days of drip ether as an anesthetic agent and they used a little cloth mask that they would put over the person's face. And Daddy, who tells the story from a layman's point of view, said, "Old Doc gave me this little wire screen with a piece of handkerchief over it and gave me this can of stuff and he said 'Hold it over this guy's face and let drops of this stuff fall on this mask until I tell you to stop.'" And he said, "So I do that" and then the man would quit moving and he said, "Doc would say stop," and he said, "And then when the man would start moving again, I'd start doing it again." So he said, "He cut his thumb off and I was the anesthesiologist."... That would've been, probably in the mid to late '30's. ... It was inland oil. Offshore oil hadn't really started at that time. All of this was all inland oil. There were oil fields in the rice fields and the rice farmers over the time became quite wealthy if they had oil on their land. The other rice farmers went broke. We had a Pure Oil camp where I lived when I was a young man up until age 12, and there were six houses out there. The superintendent of the Pure Oil in that area lived in one. The assistant superintendent lived in another. The bookkeeper lived in another – or I guess the office manager, they called them a bookkeeper then. My father was a construction foreman. We lived in one and the chief mechanic lived in one, and I forgot what the other man did, but it was out in the country. We had rice fields all around it. We had milk cows and a couple horses that were in a large pasture behind our area and we'd ride the bus to school every morning. ... [I attended] Gueydan Elementary and Gueydan High School... The area put a premium on the education that you could get in your high school. And out of my high school class of 44 students, we had two physicians, a veterinarian, two engineers, and four teachers... My father had to drop out of school in fifth grade. His father had a stroke and he had to go to work. My mother went to school to the seventh grade and that was the only school that was available to her and my mother mainly would read to me a lot and emphasize that I should learn to read. I grew up enjoying reading, so I think that that was a large part of it. And I think part of it was just I didn't want to be a farmer... I think a lot of it also was with the teachers I had in school, and they were quite supportive and helpful.

*The influx of new people to the region, along with changes brought about by schooling, contributed to the language shift from French to English. Leonard Aucoin and Dr. Walter Daniels talk about their experiences.*

*Leonard Aucoin:* We spoke French in school. What they were doing, we were trying to learn English, too. When the teacher asked me the first day of school – she asked a little girl right in the front of me what the little girl's name was, the little girl said her name was Leona Solar. Then, I was next in line and she asked me, she said, "And what is your name?" I said, "Leona Solar!" All the kids liked to crack up laughing. You know, the ones that could speak French, they knew me and they knew that was not my name. So, Howard Percie told me, he said, "That is not your name! The teacher wants to know what your name is." He said, "That is her name." I said, "Well, Howard, you know my name is. –" They called me Leonard, that was in French. "No," he said. "That is not what she wants to know. She wants to know what your name is in English." "Well, I do not know what my name is. That is the only name I know, is Leonard." So, he told the teacher I did not know. She had told him to ask me if there was any place I could go find out what my name was. I said, "Yes." So, I went to my aunt's house about two blocks from

the school along the edge of the river and she told me my name was Leonard. I never was so glad in all my life.

*Walter Daniels:* I graduated with 44 people in my graduating class, but it was quite interesting... When I started elementary school, there was a rule that you could not speak French on the school ground and the reason is because many of the little kids starting the first grade came from families that didn't speak English and so they were encouraged to learn English. So we couldn't speak French on the school ground. It was really interesting because I didn't know how to speak French. My mother was Cajun French and her family was, but my father was Texan and so no French was spoken in my house. So I spoke very good English and one of my friends, many years later, became the president of the bank and we had a class reunion and he told me one day, he said, "You know, I never did tell you how much I admired you when we were in the first grade because you spoke English so well and I couldn't speak English at all..."



**Figure 3.10. The House Trailer that Was Home to Bob and Joyce Cockerham after Their Marriage in 1943. Photo Courtesy of Joyce Cockerham, OOGHP.**

*Working in the oil fields on land required moving from place to place to find and produce oil. When the industry first began in southern Louisiana, those working in the field moved frequently, going in and out of the region and even the state. People from Texas and Oklahoma had become accustomed to the transient lifestyle; many in southern Louisiana learned to adapt to it. JH "Dickie" Written and the Gardners share some of the challenges they faced.*

*Dickie Written:* My mother and father were both from Morgan City and Berwick. I was born here but I was raised in Texas. My dad worked for Shell Oil back in the real early days and he was in exploration. In that exploration, the crew, as they were called, which consisted of different components of the exploration unit, traveled from place to place to place and they would drill shock holes with a little drilling rig, and they would shoot explosives and vibrations would tell what your seismograph pictures of the earth for early oil exploration. So, that is what we did. And we moved from place to place quite frequently. In my childhood, I can remember moving as many as six times in nine months in a school year. So, I never started at any school in the same school. It was always two or three times down the road that I had to change schools.

So, the last year of high school, my twelfth year, I, if you want to say so, put my foot down to my mom and dad and said, “Look, I would like to start and finish school at least once in my life in the same place.” And so, they agreed. So, I moved to Morgan City and I stayed with my aunt and uncle – my mother’s brother and his wife.

*Pete Gardner:* Usually at least every 60 days we’d move. And you didn’t know where you goin’ until they call you up and say, “We want you in such and such a place to go to work in the mornin’.” Now one, one time just, just for an example, we were workin’ in Hackberry, if you know where that is. ‘Bout noon one day they told us, “We want”—my crew—“we want you in Morgan City in the morning to go to work.” So we got off at four o’clock, the wives were at Lake Charles, when we got home they were all packed and everything, and we got into Morgan City at one o’clock on New Years Eve in 1940, and went to work that morning.

*Mrs. Gardner:* Every three months we’d have to put everything in the car and dishes, towels, and whatever we could haul. We couldn’t own too much.

*Pete Gardner:* We were like a bunch of nomads... When I first came here we must’ve had at least ten sugar mills around in the area between, between Lafayette and Morgan City, and now we’ve only got about three... I was workin’ with these same people out of Houston, Smith and MacDaniel Drilling Company. When we first came down here, when I first went to work for ‘em in south Louisiana, they were one of the biggest contractors on the Gulf coast. At that time, Laughlin Brothers, Noble Drilling Company, and Smith and MacDaniel were the three biggest drilling companies ... -, I was workin’ for ‘em when I got drafted into the Army [in 1942]. I came back and I got my drilling job back. ...

*By the 1940’s, the oil industry had established a visible presence around south Louisiana and had begun tentative steps into the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Though few anticipated what lay ahead, the foundations for future growth and expansion had already been laid.*

## 4. WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH

*The entire nation was affected by World War II and its demands for people and resources. In this war, petroleum was a key element in military strength and strategy. United States oil production almost single-handedly fueled the Allied effort. Oil workers deemed critical were kept home to assure that the supply would meet demand. Developments of the late 1930's and early 1940's had promised significant deposits under southern Louisiana's wetlands and the outer continental shelf, and their exploration was deemed critical. As the war expanded, concerns about German U-boat operations in the Gulf of Mexico temporarily slowed offshore exploration, making exploration and production in the onshore areas even more important.*

*Morgan City was selected as the site of a Chicago Bridge and Iron Works facility for constructing dry docks. An influx of new workers renewed the demand for housing and community support for new arrivals (Morgan City Review, 1942).*

### 4.1. Profiles

**Alden “Doc” Laborde** was born near Alexandria, Louisiana, the son of a school principal. When he finished high school Doc enrolled at LSU and joined the Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC). He entered Annapolis in 1934, graduated and served as an ensign from 1938 to 1940. He returned home and remained in the reserves until the outbreak of WWII. At that time, he was called back to the Navy where he remained until the war ended in 1945. Upon his return, Doc got a job working on a seismic crew and then took a job working for Sid Richardson Oil Company. He used the opportunity to learn about drilling and then in 1948 was hired by Kerr McGee as director of marine operations. During his four years with Kerr McGee, Doc became convinced that offshore drilling should be done from a movable unit. When he could not convince others at the company, he quit and went in search of partners. With backing from Murphy Oil Company, he founded Ocean Drilling and Exploration Company (ODECO) and built the first movable offshore rig, named “Mr. Charlie.” He remained with the company until Murphy merged its drilling and exploration companies and sold its rigs to Diamond Offshore. Doc also started Tidex

(later Tidewater Marine) boat company to provide vessels to service the offshore oil industry. He later established Gulf Island Fabricators in Houma.

**Ed Kyle** was born in 1917. He worked for his father's lumber business from 1937 until he left to serve in WWII. When he returned from the war, his father started a mud business to supply the oil and gas industry, and Ed worked there until it was sold in 1974. Ed was one of a group of ten people who helped Doc Laborde start Tidex (later Tidewater Marine). He also was instrumental in establishing the Petroleum Club in Morgan City.

**Stella Rousso** was born Marie Stella Peltier in Baldwin, Louisiana in 1920. Her father was a bridge tender for the railroad, and the family moved to Bayou Boeuf, Morgan City and finally Jennings, where Stella finished high school. She worked in a department store for a while before hearing about the Women's Auxiliary on the radio. She and a cousin decided to enlist, and Stella served for three years in the Aircraft Warning Service and as a Base Operations Specialist in

Portland, Maine and at Westover Field, Massachusetts. Upon her return to Morgan City. Stella worked as a payroll clerk for Riverside, and then moved with her husband and two daughters all over the South as he followed his job with Mobil. When her husband finally got on offshore, Stella got a job with the city and worked there until her retirement in 1983.

**Joe Robinson** became involved in the oil industry as a child .His father worked in the oil fields when Joe was young. For Joe, the oil industry offered one of the only possibilities for finding work during the Depression. Joe started working January 8, 1937 and spent about five years working for Texaco. He went to welding school in New Orleans and returned to the company in the engineering department. He then went back to work on a workover rig doing maintenance and then onto a regular drilling rig where he worked his way up to toolpusher. He held that job for 15 years. Then, at age 60, after 33 years working on the water, he retired.

**Clarence Duplantis** was born on a farm in Vermilion Parish and moved with his family to Morgan City in 1925. At that time, his father quit farming and was working for Goldberg, a contractor building the highway. Shortly after moving to Morgan City, his father went to work for the Texas Company box factory. Clarence left school in 1936 and went into the restaurant business. He then went to work in a grocery store and soon was running his own grocery until WWII. When the broke out, he could no longer get items for his store and he went to work for Chicago Bridge and Iron. He remained with the company until it closed the shipyard. Clarence then worked a bit for a welding contractor building oil storage tanks for Mobil until he eventually returned to the restaurant business.

**Clyde Hahn** was born in 1927 and has lived around the oilfield his entire life. His grandfather worked in the oil fields in Illinois, and his father worked in Illinois, Kentucky, and Arkansas on his way to Texas. Clyde's family was in Texas for the big "boom," and Clyde started working on the rigs at a young age. He worked for Standard Oil for a while, attended college for a while, and eventually got a job with Humble Oil, which would later become Exxon. He came to south Louisiana for a summer job and ended up offshore. He worked in drilling until 1965 and then in production until he retired in 1986.

**James "Rip" Ryan** moved to Texas from Mississippi, joined the Navy in 1943, and, after his discharge, went to work for Shell Oil. Rip began his career working on a seismic experimentation lab boat out of Houston, Texas. He married in the 1960's and moved to Morgan City, continuing to captain seismic ships for Shell Oil around the world until his retirement in 1985. Rip worked off the coasts of Alaska, Belize, Nova Scotia and the Gulf of Mexico.

**Ira Grow** was born in Morgan City in 1929. His entire career was spent in the oil industry working offshore. He joined the Navy at 17 and stayed three years. He then went to Kuwait in 1949 to work for Kerr-McGee's marine department running a speedboat in the Persian Gulf, and then returned to Morgan City in 1950. His first job in the Gulf of Mexico was as an engineer on a supply boat and he worked his way up to captain. Ira worked for Kerr-McGee on and off for several years until he was taken off the boats in the late 1950's during a downturn in the industry. He was transferred to work on rigs for Kerr-McGee, first as a roustabout and then as a crane operator. He was injured in



1987 and retired in 1988 after 34 years with the company.

**Robert “Bob” Cockerham** was born in Louisiana but raised in the Texas oil fields. His father owned and operated drilling rigs. Bob joined the Army in 1940 and met his future wife, Joyce, while passing through Conroe, Texas on maneuvers. They were married in 1943. After Bob returned from serving in Europe during the war, the couple spent one year in California where Bob worked for the governor before moving to Morgan City. Bob was working on shrimp boats in 1947 when Kerr-McGee began drilling what was to become the first successful offshore well out of sight of land. He heard about the well and went to work for Kerr-McGee. He then worked for Danzinger, a drilling company, where he stayed for years. Bob moved on to work for another drilling company and remained in drilling for 22 years. He then worked as a consultant until his retirement in 1984.

**Griff Lee** earned his degree in civil engineering from Tulane University and went to work for Humble Oil Company at Grand Isle. In 1954 he took a job with McDermott. At McDermott, he helped build and launch the first platform that was constructed on land and then hauled offshore by barge to a location in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Arles "AJ" Doss** was raised in a “Texaco family.” His father worked 42 years for Texaco (mostly in Caddo Parish, LA), and he and his brother worked for the company 34 and 32 years respectively. (Doss Point on Caddo Lake is named after his father.) AJ’s son, Arles Jr., worked 15 years as a Chevron toolpusher. AJ began as a roughneck for Texaco in 1942, first at Golden Meadow and then at Dog Lake, Lake Pelto, and Garden Island. While working in the Gulf in 1942, he

witnessed the tanker, David McElvey, being torpedoed near his rig. From 1944 to 1947, AJ served in the military. When he returned from the service, he went back to roughnecking at Caillou Island, was promoted to driller on a workover rig, and then was promoted to toolpusher where he worked on the early offshore rigs at South Pass Block 37. AJ worked on the first generation "barge and tender" rigs and also developed expertise in directional drilling. He worked out of Texaco’s Harvey District until the company formed the Offshore District with an office in Morgan City. He retired in 1975 but continued as consultant for Sea Drill, Gulf Oil, and Quintana Petroleum for several years afterward.

**Charles Wallace** was born and raised in Kinder, Louisiana. He began working with the railroads while he was still in school. He graduated from Kinder High School in June 1942 during WWII and volunteered for the service. He served in the Aviation Cadets and in Europe flying the B-26. After two and a half years in the service Charles returned home and entered McNeese Junior College, studying for a degree in mechanical engineering with an option in aeronautics. He transferred to LSU after his third semester but was forced to leave school before graduating because he was out of money. He joined a survey company working on pipelines, and then began working for Pure Oil Company in 1947. He left Pure Oil to work for Shell Oil Company and then for Chevron. Of his many inventions and modifications, Charlie patented one, the mud scale.

**Jimmy Jett** was born in Morgan City in 1924. He attended grammar school there and then, before high school, his parents moved to Greenville, Mississippi. After graduation, Jimmy enlisted in the Navy and was stationed on a submarine in Pearl Harbor. While in the Navy, he completed two semesters at the

University of Kansas and then was discharged in 1946. He moved back to Morgan City and worked at a gas station until landing a job at Mobil in 1946. Jimmy stayed at Mobil until his retirement in 1985, working his way up from a dishwasher, holding jobs as a boat operator, boat engineer, barge captain, crane operator, construction foreman, production supervisor, and marine supervisor.

**John Ryan** was born and raised in Alexandria, Louisiana. He left high school with some experience as a mechanic, but in 1943 was drafted and spent three years serving in Europe. Upon his return to Louisiana, John faced tough times finding work. Eventually, he got on with a Shell gravity crew. John's entire career was spent in the oil field with Shell Oil. He began as a member of the gravity crew in the late 1940's. The gravity meter was one of a handful of instruments that the oil companies were using at the time to detect oil reservoirs beneath the surface of the earth. John grew tired of constantly moving and eventually found a position at the production facilities at Weeks Island. He started as a roustabout, then gauger, made gang pusher, and then became an operations foreman. Later on, John Ryan moved into construction and worked as a maintenance foreman. In 1963, he worked at West Delta 30 when Shell was first experimenting with directional drilling. He was called back to Morgan City when the company began having problems with personnel.

**Ray Boykin** joined the Army in 1943. He was trained in Florida and served in WWII as a truck driver. He began working for Halliburton shortly after he was discharged from the Army in 1946. Ray initially worked for Halliburton's inland operations, first in Harvey, then in Lake Charles, and finally in Lafayette. While in Lafayette in 1948, he received orders to switch to the company's

offshore division. After working in the local offshore division for only eight months, Ray was sent to Venezuela for four years. He then returned to the States and was based in Morgan City for the next several years. In 1969, Ray was promoted to supervisor.

**Hubert Chesson** grew up in a "Texaco family." His first oilfield job was with Noble Drilling Company. When he took the job, his father was employed by the Texas Company, so Hubert was unable to work in that company's drilling department. When WWII began, Hubert was hired by Chicago Bridge and Iron in Morgan City and then was drafted into the Navy. When he returned from the service, Hubert tried again to get a job with Texaco and was finally successful in January 1946. He worked for the company for 38 years, beginning in drilling and ending in gas production.

**Elaine Naquin** grew up in Oregon and went to work for the Civil Service during her junior year in high school. Elaine joined the Navy as soon as she was old enough and was sent to Hunter College in New York for training and then to Corpus Christi to pack parachutes at the base where they were training pilots. Elaine was one of two women doing her job at the base. After the service, she returned to Oregon for six months. There she met her future husband, TR, when he came into her parents' restaurant. When she moved to California to be with him, TR found her a job in the surplus department where she worked there until he was transferred to San Diego. The couple had two children, and Elaine stayed home with them for eight years. After the family moved to Morgan City, she got a job with National Supply Company in 1959. She remained with that company until she was asked to retire in 1982 during a period of cutbacks. At the time of her retirement, she had advanced to office

manager, the highest position available to a woman.

**Aubrey Fields** was born in Morgan City on June 21, 1925, the son of a carpenter. He graduated from high school in 1943, joined the military, and served in the China-Burma-India theater, guarding a pipeline that went to a base in China. After returning from WWII in 1946, Aubrey got a job with Magnolia. He worked on one of the early quarterboats in the galley, worked his way through a pumping and roustabout job, and eventually made his way into production. He retired from Mobil in 1984.

**Floyd Fanguy** was born in Montegut, Louisiana in 1926. His father started working for Shell during WWII. Floyd left high school to join the Army Air Force and then returned after the war to finish high school. After graduating, Floyd went on to trade school. In 1948, he joined the Shell drilling department in Buras, Louisiana. He began as a roustabout, working out of Morgan City and Cameron, and helped drill Shell's first well at East Bay in 1951. He then became a welder. In the early 1960's when Shell sold its drilling rigs, Floyd was transferred to production, where the pay was better. In 1971 he became gang pusher on Shell's 65A platform. He retired in 1989.

**Roy Parr** was born in 1931 on a plantation in southern Louisiana where his grandfather worked as a blacksmith. His father spent most of his life working in the oilfield, and Roy followed in his footsteps. When he graduated in 1948, there was not a lot of work available for a 16 year old. He worked on a seismic crew for a while, cutting rights of way. Up around Lake Charles, Roy drove a water truck, making up dynamite charges and doing other odd jobs. When work slowed there, Roy worked on a dynamite boat off the Texas

coast for a seismic contractor. In 1952 he got a job with Humble Oil Company and worked his way up through the company. Roy retired as a production superintendent in 1983.

**Earl Hebert** was born in Berwick in 1932 and has lived there all his life. He witnessed firsthand the postwar increase in oil exploration and development. Earl graduated from Morgan City High School in 1950 and then spent four years in the Marine Corps. Upon returning to Louisiana, he worked at a variety of jobs until he went to work for Diamond Services in 1969. The company was started in 1962 by Wallace Carline. Earl was the office manager and responsible for a wide range of tasks including personnel and purchasing a building. He was with the company when it went public in the early 1970's and again, seven years later, when Mr. Carline acquired the company again to run privately. Earl also served as the Justice of the Peace, a member of the hospital board, and a port commissioner.

**Clyde Johnston** was born in Norplet, Arkansas where his father was working in the Smackover fields for the Texas Company. His father was transferred to New Iberia in 1943. Clyde grew up there and got a degree in business administration from Southern Louisiana Institute in Lafayette (now University of Louisiana at Lafayette). He worked for Bethlehem Supply Company in Morgan City and south Louisiana for many years. Clyde began as a clerk for Bethlehem and then became a field salesman. He later became assistant manager in Leeville and then regional manager. He also worked for Ralow Oil Field Supply.

**Charles "CJ" Christ** is a pilot with varied experiences in the oil field. Before completing college, CJ joined the U.S. Air Force and served as a bomber pilot in Korea.

After the Air Force, he returned to college, then, in 1954, started driving a truck for Halliburton. In 1956, he became a mud engineer, working for Magnet Cove Barium (Magcobar). As a pilot, he was able to fly to his mud engineering jobs. In 1959, he became chief pilot for Magcobar and set up the company's aviation and pilot training program. In 1963, he and Paul Hanes of Morgan City established Coastal Marine (Comar), an offshore boat contractor. One year later, CJ started Houma Aviation Services, a fixed base floatplane operator at the Houma Airport. Houma Aviation was caught in the 1980's oil bust and went bankrupt in 1989. At 61, CJ became a boat captain for Coastal Marine, running crew and supply boats to the offshore platforms until he retired in 1995.

**Jerry Cunningham** was born in 1940 and attended first grade on Grand Isle where his father was working for Shell's seismograph operations. His father had been born in Oklahoma and gotten his start in the oil fields

there. His father had moved to southern Louisiana during the late 1930's and eventually worked his way up to Shell's main office in New Orleans. Jerry was raised in southern Louisiana and worked in the oilfield as a young man. He pulled cable on gravity boats and started working offshore in 1955 while going to school part-time. He completed his education after serving in the armed forces and became a teacher and principal in Morgan City.

**Earl King, Jr.** was raised in Houma, Louisiana. His family has been involved in oilfield trucking since WWII. Earl's uncles drove trucks for Texaco at a time when the oil companies still owned and operated their own fleets. Earl moved to Morgan City in 1967 to establish King Trucking. He got started in the trucking business when trucking was regulated by the Public Service Commission. He witnessed the changes brought about by deregulation and then the reorganization of the oil and gas industry in the 1980's and 1990's.

#### **4.2. Oil Exploration as a Critical Service to the Country**

*Though many young men from southern Louisiana volunteered for or were drafted into military service, some learned that their knowledge and skills in the oil fields were deemed more critical than would be their service elsewhere. This proved particularly important in the case of knowledge and skills related to the exploration in the wetlands and water bodies of the region, In addition to their knowledge of the physical environment, their social and linguistic expertise was vital to their success in the swamps and marshes. In the following paragraphs, men and women talk about deferments and the types of oilfield work for which they, their fathers, or their friends were kept home.*

*Nelson Constant:* We had to cut out all the property lines on the swamps and find the corners and be sure it was the right property. That's what more or less gave me a big boost working for Humble, and also, I was able to talk French. The surveyor and the permit man, he couldn't talk French, he was from Texas. Just about everybody in this section we were working talked French. What happened was that I just went ahead with the surveyor and I translated most of the time for him. Finally, he was transferred and they gave me his position. So I was doing permitting and surveying... I was drafted, but then they got a deferment for me on account of this being essential for the war. There was five of us, I believe, that was drafted and got the [deferment]. I went through examinations and everything else.

*Mrs. Constant:* He was gonna leave the Monday morning. And when did you get the notice?

*Nelson Constant:* I know it was just before I left... The company's the one that deferred me. [Not] that we were trying to get a deferment or anything. --

*Mrs. Constant:* But the oil industry was always so vital.

*Nelson Constant:* Now if it was highland crew, or if it was a water crew, it wouldn't have been so bad. But this thing [in the swamps], you had to have people that knew what they was doing. Or everything would get busted, you know... We were at Krotz Springs and it was during the war and we hired, I believe it was 13 or 15 colored, from Opelousas... We needed 'em. We had a certain job. Afterward, they said, "Well, we don't need 'em anymore. We'll let 'em go." [I said,] "We can let 'em go." Well, they didn't. They kept 'em. And so then they stayed in there for a little while and then they started getting' drafted. They kept draftin' and draftin' 'em until they was only three of 'em left.



**Figure 4.1. Nelson Constant Using Breton Compass While Surveying in the Marsh. Photo Courtesy of Nelson Constant, OOGHP.**

*Jerry Cunningham:* Daddy... was a seismologist, and he went and joined the Army to go fight in World War II. Well, they found out he was a seismologist, geophysicist, and they sent him home. They said they need the oil more than they needed him. They couldn't find crews to work. All the manpower was in the military.

*Clyde Johnston:* My dad worked in the oil field from 18 up to 65. He started at 18 in southern Arkansas when there was an oil boom there. We lived there until I was probably about 11 years old. Texaco was The Texas Company then... It was during the war years, but he was about 38 years old and Texaco sold their holdings in southern Arkansas. But he was exempt because of the war and he was working in the oil patch. So, they transferred him and a lot of the guys because they were critical to the war industry and to southern Louisiana. Some of them to east Texas but he worked down in Louisiana. We moved to Iberia in 1943.

*Joe Taylor:* Well, most of my time was on the steam rigs. See, I roughnecked, I was just a regular derrick floor hand for nine years, and then I drilled. I was promoted to driller and I drilled for eleven years... I was married, didn't have no kids, I was 27 years old, just me and my wife, and I was living in Morgan City, and I registered in St. Mary Parish. About three or four months after that I moved back up [to New Iberia] to this house – I don't remember the dates and all that, but I got a report on a Friday evening through the mail – they sent you [by] mail – to report to Dauterive Hospital... It said to report to Dauterive Hospital for a physical exam. Of course, they examine you here, and then they send you to New Orleans and then they put you in whichever Army place they're going to put you. It said "report for duty" at Dauterive Hospital, so I got everything ready. It said to report Tuesday. Well, it's Friday I got that. And then Monday I got a card from the draft board. I'd been deferred. In other words, they'd deferred me because I worked in the oil field. I stayed down there and I didn't go into the Army. But a lot of them did go. A lot of the boys I was working with went... Most of that time I was working around Horseshoe Bayou at that time, and we were working out there at Rabbit Island... And at that time at night the submarines was all out there, you see. And we didn't run no lights. We had a little old blue light in the derrick. Of course, it wouldn't do no difference. You could see that for forty miles! And then we had a real low dim light on the floor, but that's the way we had to work it there. That was fifteen miles from the bank out to Rabbit Island. That was a long ways out there from Horseshoe.

*Hubert Chesson:* The two jobs that I had was for the Navy, building ships. So, when I got drafted, I had my choice to either go in the Army or the Navy. I chose the Navy and I stayed in there 34 months... I spent all my time in the Pacific, from Hunter's Point, California. That's where I boarded the Battleship Mississippi... When I got out of the service, I had it in my mind, "I'm going to work for Texaco. Period." And they was in bad need of people... During the war, they'd hire a man that was already 60 years old because they needed one that was so bad just to continue. Because when the war first started, they didn't defer anybody. You had to go into service.

*Joe Robinson:* The school (Delgado College) was out near New Orleans. They started that during the war. There was such a shortage of welders that the company (Texaco) was having trouble hiring and keeping welders because the shipyards were paying so much more than the company would pay. So when this opening came up, I went down to learn how to weld with the intentions of staying with the company, just being more qualified... Being there was such a shortage of welders, Delgado made an exception – there were three of us that did that – they made an exception of being able to come part time like that... [It was] the war, the shortage that created that opportunity... [At the end of the war,] the only way it affected them was, if they had to hire somebody, those people had preference. Or, if they were working for the company and

were called in they were given their jobs back regardless. That was with Texaco and most other oil companies, big oil companies anyway. They were replaced naturally, but they didn't lose their jobs. Now I didn't go to the service because I was in this engineering job. And the company thought that it was important enough that they asked for my deferment. I did not, they did.

### **4.3. Military Service and Oilfield Work**

*Morgan City and the surrounding areas were called on to supply men to serve in the armed forces. As described above, finding and bringing in oil was perceived to be important enough to keep some men home. Nevertheless, for many men who came of age during the time, military service was a given. Overseas, like at home in the swamps, the ability to speak French proved valuable for some. Women, too, contributed their knowledge and skills to the war effort. Though women were prevented from entering combat, they served in special auxiliary units and in shipyards and on airbases.*

*Almost all Americans who were old enough to be aware of what was happening at the time can recall exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard that the United States had been attacked at Pearl Harbor. Whether they served in the Atlantic or Pacific, or entered the war at the beginning or near the end, veterans' lives were changed by the war. When it was over, many veterans returned to their former jobs in the oil and gas industry while others adapted their new knowledge and skills to develop what would soon become an international offshore oil and gas industry. As the industry expanded, it became an important part of the area's economy and a source of jobs for many. Each person's story is unique; taken together the stories offer a glimpse of this period and the special relationship among the oil field, east St. Mary Parish, and WW II.*



**Figure 4.2. Pete Rogers and Another Crew Member Walking through the Swamp to Set Up Torsion Balance Equipment for Seismic Exploration. Photo Courtesy of Pete Rogers, OOGHP.**

*Pete Rogers:* I joined Shell Oil Company in 1935 in exploration, torsion balance and gravity meters, and seismograph. I worked all over south Texas, all over south Louisiana. Then the war

scare came up in 1940, and we had a temporary layoff, so I volunteered for the service. Two weeks after I was in, Shell Oil called me back to work, but I was gone. A year before the draft, I went into the service, into the Air Force. ... I got [my name Frenchie] during the war years. I interpreted in Africa because the Arabs spoke French, and the ones that were educated, because the French nuns taught there, and we got along quite famously in the desert... And then after I got out of the service in 1945, I went back directly to work for Shell Oil Company, but in the production department. ... I worked in a gang laying pipelines in the swamp, and cleaning tanks and all that sort of stuff. I finally got to be a gauger, and in 1951, they were starting up operations offshore, so I transferred to Block 69 at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

*Doc Laborde:* Somewhere along the way, probably around the tenth grade – we only had eleven grades in those days, not twelve – about the tenth grade, I somehow got the notion that I would like to go into the military, and had heard a little bit about West Point. So, that was kind of in the back of my mind. Otherwise, I think I was just a kid growing up, without any great ambitions about it. Some years before that, I thought I wanted to be a priest. And, as a kid, around ten and twelve years old, I even went to spend a weekend at the seminary. Our pastor had taken us over there. And it looked pretty good to me. But my mother didn't want me to go that early, and somehow, you know, I guess I outgrew it later on. Finally, though, in those days, when you finished high school, if you were going to college, LSU is where you went... It was either that or get a job. Maybe the judge's son or the doctor's son might think about going to Tulane, but, generally speaking, no one else could think about that. And so I did go to LSU for a year. And we were three boys. My younger brother and my oldest. My younger brother was coming along the year behind me, and my oldest brother was already there, so that was a pretty good load for my father. And, while there, I was in the ROTC. And, again, the West Point idea sounded good. I talked it over with the fella who was running the ROTC thing, a Major Middleton, who later had a brilliant career as a general in World War II, incidentally. But he was head of the ROTC unit at LSU. And he suggested, again, he encouraged me to try for West Point, and told me all about it. And, in those days, it was a little more political, perhaps. You had to get an appointment from your Congressman in not an open, competitive way like they do now. And so, I consulted my father who was in on it. He knew one of our senators in Louisiana, Senator Overton, [and] talked to him about it. He said he didn't have anything for West Point that year, but he said he did have an opening at Annapolis. And he said, "That's just as good." I said, "Okay. I'll try that." So that was my career decision, if you will, to go in the Navy instead of the Army.... [When I got out in 1946] I was looking around for a job and there were millions of soldiers coming home looking for jobs. My brother knew of an oil company that was working up in Avoyelles Parish in Marksville, where I was. There was a seismic crew. They go around exploding explosives and mapping the underground contours of the formations looking for oil and gas. And my brother got me a job as a helper on one of those crews. We were dragging those cables through the swamp and what have you. And that's where I got started in the oil field.

*Jake Giroir:* Let's see, war was declared, I was working out of Columbus, Texas, and war was declared on the seventh, and I was working graveyard. That was on Sunday morning. I let my clock go. That boy come woke me up, "Man, guess what? Japanese have attacked at Pearl Harbor." I said, "Man, go away." "They have. Turn your radio on." That's all they had on. I didn't get much rest that night. And so from there, I stayed there in '41, and they transferred us back to West Lake Verret on a barge, and from West Lake Verret I went to White Castle. And I



had already got one deferment, because I was almost 30 years old, but I was helping my family out. And from there, I went to White Castle, so I get me another notice. I knew this one here wasn't going to go up. Then they changed it. When you get your third you could go in to what you want. I didn't want the Army because I had put seven years in the National Guard. So I took my vacation, and I was in New Orleans walking around, and I come to this place ... I was looking up, talking to this sailor and everything else, and he says, "You're still hanging around here. This is the second time you've been here." I says, "I'm looking." "What about?" I says, "I'm getting ready to go into the service, and I don't know what I want to join. I know I don't want the Army." He says, "Your papers come in?" I says, "No." Oh, he looked at me, he says, "Come here, I want you." So we got to talking, he asked me what I did on the rig. I fired boilers, I drilled the well, I worked derricks, I did everything you could do on a rig, I did it. And he says, "You fired boilers?" I said, "Yeah." "Oh, man, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. You join, I'll give you second class boilermaker. I mean water tender." "What do you mean?" He says, "You're gonna have two stripes to put on your arm." I said, "What's the...?" "Ninety-six dollars a month." Oh, lord. If I'd've went in the Army or just in the service, it would be about fifty dollars. "Oh," I said, "Okay." He said to come back tomorrow. He's gonna get all the papers ready. I went back the next day, went and got examined. They give me fifteen to twenty days, and I was on the vacation, too, you see? And it was about up. ...I went back and told them what they had said. They [Shell] wrote a recommendation, too. I had to get a recommendation. And I left on the, I'm trying to think what day it was, well, about thirty days after that. ... it was in September, the 31<sup>st</sup>... I went to San Diego, and from there I went to boot camp. From there I was transferred to the [USS] Boston, it was in Quincy. ... I put the Boston in service. I stayed on the Boston for almost three years... When I got back, I didn't go back into drilling. I went into production at Weeks Island because I had gotten married. ... I started off as a gauger, and from there I worked myself up. When I left, it was number 100 well. That's when I got transferred...

*Santo Rousso:* When I was 20 years old, or 21, I went off to World War II... I went to the Pacific. I was in a fighter control squadron... When I went in the service, I took basic training in Shepherdsfield, Texas. I was in the enlisted in the Air Force. Every time I heard the Star-Spangled Banner, I was looking for a recruiting station! And anyway, I went to Shepherdsfield, Texas, took basic training there, and from there I went to Scott Field, Illinois, which was a radio school. ..And I was in radio operating and direction-finding. Our squadron was called ROD's - Radio operators and direction finding people. So I got training in radios and Morse code and whatnot, and from there they sent me to Philadelphia, where I joined the squadron. I was assigned to the 33<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Control Squadron. The purpose of the fighter control squadron was to dispatch fighters in the event of enemy aircraft coming along the East Coast. So we had radio stations in Maryland, Philadelphia, and all along the Eastern seaboard. And from Philadelphia, I went to Newport News, Virginia, which was a shipping out place for overseas. And from there I went to the South Pacific... I signed up to come back for a year's service, so they allowed me a furlough, 'cause I never had been home... I came back on furlough, which I agreed that I would go back. And we were staging at that time to go to Japan... Just before I got back, four days before we landed in Seattle, Washington, the first bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. So they rescinded our orders. We didn't have to go back. They were going to reassign us to a place in the States. So I went to Kelly Field, San Antonio, and while I was there, they decided they didn't need us anymore, so I was discharged. And I came back to Morgan City... I left in July of '42 and came back in November of '45... I got back to Morgan City and I went into the radio

business. I had a radio repair shop along with Allen's [which is now a] TV/Cable Service... It was just he and I opened up a radio repair shop. It got to where there wasn't enough business for both of us, and I elected to buy him out because I had started it... So there was a fellow with Magnolia Petroleum Company that was interested in radios, and he came to my shop daily. And we talked and got chummy, and he suggested, "Since you're not doing too well, why don't you try to get on with my company?" which was Magnolia. So I went and I talked to them... and they hired me on part-time.

*Stella Rousso:* [I was born in] Baldwin, Louisiana, September 28, 1920... My daddy was a railroad man, and we moved to Bayou Boeuf. He was a bridge tender in Bayou Boeuf, so we moved there. We stayed there nine years. Then we moved back to Morgan City... I went to high school in Morgan City, and then we moved to Jennings, and I finished in Jennings, it must've been '39... I worked in a department store for a while. That was all they had to do in Morgan City, so I worked in the department store. And I was making very little money so I just quit. And then I heard about the service, and I wanted to go in... I was one of the first Auxiliaries. And nine months later we were sworn in to the regular Army. Or Air Force, I was in the Air Force... I was living with my mother, and she was heartbroken, but she saw me off at the bus. She was crying but I wanted to go, so I went... They sent me for Aircraft Warning Service. In Portland, Maine... It was checking the planes that were flying overhead. We had plotters that would call us in and tell us what kind of plane it was and where it was going. 'Cause we had, also a water [body], and we had to watch this for people that were coming in out of that body of water... I got out in November [of 1945], we got married the following July... I had to work. I was supporting my mother. I went to work at Riverside [Packing Company] as payroll clerk... I took advantage of [the GI Bill]. I worked at Riverside as payroll clerk, I handled a bookkeeping machine... I was taking a course to be a CPA I guess, through the Army was paying for it... I had to quit 'cause I was leaving... I had to leave because [my husband got a job with Mobil and] Mobil was moving men around. So, I had to go with them.

*TR Naquin:* In 1942 I finished high school, Sacred Heart Academy, went to work for the Bureau of Yards and Docks in the Navy Department, here in Morgan City. They were building dry docks for the World War II in England, built them for the English. And after a month here, they transferred me to Traverse City, Michigan to build a secret airplane base for the Navy. And while working in Michigan, after the War broke out and they started drafting, I was drafted into the Navy in 1943 and spent three years in the Navy, to 1946, and got out. And that's when, after getting out of the Navy, I came home for about a month and it was just like day and night. All the people that you knew before are gone, by the wayside, it's an entirely different picture. So I went back to California and claimed my job with the Navy Department at the San Bernardino Army Air Base. [I had a number of jobs] until '57 and I came back here. ... I went to work with the Pure Oil Company. I worked with Pure Oil as a clerk for nine years.

*Charles Wallace:* I was born and raised in Kinder, Louisiana. I went to Kinder High School. I graduated in 1942, in June. And the reason it was in June, most of the time we graduated in May, but it was in June that year because World War II was going on and the red army and the blue army were on maneuvers in Louisiana and they were using our schoolhouse for headquarters. And they did not vacate the building until two or three weeks after school [was to let out] my senior year... I wound up in the service. I volunteered for aviation cadets and I went to Europe

flying a B26 bomber. My time in the service was about two and a half years. When I got back, I went to school at Baton Rouge Junior College. I was looking for a degree in mechanical engineering with an option in aeronautics. Back in those days, it was a junior college then. I took more subjects than I was supposed to, than you ordinarily would, and went to summer school. But at the end of the third semester, I moved to LSU. I did not graduate... Right before I graduated, I had family problems and I could not continue school. So, I went to work for a survey company. This was right after the war and they were building all kinds of pipelines going up north to pipe. John L. Lewis was controlling the coal miners and every time you turned around, they went on strike, so they were seriously building pipelines in the north. I worked on two or three different pipelines as a preliminary surveyor.

*John Ryan:* When I went to high school, Louisiana had started what they called a part-time diversified occupation. You work a half day and go to school a half day. Take you five years to finish. And I was working as a mechanic there in Alexandria for a fellow named Harold Price. He did automotive carburetors. Back then they didn't have alternators, they had generators. Batteries. Tune-ups. We serviced a lot of the Hickson Brothers and Kramer Funeral Home. We had a contract to service their ambulances. [The oil industry] was far removed. ... I went into the service, I was drafted in '43, and I came out in '46. ... A lot of them went to the Pacific. I'll tell you, it was rough. We were fortunate to go to Europe. I was in France, Germany, and England, and Austria, but them poor devils in that Pacific, boy, I'll tell you, that was rough...

*Ray Boykin:* I had to leave school when I was about 13 and start farmin'. My dad got sick and I farmed two years. And then we moved into town and there I worked different jobs – grocery store and driving a truck. Then when I was 20 years old, well I got drafted into the Army. I went into the Army Air Corps in 1943. And I had my training mostly in Florida, at St. Petersburg, Tampa, Tallahassee. And from there we went overseas to England. And I spent two years in Europe. Made the invasion into France. We went over 'bout a month after D-Day and was attached to a Air Force Reconnaissance Unit. I drove a truck in there and I stayed over there till the war ended and ended up in Germany, in Nuremberg, Germany. From there I returned to the United States and I was discharged in '46, 1946. And then I went to work for Halliburton Oil Well Cementing Company in February of 1946.

*Bob Cockerham:* [My wife] was from here. She was livin' in Texas at Conroe. And then when we got back to Ft. Bliss, she and I corresponded for a couple of years and then the Army sent me to Louisiana up here at Camp Polk and then Camp Laughlin. And, of course she and I were still writing one another and then she got me to come down here on a Blessing of the Fleet deal. I made a [trip]. That was in '41 or '42, and then I just kept coming back. So she and I got married in '43 and I went overseas in '43. I went to Europe, and when I come back we went to California for a year. I worked for the government. And I didn't like California and she didn't either. So we come down here for a year 58 years ago, so we been here ever since. ['Course] I was more or less raised in the oil field. My daddy owned some of these drilling rigs back in them days out there in west Texas. And in the summer I would work on one of these rigs. Of course after I went in the service and went [overseas], then my daddy sold out and moved from Texas to California. Workin' for the Navy, he was a naval officer, too. Like I said, well, I didn't want to go back to Texas... I liked it here and so we stayed here. Then when they started drilling out in the Gulf... We drilled our first well in '47 out of Morgan City here, Kerr-McGee did. ... I didn't [intend to

get into oil]. I tried everything I could, I even shrimped, I even bought a filling station. Next thing I knew that oil field's picking up pretty good. I got pretty good offer, and I got stuck in it for about 40 years. ... I wanted to get back in [oil 'cause] I was born in it and it was kinda in my blood.

*Elaine Naquin:* It was during World War II and well, I had finished my junior year of high school and I went to work for civil service. And after that, I was working on an air base in Great Falls, Montana in the parachute department, and I learned how to pack parachutes. So when I got old enough to join the Navy is when I joined the Navy and I also packed parachutes in the Navy. So that was really interesting, I will guarantee you. I really enjoyed that... I was trained in the Navy in New York City, Hunter College in New York City. And from there I went to Lakehurst, New Jersey. They had this Blimp Base. You've heard about this Blimp Base where the Blimp exploded? That's where I got my training from, in the Navy part of it. And while I was there we were out for a break and one of the blimps started to take off and they let go of the lines too quick and they ... hit the top of the hangar. It split that thing like that and the cab dropped to the ground like that and killed everybody aboard, and we saw it happen. Believe me, after that they made all of us wear our dog tags everywhere we went. But I only really stayed learning how to do it with the Navy [for] about maybe two or three weeks because I had prior experience, so they put me in the loft to go ahead and pack for the base. Well that didn't go over very well either... But then they transferred me to Corpus Christi, which was an air base for training pilots, and I packed the parachutes for the pilots. And I didn't have to do any barracks jobs or anything like that because the rule was, if a plane crashed, we had to go out and pick up the parachutes. Well, we had men working there, so the men did that and we women didn't have to. It wasn't bad service at all. ... [I went back home to Oregon, but] it wasn't over about six months if that long. ... I went to California (to be with TR, my future husband). He kept writing me and calling me and so on and so forth. ... He had [a job in the Surplus Department and] everything lined up for me before I got there, a place to live and everything.

*Dub Noble:* I volunteered for the Navy, went to internal combustion engine school in the Navy. After graduating from the school, one of my buddies that I was going to school with came by and said, "Say, Dub, you oughta go- join submarines." I said, "Man, I'm not sure I want to get into submarines." He said, "Man, the pay is good." Sure enough, next month they almost doubled my salary.. up to 118 dollars a month. ... I only spent about two and a half years in the Navy. All of my career in the Navy was in the submarine group... When I got out of the Navy and came back to Morgan City, one of my friends that I had known was working for Humble Refining Company. He suggested that I go and talk to 'em, and go to work for them. I did.

#### 4.4. The Making of an Industrial Landscape: Chicago Bridge and Iron

*Citizens who were not off fighting the war were recruited to work in shipyards and other facilities at home. Even before the United States officially entered WWII, Morgan City officials worked to attract military-related industries. In the 1940's Chicago Bridge and Iron Works located its facility on the Young brothers' property that had been occupied by the Union Bridge and Construction Company during WWI (Morgan City Review, 1944). Chicago Bridge and Iron constructed dry docks on Bayou Boeuf and advanced the region's future in metal fabrication. The company created a new demand for workers of all sorts. Craftsmen such as welders and fitters were brought in from area shipyards and were trained onsite. Others were attracted to the region to fill positions at the facility. Indeed, some local women first entered the workforce at that facility. The following men and women discuss the role of the company during the war and its impact on the workers and the community.*

*Edward Dupont: My brothers and I were brought up working, hard work. My daddy believed that if you were big enough to get to the table to get something to eat that you were big enough to do something... I was in this little shop that my daddy and I had up in Rayne. We were building tanks for farmers, and what they call a rice cart for the rice industry. We built hundreds of them, delivered them all over, from Missouri to down here. You didn't know that they grow rice as far up as Missouri, but they do... When I first got out of school, I went to what they call a trade school in those days to learn how to weld. I stayed there a few weeks and said, "The heck with this." I came up here [in 1941] and went to work for Chicago Bridge and Iron Company, when they built that big dry dock. The largest dry dock ever built was built right here in Morgan City. It was built for the government to pick up ships and repair them. It was a huge thing. The walls on it were 125 feet high. They took it to Europe. They would sink it and pull the ship up and lift it clean out of the water... [My brothers] were working there too. There was no such thing with my daddy as "you can't do it." Just get at it. We all learned the hard way. We were six brothers, and we all learned to use a welding torch.*



**Figure 4.3. Morgan City Yard of Chicago Bridge and Iron during WWII.**  
Photo Courtesy of *Daily Review*, Morgan City Archives.

*Charles Pearce:* I had finished the school a little early, went to work on a boat for a good friend of the family who was running this boat at the time, and I went deckhand for him. I think I was about 16 years old then. From there, Chicago Bridge and Iron had put in a huge shipyard in Morgan City after the war broke out, and they were building dry docks, huge dry docks, for the Navy. The dry docks, they would take them out there where all the fighting was and if one of the ships got damaged, hit or something, well, they could dry dock it right there and repair it. So, I went to work in the shipyard and that is where I learned how to weld. They had a school set up there in the yard because when the war broke out, they drafted every available man that was not too old, that was not crawling, really! They drafted young married men, middle married men with families. We were not prepared for that. When the Japanese came over and started hitting, we had to hit back, of course. I worked in a shipyard for a few years. When I became 18, I registered for the service and I was turned down because I had an extremely nervous system. My stomach gave me a lot of . . . still gives me problems. But they turned me down for the service for that and that is when I decided to go to high school and see if I could get a little more learning and I ended high school over at Acadia Baptist Academy over in Eunice. When I graduated from there, I was 20, I guess, or 22, 21 or 22. And then from there, I worked about one year, then went to Clarke Memorial College over in Newton, Mississippi. This was a junior college back then. I stayed that one year, learned enough to know that I was not college material, so I gave it up! I followed my welding career after that.

*Hubert Chesson:* I was sixteen, I was roughnecking for Noble Drilling Company... And that's the only contractor that I worked for in the oil industry before I went to war. But, in the meantime, these shipyards started coming up. At my age, eighteen, so I went to work in the shipyard... went to work at Morgan City. I went to work in Orange, Texas. We was building wooden ships... Then, when they opened that big [facility], they built dry docks in Morgan City out of metal, floatin' dry docks...Chicago Bridge and Ironworks was the name of the company. They built these floatin' dry docks that if a ship became disabled out in ocean anywhere, they could sink it, put it under that ship, and then pump the water out, and it would float that ship to do whatever they had to do. It didn't sink on you, and they'd get a dry dock, float it under there and pull it back it up. [I was working in Morgan City]. That's where I got drafted. Then I went in the service, and I chose Navy...

*Clarence Duplantis:* I went to work at a grocery store, and I found it so good I went into business myself because I married my wife. I didn't have to pay her, and she was helping me to clerk in the store. So we was doing pretty good. Then things got pretty quiet, so I got me a job at the shipyard because we couldn't get everything we wanted from the wholesale. You couldn't buy no shortening, we couldn't buy no cigarette, things like that... They were taking them cigarettes and shipping them to the boys overseas, you see, so they didn't have none. So I went and got me a job. And then war broke out. That's when I went to work with the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company. ... The union wanted me to join, and I didn't want to join... You had to pay dues, and I was satisfied with my pay, so they said, "You're going to be the first one gone." Come to find out, I was the last one there. I was the last one there because I helped them to pack and welded some braces to ship that stuff off. So I was the last one. It was better without going to the union.... Well, we started building them dry docks. Then I took up welding. And after six weeks of going to school – they sent me to school – and after that, I went to work there, and I took a test, and I come out A-1. So I stayed like that a pretty good while ... They had people

from all over come here. They came from Houma, Thibodaux, people from Plaquemines, New Iberia, some from Lafayette would come here. They'd work around the clock – 24 hours. ... building dry docks...

*Cecile Grow:* When my daddy went to work for Chicago Bridge and Iron, that's when it was wonderful because we all got new shoes. We all got new dresses. It was good because all my daddy ever did was some carving the wood. He['d] do some yard work. He was wounded in World War I and he had a bad heart, and where a piece of shot that hit him in the back, it almost got his spine, his backbone. But anyway, he couldn't breathe well... And my mother died in 1941. My dad died in '47...I have no idea [how my daddy got a job at Chicago Bridge and Iron]. I guess people by mouth maybe told him that they needed workers. He was a guard. He worked at night and he'd get in his boat – we lived in Bourg at the time – and he'd get in his little boat and he'd run it around to where Chicago Bridge and Iron was, which where was where ...

*Ira Grow:* ...they had Kerr-McGee and Magnolia. Kerr-McGee was in one of the slips where Chicago Bridge and Iron was. And Magnolia Oil Company, that was there.

*Cecile Grow:* But he would go back and forth to work in his boat. It was too far for him to walk, so he'd take his rowboat and he'd ride in it and dock at the back of the place, I guess.

*Ira Grow:* They had a special place where they put the boats back there, because most people went to work in boats. They all lived all over the swamp and everywhere else and they just... Nobody had cars and a lot of places where you lived you couldn't use a car anyhow so it didn't...

*Cecile Grow:* Well, we never owned a car. We were lucky we had a boat and a skiff and a pirogue, which is a little necessity thing that he used to go fishing in and hunting in or whatever. One time my sister, my older sister, met a guy who was from Livingston, Montana and he was in the Navy and she was going out with him. They were christening one of those dry docks and they invited us all out to go out there. That was exciting. All the bands were playing. They served us, you know. It was really a nice thing that went on that time.

*Ira Grow:* Well, all the young people were going to war...

*Cecile Grow:* I had my two brothers in the war at that time, you see, which were older than I am...

*Ira Grow:* ...anybody who couldn't go to war worked at the shipyards, you know, at the time. But that's what brought the economy up here.

*Catherine Dilsaver:* [During] World War II, they had what they called these steel dry docks. And, I worked down there. A surprise since my dad would not let me be out. I was just out of high school, and I was hired as a typist. And that's when they built what they call ABSD, Advanced Base Sectional Docks. They built a dock with the walls that would fold down. The side would fold down, and they'd take 'em even to Africa out there or to the Pacific to

[inaudible] in the Philippines. And then when they put ten of those together in the Philippines, then they'd float 'em down the shore. So we had a lot of activity on that property.

*Chicago Bridge and Iron shut down its Bayou Boeuf facility only months after the war's end, while the Magnolia Oil Company was expanding its operations there. Kerr-McGee soon leased property at the site and the industrial landscape was firmly established. As Magnolia sought to enlarge its operations, company officials recognized that housing shortages were detrimental to their efforts to attract new employees and in late 1948 began the construction of homes on the site. Catherine Dilsaver recalls the transition from Chicago Bridge and Iron to Magnolia (Mobil) Oil Company.*

*Catherine Dilsaver: You had a housing shortage. And this is when Mobil Oil out in the area had to build their own houses for their offices. People who'd bring their offices, they had to build houses for them, 'cause we had a housing shortage. The schools were overrun with students, with people moving in. [They] opened up a new subdivision... It was a boom town at that time. You see, the [offshore] oil actually came in in '47, but, they had seismograph crews before that. And I think just about every oil company in the United States had an office here at one time.*



**Figure 4.4. Magnolia Company Housing. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Both the war and the ongoing exploration for oil affected Morgan City and the surrounding communities. The Morgan City Review, the local newspaper, regularly reported the deaths and injuries of military personnel. As the oil industry grew in size and impact, stories about discoveries, as well as those about accidents and mishaps, became front-page news. The injuries and deaths associated with the new industrial activity continued what had become a part of life during the war. Earl Hebert notes how the communities recognized those who were killed during the war.*



*Earl Hebert:* That was a special time. Both the communities around here had big boards with the names of the people who had gone, that were in the service. They also had boards with the names of people who were killed and – I was a kid, but they would have periodic ceremonies and they would have that stuff where everybody in town could see it. But it was a different era too... My parents had a grocery store. My mother ran a grocery store and my dad had a dry cleaning establishment.

*Competition among industrial sectors became a problem as economic activity increased and demand for workers exceeded supply. As described below, workers challenged their employers to meet wage rates being offered elsewhere.*

*Nelson Constant:* We were making 40 dollars a month. It was kinda hard for [the party chief with the survey crew] to pay me more than that. But when I got to work for him, I was making 60 cents an hour. I started with 60 cents an hour. We stayed about five years at 60 cents and then war started off. And the shipyards starts hiring at a dollar and a quarter an hour. So it was costing us to go back and forth, so we talked to party chief and said either we gonna go work for the shipyards, or we gotta get some more money. I mean, we're not just gonna just leave you blank, but... So he was nice enough and I believe we got a dollar and a quarter then.

#### **4.5. War's End**

*The end of the war signaled a new era for oil and gas production which was stimulated by the people and equipment returning from the war. With major onshore oil fields depleted, offshore beckoned as a promising new frontier. Returning veterans helped shape the offshore industry, both as managers and laborers. Some of the men serving in the military had acquired skills that they could apply to the offshore industry. As the industry developed, many Morgan City residents created or found new economic opportunities there. The following paragraphs describe the diverse occupational paths traveled by workers in the post-war years.*

*John Ryan:* Well, I came back, and I was real, real disappointed trying to find work. It was just hard. I was thinking about essentially going back [into the service]. In fact, I had an opportunity to stay with some benefits, but I elected to come back. I had enough of that overseas... Similar to seismic work, I worked on a shooting crew some, I did some surveying... [I started out as a] helper, seventy cents an hour. I went to work February the 10<sup>th</sup>, '47. ... We went offshore later. That was in about '48 or the early part of '49. ... When we went offshore, we rented the Miss America, in Houma. [That's] a shrimpboat. That mother, man, we worked off the back of that, and where all this deep oil is now at the mouth of the Mississippi River, we never could get that instrument on the bottom there. It would fly like a kite in that current. But we worked a hundred miles out. We hired a guy from the United Fruit Company who was a navigator for them, and he set up his sextant and all the goodies that goes with it, the stars and the moon and all that stuff, and he plotted our stations. And we'd make set-ups every four or five miles. We'd drop that instrument and get readings. Oh, yeah, they bought a little old dirigible, and they'd fly it on a long line above the boat with some lights under it. On the beaches, we'd put up towers, about fifty foot, and we'd use triangulation – we'd have three of them. And that worked partly, when we were fairly close, but the curvature of the earth kinda got to you after a while. You just get out of line of sight ... Later on Goldwater got involved with helicopters...

*Santo Rousso:* I went to the Pacific. I was in a fighter control squadron. ... I left in July of '42 and came back in November of '45. ... I got back to Morgan City and I went into the radio business...and they hired me on part-time [at] Magnolia Petroleum, it was Seismic Party number 9. ... I was hired temporary. They said, "Well, you work one day, then you'd be off the next day, then you can work in your shop." The boss told me that. And the boss was Jim Wilson... He was the founder of the golf course here in Morgan City, and he was the seismic party chief of Seismic Party number 9. ... My specific job was developing seismograms. See, they had a crew working offshore, and the temporary job I got was in the office, developing seismograms that they would send in. A seismogram is the readout from the earthquake that was derived from dynamite shooting. ... I think Magnolia was one of the first offshore companies. ... Well, after about a week, they were doing a lot of work out in the Gulf, in the bays. So they kept telling me to come back tomorrow, and then you can take two days off. See they had so many seismograms coming in, they kept me pretty busy. And so ... the boss told me, he says, "Take off tomorrow," or "Come back tomorrow." So that went on for about a week or so, and after a week they said, "How long will it take you to shut down your shop and come on permanent?" So, I said, "Well, it won't take long." The next following week, I went on permanent assignment. I was no longer considered temporary. So shortly after that... then they sent me out to where I worked on the boats... Things slowed down coming in from offshore, so they said, "In order to keep you," 'cause they wanted to keep me, they sent me off to the boats to work. It wasn't exactly offshore. It was kind of inshore. The name of the first boat I was on was the motor vessel Allentoch. It was a recording boat, where we laid a cable out behind the boat, and drug these detectors, and they shot dynamite charges, which was reflected there. ... So, I started out as what they called a geophysical helper. I helped put the cable out, and bring it in, clean up, develop seismograms. I got in pretty good with the observer, and I helped him fix a radio. So he says, "I want you in the darkroom." He took me off the deck and I worked in the darkroom, which led to my career with Mobil.



**Figure 4.5. Quarterboats on Barges. Photo Courtesy of Nelson Constant, OOGHP.**

*Jimmy Jett:* And after I was discharged, jobs were hard to find in Morgan City. I'd moved back to Morgan City then. And so I finally caught on with Billup Petroleum Company. What it was,

was just a regular service station, pumping gas in automobiles. And Mobil Oil came to Morgan City as a seismograph, and everyday after I'd knock off of work, I'd go to the Mobil office and apply for a job. Finally, November the 10th in 1946, after almost a year out of the service, I caught on with Mobil... I used to go everyday after I knocked off. Saturday, sometime too, and they'd tell me they didn't have any work. Everything was full. So, I went in there one day, and, I was talking to this fellow, his name was Herb Simmons. He was like the secretary there. He was takin' applications and whatnot. And while I was in there talking to Herb, and he had told me like he's been there telling me for days, that there's no openings, this fellow walked through the door. And he looked at me, and he says "I know you from somewhere." I says, "I don't know where it could be." He said, "Where you from?" He said, "I'm from Billings, Montana," I think he said he was. And he got to looking, and he said, "I know where I saw you." He said, "You was in the submarine service, at Pearl Harbor." I said, "Yes, sir, I sure was." So he told Herb, he said, "Herb," he said, "Send this man up." We had a quarterboat where we stayed. That was the first well that was drilled out in the Gulf. It wasn't the first producer, but it was the first hole ever drilled. And so they sent me out to the quarterboat. And I washed dishes for a few days, and then they put me on a regular boat, running' a boat back and forth among cities transporting crews. And that's how I originally got on with Mobil... It was a good company to work for, but they were rough, boy. You either put out or you got out. And, uh, they didn't think twice about running you off either. If you didn't do the work, you were gone.

*Aubrey Fields:* [When I got back from the service and went to work in 1946] there wasn't any oil industry around here. As a matter of fact, I went to work for Mobil, Magnolia, they didn't have a well anywhere in the Gulf of Mexico... There wasn't nothin' else to do around here and they hiring people to do seismic work. And the best thing that ever happened to me, I missed the boat. I went to work in production... I was at Eugene Island. Mobil had a quarterboat, they called it the Magnolia Inn. And the reason they had it there, the boats were slow. It took I think from here to Eugene Island about three hours on a boat and another three hours to go where they put a platform and were startin' to drill. That's how bad communication was, the radios weren't strong enough for communication just right off of Point Au Fer here, which is not too far. And, at one time, I used to be the radio operator. And, I relayed the drilling instructions from the toolpusher in town to the superintendent in town to the toolpusher on the rig and then I'd relay it back to him... I worked in the galleys first off... What they had that quarterboat there for, they had it to feed the crews. They'd work out then come back at night and sleep on there. They had two crews, one day and one night and when on a crew change, they'd stop and eat. Stay there at night and the next morning go to work.

*Hubert Chesson:* When I got out of the World War II, I had an ambition to work for Texaco. My dad was still working with them at the time. They wouldn't let relatives work with relatives or for relatives. They put you somewheres else, so I went into the drilling department, and my father was in the production department. Roustabout. He was uneducated, and I had very little. I had eighth grade then. But I worked on drilling rigs for eight years... from one rig to other, where they needed me. And they eventually shut all these old stream rigs down, and went to power diesel or natural gas... I was with a bunch a fellas that was already working for Texaco. I went to the service with, and knew 'em when I got back out. When they got out they came back to work for Texaco because Texaco in turn gave 'em... back their seniority. Because they continued being an employee when they come back... I started January 6<sup>th</sup> in '46... for eight

years I went in drilling department. Everybody that they hired had to go in the drilling department. Then from there, if you wasn't satisfied, if they had an opening in production, you could transfer from the drilling department to the production department... And let me tell you about Texaco. My first week, well, wait, my first five months, which was out here in Lake Dauterive, that was the only job that I could come home every night.... It was seventeen miles from my house in town to the job. And when you knocked off, after you made your twelve hours, you could come home and go back to work the next day. We worked ten on and five off.

*Rip Ryan:* In 1943, I went in the Navy. Stayed there for three years. Got out in 1946 and went to work for Shell Oil Company. My daddy was the captain on the ferry and he met some people working on boats and about a job... I went to work in the engine room at first. And then, later on, I went up to the wheelhouse, operated the boats and stuff. I guess I got my training there before the war on tug boats and stuff... It was two week on and two weeks off... Just imagine two weeks off... We worked with Shoran at first. They were set up on the beach every so many miles apart and they would triangulate and keep us in position. We had a master, a Shoran operator on the boat which the director would tell us where to go. [We had] a lot of trouble [with communications]. One time, I was running to Grand Isle and there was a hurricane coming and they could not get in touch with us. They had to drop us a note from a seaplane telling us to head back to Morgan City... At first, it was all haphazard, you know, and then it got better as we went along.

*Laurie Vining:* I came out of the service... [I was doing] a little bit of everything. A little bit of carpenter work, a little bit of welding. Whatever. I picked up a little bit [of welding] at Chicago Bridge and Iron. 'Course I'm not a welder, but I could usually glue two pieces of metal together... [In the service I was working on] landing craft... They put us over there on the landing crafts, you know. They just transported us on the ship, that's all... [I] was a coxswain... [When I got back from the war], I figured well, you know, I could probably better myself. So I went down to Kerr McGee and my cousin, Milton Vining, was a captain on one of the tugboats. And they needed a deckhand, so he said, "You want, you know the job is vacant?" and I said "Sure, I'll take that 'til something better comes along." You gotta start at the bottom and work [your way up].

*Dolores Henderson:* When my husband [Caleb] went to the service, he was just 14 years old. He was big and some lady signed and pretended she was his mother. So when he came out, he was just 18 years old. He went to adult education they would have at night and finished his high school. And his scores were so high 'til they went off the scale so the school system offered him a scholarship, something I had not heard of then. They probably had done so with some other kids, but he did not take it because we had just got married. We got married when I was 18... We had just got married and we wanted to build a house, so that's what happened. But through his GI Bill he had taken refrigeration and he had taken radio, and while he was taking refrigeration at Xavier University they noted that he [could] do physics, and he had never seen physics before. So they had offered him a scholarship too, but he was still on the house. So we finally did build a house... During that time he'd worked at a shell plant in Morgan City and at a lumber company. And then finally he was able to find this job McDermott Fabrication yard.

*Ray Boykin:* From [the Army Air Corps] I returned to the United States and I was discharged in 1946. And then I went to work for Halliburton Oil Well Cementing Company, in February of 1946. I was stationed first in Harvey, Louisiana, and then from Harvey to Lake Charles, in Lake Charles and Lafayette. And when I was in Lafayette, I got involved in the offshore oil in 1948. It was just beginning out here. Another feller in Lafayette, his name was Ellis Comeaux come over. He was one of the first Halliburton operators offshore and I was number two... And it was a little primitive at times, you know. You had to get on the rig at that time, the boat would back up there and they had to have a rope hanging down from a thing sticking out from the platform. And you grabbed that thing and swing from the boat to a little landing over on the lower leg down there. I know one time me and my helper, we had to go to Grand Isle for a job. At that time [it] was Humble Oil and Refining, before it changed to Exxon. And we went on this rig out there, it's at night. Caught an open shrimp boat, wooden shrimp boat goin' out there. And the water was a little rough, 'bout four or five-foot seas. And the boat backed up there and the rope was hanging down. And so my helper, he swung over and got on the landing over there. And then I went to swing across it, the rope didn't have no knots in it, so I started down and boy the rope had got wet and I was sliding down. And just as I got there, well I caught halfway on the landing, well he reached down and grabbed me. Good thing he was there, 'cause he saved my life.



**Figure 4.6. An International WWII Surplus Truck, Used by Halliburton for Hauling Cement to Drill Sites, 1948. Photo Courtesy of Herb Barrett, OOGHP.**

*Pete Gardner:* I stayed with them (Dixie) until... it had to have been about 1950-, '52... After the war it all changed... The whole damn world, the whole world changed after the war. Everybody was hustlin'. Every man for himself. And, if I can get it, I'm gonna get it. There was no loyalty to a company. There's no loyalty to 'em now and actually most of 'em don't deserve it

anymore... After the war it all had to be college graduates. And more of 'em didn't have enough sense to do anything. They'd read a book by someone who read a book and so forth and so forth and so forth and so forth. And they didn't have no blood in 'em... what it was was cold. You were nothin' but a figure. No personalities to it. I can remember the days for Texaco, for instance, the superintendent will go out here and call every man in your district by his first name. It ain't like that anymore. [It changed] after the war. Up until then the experienced men, maybe they didn't have any book learning but they knew what they were doin'... You had no radios. No telephones. You had a problem, you took care of it.

*Surplus equipment brought back from the war also proved vital to early offshore efforts. Key technologies and equipment developed during the war jump-started the new offshore industry and would remain vital to the industry for more than a decade. The expansion offshore had been stymied by supply and vessel shortages prior to the war. Oil and service companies took advantage of surplus boats, engines, and communications equipment to extend their operations into the Gulf. In the following paragraphs, men and women talk about how they used surplus equipment after the war.*



**Figure 4.7. Shrimp Boats Converted for Use in the Oil Fields.  
Photo Courtesy of Jerry Cunningham, OOGHP.**

*Parker Conrad:* In 1945 I had a shrimp trawler that I put into service with Pure Oil Company doing seismograph work in the Gulf, and they had what they called a shooting shack built on the back of the boat because they had explosives. And so that's my first venture into the oil business, was renting this particular boat in 1945, and it worked for quite a few years out in the Gulf for this particular oil company. Right shortly after that I acquired an 85-foot PT boat, serviced from the WWII. I took the old engines out of there and put a couple of small General Motors 671 engines in that boat, and that boat worked for Shell Oil Company for many years as a seismograph boat also, out in the Gulf. Also at that time I built the forerunner of the fast crew boats to service the oil companies. It was built by Seward Seacraft right across the river here in

Berwick. It was a 55-foot steel hull, and it was built like a speedboat, but it didn't turn out to be a speedboat. It did work for many years – many, many years – for Mobil Oil ... It was a forerunner of the fast crew boats that were eventually being built by Seward Seacraft at the time. He developed some pretty fast steel boats. Later on when aluminum became the ideal thing for fast crew boats, well, he switched over to that and everybody else did too.

*Griff Lee:* The oil companies, before World War I started, had begun looking at what might be sensitive and interesting seismic areas that were up in the marshlands and ran out into the water. And there's no way to get out into the water. World War II came along, and of course there was no steel or anything else for anything like that. So it was over. The oil companies wanted to go back to that and did get permits. And so there were three companies and three contractors that started out to build three different kinds of structures in the water. And McDermott was one of those three. McDermott built one for Superior Oil Company. Brown and Root built one for Kerr-McGee and W. R. S. Williams built a structure for Exxon/Humble... None of 'em there was not an offshore contractor. They were people with marine experience and draglines on top of a barge or something that would float [and could] do construction work. In fact, when W. R. S. Williams went out into the first location, they had got a World War II LST (Landing Ship Tank), got a Navy surplus crane from Africa that could lift all of 50 tons, put it in the middle of the LST and that was their construction work. McDermott went out... and they started building what was to be the first derrick barge. It was 150 ton, built for this job. But McDermott actually started work on that job by taking a marine harbor crane, pulling it up on the deck of a World War I barge to make it a little bigger, and it goes offshore and start work with that. But it got on location, the old McDermott Derrick Four, which is a 150 ton barge. Derrick Four was built in those days – instead of being 90 feet wide it was in three sections – so it could be unbolted if had to go through narrower canals. It was never unbolted, but it was only 150 ton. And this got out on the job, I think, I believe it got out there before the [war] was over. Those two were finished. McDermott finished the platform for Superior first. Kerr-McGee had the first [successful offshore well], from their platform built [by] Brown and Root. So since we're in the oil business, not the platform business, the one that's had the most publicity is...[The] structure which actually Brown and Root completed for Kerr-McGee. The actual first structure completed was the one that McDermott built for Superior... Superior didn't get the well completed as fast as Kerr-McGee did.

*Eldridge "Tot" Williams:* [My dad] did a lot of work for Shell and General Geophysical. After the war, he bought three government surplus boats in 1945, and I was captain on one of the boats and we did seismograph work from Aransas Pass, Texas to Ship Island off the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We shot the Gulf Coast from Aransas Pass to Ship Island to about 50 miles out offshore at that time. That was in early 1945, 1946. They did not have anything out there then other than Ship Shoal Light southeast of Morgan City. The way they would do this work, they had a land base, they had what they called a low rack station that was operated from a tower. When you would anchor up four boats – at that time, the only boats available were shrimp boats, so he bought four shrimp boats and used them what they called as a target boat. And we would go out, we would take a reading from Eugene Island light south of Morgan City, take a bearing there, go to Ship Shoal Light, take a bearing there, and then they would set the boats at different stations. They called them target boats to get a bearing off of each one that they could run their lines north and south and east and west. They would run them from south going towards the beach out to a

certain distance out and they would shoot. Anyway, at that time, they were using about 100 pounds of nitroman to make their shot points. I was captain on one of the 104 footer recording boat, and they would record what the shot points, when it would explode, they would record it on the boat and get a reading from the jug line that we were towing about 1,500 feet behind the recording boat. It was very interesting work and from there, that is when the oil field developed, started developing Kerr McGee, Ship Shoal, Block 28, Block 32 and from there, it just kept expanding on to the west, into the east.

*Roy Parr:* They [Humble] were workin' since '47. They started off with a lot of these surplus military ships. When I say ships, they were small. You know, 160 feet long, somethin' like that. But ACs, attack craft, and, gee whiz, they had a damn fleet of LSTs for living quarters. And they would just drive pilings right close to shore. Block 16, Block 18, [in] 20, 30 feet of water... but the first platform put offshore was Kerr-McGee Number One, which was out of the mouth of the Atchafalaya River. 1947. And they tell me it was in 47 feet of water. When we went seismographing out there, they were building Kerr-McGee Two.

*Clyde Hahn:* They (Humble) built a platform in about 40, 50 foot of water. And you had an old LST. What they were, they call 'em LSTs, but they were landing ship tanks made into a tender. And most of 'em laid to the north of [the rig], with the bow to the south. And then you had what they call a bow ramp, they had a turntable here with a ramp. And they would put it up to the structure. And they dropped it over on its turntable, and it would turn when the ship rolled a little bit or somethin'. But if it got too rough you had to drop this ramp down and you had a pilot ladder, which I had had a lot of experience with climbin' pilot ladders. But you could climb down that thing and get on the ship or climb up if it wasn't too rough. If it got too rough, you just had to pull back and wait for the water, or the weather, to get better, but it didn't happen too much. Unless you was fat...

*Floyd Fanguy:* After school I went to work for Shell in August of 1948, in the Drilling Department. I worked for a rig out of Buras, Louisiana. And then on out. The second well we dug, it blew out. Rig caught fire and it was destroyed. Then a few months after that Shell bought a Navy LST and had it converted into a drilling platform. That was Shell's first offshore platform... It was in late '49, early '50's. And we went, completed the rig, drilled the first well in what they call East Bay, right out of the edge of the Gulf out of the mouth of the Mississippi River. Yup, I think that was in early '51...about that time... I was hired as a mechanic, but when I got to the rig they had given that job to an older fellow and I went roustabouting. And I roustabouted a while. Then they needed a welder. So I went to welding... It wasn't a year, just a few months, and I went to welding. And I stayed on that rig. We moved all the way around the country. We dug out of Morgan City. We also went out of Cameron, and we took the rig to Alabama to have work done on it. And then after eleven years, well they cut that rig up... And I also at times I also worked as a motorman, taking care of the motors. Because on this LST we had three generators. We made our own drinking water.

*Cecile Grow:* You know something amazing about [Ira] is when he went to work on one of Kerr-McGee's boats here. Well, when he was in the Navy, he was on one of those kind of boats, he was in a little bitty wooden ship he was on when he was in the Navy. He said he knew all about those boats when he started runnin' these because they was the same thing.



*Ira Grow:* The ship that I was on in the Navy was a minesweeper and it was only 135 feet and it was made out of wood... They were using them as crew boats when we come back.



**Figure 4.8. Navy Surplus Minesweepers Purchased by A.B. Cunningham for Use by Shell Oil Company for Seismic Exploration. Photo Courtesy of Jerry Cunningham, OOGHP.**

*Laurie Vining:* The first one [I worked on] was a tug, KerrMac, as a deckhand. And then I went on the tug, Senator, as a mate... The KerrMac, that was surplus... Everything that we used were surplus. The tugboats, the drill tenders to drill the first well. That was the ex-Navy YF barges. They fill those up with supplies or whatever because I remember we got beer off of one in the Philippines. And that's what they'd tow over whatever needed. And they had some crew boats, some 63 footer, all wooden boats, they think was supposed to been some aircraft rescue boats. We had some of those and we had some of the 85 footers that was a bigger boat, slower. And that's what they wound up with those as crew boats... They had some LCTs (Land Craft Tanks) that was surplus. They were using those as the supply vessel to carry supplies out to the rig.

*Doughty Dominique:* It was a real poor-boy operation from the beginning. Course one of the partners, D. A. McGee, he was the McGee in Kerr, and Senator Bob Kerr, the politician, he was the one that was able to go to Washington and get all the paperwork in place and buy the LSTs they used as tenders, surplus, army surplus. All the LSTs that they used, they were Army surplus.

*CJ Christ:* They were old LSTs that were from the war. And if they took an old LST and they had a ramp about a five or six point anchor system. And then they had a ramp that went from the ship up to the platform, they called the "widowmaker" because every once in a while the water got real rough and that ramp would fall down. So guys on the rig, they were on their own.

*Arles Doss:* We used to take a long crane and set a barge box up there. They couldn't get down, but those widowmakers hung down on that cable. And it was there and that ship was swinging down under it and you stood there on the end. And when that widowmaker come by you jumped

on it... [The widowmaker's] hanging on a cable and the ship is under here you see, moving around. And all your hoses and everything connected from that platform to the back of the ship, your mud hose, your water hose and everything. One time when it was real, real rough, we was trying to disconnect all of those hoses – so when it got real rough, you had to pull that tender back away from the platform – and it was all them hoses and everything connected in the back end of this ship. We were trying to cut it loose where we could get that ship away from that platform. And a big wave comes in there and all them roughnecks, it caught one of them roughnecks and washed him clean off of the ship, and another wave hit him right behind that and washed him right back up on the ship.

*Ray Boykin:* [The work in Venezuela] was inshore. It was all on land... Halliburton had people comin' from all over the United States, whereas Louisiana I think there was only me and another feller at that time was in Venezuela. But they had a lot of people from Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma down there... The only way you could get in there, Texaco was workin' for down there, they had a big old World War II PBV seaplane what it was. They hauled people in there, or either by boat, that was the only way you could get in there.

*The visible signs of the war-related activities soon faded. Chicago Bridge and Iron left Morgan City, by the fall of 1945 and its yard became part of what was soon a vast and expanding industrial complex developed to service the offshore oil and gas industry. War surplus equipment was replaced by vessels and machinery built especially for the industry. To meet their needs, petroleum companies hired contractors to construct the equipment they needed, a practice that would lead to the development of small and large companies, many which got their start in southern Louisiana.*

## 5. OFFSHORE DEVELOPMENT AS A DISTINCT PHENOMENON: THE LATE 1940's THROUGH THE 1950's

*During the post-WWII era the offshore oil and gas industry, augmented by people and equipment from the war, was established in the Gulf of Mexico and the stage was set for worldwide expansion. Although, in 1951, the Oyster Shell Products Corporation was the largest plant of its kind in the world and still provided the greatest single payroll in Morgan City (Morgan City Review, 1951), petroleum and oilfield service companies were rapidly coming to dominate the local economy. Morgan City lay at the heart of the new offshore industry and it, and the communities surrounding it, saw unusually rapid growth during the 1950's, attributed to the exploitation of both onshore and offshore petroleum resources (Gramling, 1984c). Between 1940 and 1960, oil and gas development also led to a demographic shift toward younger residents and changed the occupational structure of Morgan City and St. Mary Parish; a major decline in jobs in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries was matched by an increase in petroleum-related employment in mining, manufacturing, and transportation (Gramling and Joubert, 1977).*

### 5.1. Profiles

**Ed Dilsaver** was born in North Carolina in 1925 and moved to Florida as a child. Ed served in the Navy during WWII and then returned home and earned a business degree from Florida State University. He worked for Shell the first 10 or 11 years of his career. Because of his education and his experience in the Navy, his starting position was as an "oil buyer" in 1955. In the mid '60's he went to work with his brother in Morgan City on his boat, which was contracting out to Magnolia at the time. In 1967 when Mobil took over Magnolia, Ed went to work for Mobil as the marine foreman. After retiring in 1982, he went to work in Houston for the Trans-Co Energy Company. Ed's supervisors supported his quest to patent an Emergency Boarding Net he invented while working for Trans-Co.

**Bill Wilson** was born into an oilfield family in north Louisiana in 1927; his father had migrated from east Texas to Magnolia, Arkansas and worked for the Interstate Oil Pipeline Company. Bill spent a couple of years in college and joined the Air Force. He returned to Shreveport after the Korean War,

went back to school, married, and worked two jobs until he decided to get into the service station business. That venture was short-lived; he was fortunate to get a job with Texaco in 1957, despite the recession at the time, and spent two years working whatever jobs were needed until he landed a permanent position as a roughneck. He advanced through several positions to become a yard foreman for the company's Morgan City shore base of its new offshore district. He continued to advance, was moved into the company's New Orleans Division Office, from where he retired as purchasing manager in 1992.

**Emmet Sellers** was born in Abbeville, Louisiana on July 27, 1927. He was drafted into the U. S. Army in 1947 but was later transferred to the Air Force as part of the 55,000 troops that were "paid back" in exchange for those "borrowed" during World War II. He attended Southern Louisiana Institute (now ULL) in Lafayette and then went to work as a basic engineer for the US Coast and Geological Survey. His father had worked many years and had

retired from a Texaco gas processing plant in Erath, and Emmet went to work for Texaco in June of 1950 as a deckhand. Several months later, Emmet was roustabouting and also worked as a pumper. He later became a production supervisor for Texaco. Most of his career was spent around Horseshoe Bayou and Morgan City, Louisiana. Emmet retired from Texaco in 1986.

**Joyce Cockerham** was born in Lafourche Crossing near Thibodaux. Her father was a supervisor for Shell Oil Company, and the family moved to Conroe, Texas. She met her future husband, Bob, while he was serving in the Army during World War II, and they married in 1943. After Bob returned from the war, the couple settled in Morgan City where Bob soon got a job working for Kerr-McGee, drilling what was to become the first successful offshore oil well drilled out of sight of land. Bob worked for several drilling companies over the next 22 years and then worked as a consultant until his retirement in 1984. Bob and Joyce's daughter, Frances, married Buddy Justillien. Joyce, Frances, and Buddy spent their lives in the oil field. Buddy and Frances now operate Justco Engine Service.

**Burt Ross** was born in 1928 in Morgan City, finished high school in 1947, and went to work for Magnolia as a galley hand in 1949. He was laid off after two months when the work slowed down, and he then was rehired as a deckhand a month later. Burt was transferred to Texas in 1951 due to lack of work, and was then drafted into the Army in 1952. On his return to Morgan City after being discharged in 1954, Burt was immediately hired by Magnolia as a roustabout. He advanced through several positions within the company and retired in the 1980's as a Production Supervisor IV.

**Robert Shivers** was born in Hull, Texas in 1929. His father built derricks for the Gulf Oil Company and later worked for the Sun Oil Company and the Rio Bravo Oil Company. Robert stayed in Hull through the 11th grade of high school and graduated in 1946. He attended the University of Texas where he finished in 1950. He began working in the oilfield in 1944 in Monroe City, Texas. Then, in 1952, he entered the Army. He was discharged in 1954, during a period when the oilfield was cutting back. He built an office for a local physician and got into the home-building business. He moved to Morgan City in 1957, during a period of industry growth, a time the oil and gas companies were hiring anyone with a skill and even sending buses out of state to find workers. Houses were needed in Morgan City by the dozen and Robert's business took off.

**Barbara Ross Stansbury** was born in Berwick and moved to Morgan City when she was about seven years old. Barbara's first husband, Merlin Boudreaux, began working offshore for Mobil Oil in the mid-1940's and stayed in that job until he and his sister were killed in an automobile accident in 1953. Barbara's second husband was a surveyor for Humble Oil Company. Barbara raised her children and took charge of household responsibilities during the 1950's and 1960's when the offshore oil industry was flourishing in southern Louisiana.

**Howard Thibodaux** was born April 15, 1929 in Amelia, Louisiana, and lived there most of his life. He began work at the age of 15 on a tugboat for Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Company. He tried several jobs and was working on a dredge boat when the Korean War broke out. He served in the Air Force for four years, and then returned to

Morgan City and began working for a joint venture called McDermott and Raymond Concrete.

**Gladys LeBoeuf** worked as a schoolteacher throughout her career. Gladys began teaching during WWII when teacher shortages were acute, and she continued in that profession until her retirement in 1987. In 1975, Gladys moved with her husband, Harry, from her hometown of Montegut to Morgan City. In her first teaching job in Morgan City, Gladys was confronted with larger classes, up to 40 students per class, and more discipline problems. Many of her co-teachers at the time were the wives of oilfield workers.

**Harry LeBoeuf** worked for Texaco his entire career, beginning in February 1948 and retiring in September 1987. Harry began as a roustabout, advanced to gauger/pumper onshore, and then moved offshore where there were more challenges and more money. In 1962, he was Texaco's first pumper offshore; several years later, he became the company's first production foreman, a job he retained until about 1974. In that year, he moved into Texaco's offshore district office in Morgan City as production supervisor in charge of all Texaco offshore production.

**Tess Dilsaver** grew up in Morgan City and began working for a small insurance agency as a teenager. She went to work for Kerr-McGee in 1947 at the age of 19, stayed with the company for seven years, and then left to start a family. After her children were toddlers, she returned to the company and worked for two more years. Her husband, Ed, also worked in the offshore industry.

**Mary Samaha** was born in 1930. In 1939, she was living in Harvey where her

mother rented rooms to people working in the oil fields, referred to locally at the time as "oilfield trash." Mary's mother remarried an oil worker when Mary was nine years old. At that time, Mary's mother had three children. The family moved often during the next 9 years, sometimes only staying in one place for a few months. Each child had a suitcase; their mother would bring the cooking supplies and the ironing board. The family would get to town and immediately find a place to live while Mary's stepfather went to work. Though Mary's life was exciting for a young girl, it became more difficult as she grew older.

**Bill Bailey** began his career working at Humble Oil Company. Bill left Humble in 1956 and went to McDermott in 1956 to open that company's fabrication yard. He helped build and launch the first platform that was constructed on land and then hauled by barge to a location in the Gulf of Mexico. He stayed with McDermott until his retirement in 1973.

**BA "Red" Adams** was born in 1933 across the river from New Orleans. Even though the area was involved in the oil industry, Red was not aware of it as a child. After 5 years in the Navy, Red found employment in the oilfield in 1952. He worked offshore as a contract laborer for the California Company (later renamed Chevron). He started as a roustabout loading mud sacks and eventually worked his way up to gang-pusher. In the 1960's, he was offered a job in sales and decided to take it. He worked for two different companies before finally opening his own company in 1967. Oil and Gas Rentals grew from having a handful of employees to employing 95 people in 2002.

**Pierre Jackson** was born in Berwick in 1934. He became aware of the oil and gas industry in the 1940's when he worked in the barbershop shining shoes and heard the oil men come in with stories of rigs offshore. Pierre worked at a variety of onshore jobs, such as loading drilling mud, until he went into military service. He returned home after two years and worked at more odd jobs until he was hired by Texaco in 1967. He began cutting grass at the Bateman Lake Plant and was promoted numerous times. He began working at Texaco's new cryogenic plant in 1973 and retired from Texaco in the mid-1990's.

**Alden Vining** worked in the oilfield for Kerr-McGee, Phillips Oil, and Shell Oil companies. He was born in 1936 and attended high school in Morgan City. Alden worked on boats, towing rigs and barges, and as a general hand when he was in high school and on summer vacation. He witnessed the conversion of LSTs (landing ship tanks) and shrimp boats to service the oil companies and also saw great changes in his hometown of Morgan City. After high school, Alden's guidance counselor placed him with a company building concrete pilings. He then took a job as a roughneck for Phillips 66. In 1957, Alden was hired by Shell Oil. He worked as a roustabout, gauger, gang pusher, and supervisor of production maintenance at Eugene Island, Block 18.

**Joe Young** attended Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana and received a degree in geology. He went to work on a seismic crew in 1951 and then went to work as an analyst for a mud logging unit called Consolidated Well Logging in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Later, Joe went to work for Dowell as a service engineer in Kilgore and Tyler, Texas. He then moved to

south Louisiana and worked offshore from 1956 to 1959. He went to Maracaibo, Venezuela and then returned to the Gulf of Mexico to operate production leases there. In 1975, he went to work for Lease Service as a salesman.

**Billye Grice** moved to Morgan City in 1954 with her husband, Jesse. At the time, Jesse was an engineer working for Phillips Petroleum Company, and Billye was responsible for managing their household. Jesse had studied photography and worked in a studio at Louisiana Tech when he was in college, and he began taking photographs of industry-related equipment and events as a hobby. Word of his photography got around, and Jesse began receiving requests to take pictures. When he realized he was making more money selling photographs than in his regular job, he left Phillips and started his own business. At that time, Billye was raising children and doing community work. She soon found herself helping with various aspects of the business, from the bookkeeping to working at the retail store. The business suffered tremendously during the downturn of the 1980's. When Jesse passed away, Billye sold their business. She stayed in Morgan City and became involved in other community activities

**Verdie Laws** moved to Morgan City in 1958 when her husband took a job at Cameron Iron Works. She raised two children and went back to work in 1978 after she and her husband divorced. She worked at Oceaneering International, Inc. for nine and a half years and was laid off in 1987 during the downturn in the oil and gas industry. She then held several jobs both in and out of the oil and gas industry, though she preferred working in the industry. Verdie continued working full time until 1999, ending her career working at a boat construction company.

**Haggai Davis** was born in Denton, Texas. He roughnecked in high school in 1947 for a drilling company called Cooper Herring. He quit high school in his last semester to join the Coast Guard. He went to work for Warren Automated Tool Company out of Houston and then moved to Harvey in 1952 where he met his wife, Gail, who was working for J. Ray McDermott. Later, he went to work for Fishing Tools, Inc., then Taylor Oil Field Rental, and then went to Kajan Specialty, a fishing tool company out of Houma. Haggai also did sales for Whipstock, Inc. out of New Iberia. That company was so busy that Haggai also learned and performed directional drilling. He headed directional drilling projects and worked in the oil fields of the southeast United States, the Middle East, Alaska, London and the North Sea. He first moved to Morgan City in 1958 and then returned in the late 1960's after working overseas to work for Stable Drill. Haggai has patented several drilling tools including a snubber rig and the Gumbo-buster. He had his own company called Macaroni Tubing Rental.

**Lucius "Lou" Trosclair** was born in Berwick, Louisiana and graduated high school from Morgan City in 1948. He attended Southern Louisiana Institute in Lafayette and received a degree in education in 1952. In June of that year, after college graduation, Lou went to work for Shell Oil Company as a roustabout. In January 1953, Lou was drafted into the Army and spent one year in England until his discharge in December 1954. He returned to Shell and moved to Gibson as a roustabout and then was promoted to gauger. He remained at Turtle Bayou as a gauger until 1956 when Shell opened its first offshore platform at Block 18. Lou went to work at Block 18 as a gauger and was promoted to maintenance foreman. He was then promoted to

production foreman and moved to Block 100. Lou also went to Eugene Island Block 188 after its discovery and, in 1963, became a tool pusher or drilling foreman, representing Shell on their drilling contracts on federal leases. He retired in 1985.

**Garver Watkins** was born in 1933 in Patterson, Louisiana. He grew up in Berwick and attended high school in Morgan City. During the summers, Garver worked in boat businesses that supported the oil industry, first with his father and then his uncle. He spent some time at the University of Southwestern Louisiana before he was drafted into the Army. He served two years in Korea. When his father's health declined, Garver took over the family boat business, but the small enterprise was unable to keep up with new, costly regulations and he eventually sold out. Garver got a job at McDermott in 1956 and worked there for 38 years, starting out as a helper and working his way up to foreman and superintendent.

**Joe Sanford** was born and raised in South Carolina and got into the commercial diving business after leaving the Marine Corps in 1954. He dove for a couple of years on the East Coast until he received a call from a friend to relocate to the Gulf coast to dive for Sea Engineering. Joe and his brother purchased Sea Engineering four years later; they formed Sanford Brothers and moved to Morgan City. They were among the first diving companies working in the area to have insurance; this proved to be a benefit when the oil companies started to require their contractors to carry insurance. Within a few years, the company grew from Joe and his brother to a 45 to 50-person operation. In 1967, the Sanfords sold the company to Westinghouse; two years later it was sold to Santa Fe Drilling Company. Within a couple of years, Santa Fe was bankrupt and out of the diving business. Joe and a former

employee purchased Morgan City Rentals, a company that rents equipment to petroleum and service companies. After many years, Joe's son bought the business.

**Doris Mullendore** was born in Lafayette, Indiana and moved first to Oregon as a child and, then, to Amelia, Louisiana in 1946 as a young teenager. She graduated from Morgan City High School and took a job as a bookkeeper for a local Buick agency. When its owner bought a crew boat, Doris began what was to become a career in the offshore oil and gas industry. She left that boat company to work for a pipe and supply company. She worked for a short time for a hardware store and then, in 1976, went into the diving business with several friends. The diving company folded in 1986 during the oil downturn, and Doris worked for a few different companies until she was hired by Morgan City Rentals, where she stayed until her retirement. In 1966, Doris helped found the Morgan City Desk and Derrick Club, an organization for women working in the offshore oil and gas industry.

**Clyde Dyerson** grew up in Kansas City during the Depression. He earned a degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Kansas in the early 1950's. Clyde's first job was with Magnolia Oil in Lake Charles in 1954. He then served in the military for two years and returned to work for Magnolia in Oklahoma. In 1958, Mobil transferred him to Morgan City in 1958 and, in 1962, he left Mobil to work for McDermott. Clyde was transferred to New Orleans in the early 1980's and became involved in research. He was transferred back to Morgan City in the late 1980's and stayed with McDermott until his retirement in 1992.

**Walter Daspit** was born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana. At 17, he left home to join the Merchant Marines. While a seaman, he saw an advertisement for a diving school, which led him to an eventual career change. He began diving in 1954 while still serving in the Merchant Marine, and he closed his seaman's book in 1956. He worked for Al Warriner and then Dick Evans Divers. He remained with Dick Evans after the company was purchased by McDermott, and continued diving with that company until he was injured by a severe case of the bends he contracted as a result of a faulty gauge.

**Lloyd Charpentier** was born in Franklin, Louisiana, lived in Morgan City and New Iberia, and then moved to Berwick where he remains today. During WWII, Lloyd's father worked at Terrebonne Shipyard in Morgan City, building vessels for the Navy. Lloyd began his career on the water in the 1950's, when he went to work on his uncle's shrimp boat. He chose the oil industry rather than the fishing industry because, at the time, it seemed a little more stable. Lloyd went to work for Paul's Boat Rentals and operated a crew boat for Phillips 66 when the company was laying a pipeline to a Eugene Island field. He left the Gulf of Mexico to serve in the Army from 1961 to 1963 and returned to the oilfield as a deckhand-engineer for Tidewater Marine. He advanced to captain within six months, and then moved from crew boats to supply vessels the following year. He worked in the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska, South America, and Trinidad until 1973, when he moved into a staff position overseeing vessel repair and maintenance.

**Valine Mullen** got her first job related to the offshore oil and gas industry in 1967 when she was still in high school. She worked for an answering service that had a



contract with a company working offshore. Val would take calls from people needing to talk to someone offshore. When she finished high school, Val married and moved to New York for several years. She and her husband moved to Houston and then Val moved back to Morgan City. She worked for several companies that provided services to the offshore oil and gas industry and, in 1985, went to work for the Perry Flying Center. While working at Perry, Val became involved in the Desk and Derrick Club.

**Lisa Topham Williams** began working at McDermott in 1989 through the company's program to hire employee's children. Her grandfather, Oliver Topham, worked for McDermott from the 1950's to 1983. Her father, Gerald Topham, also worked for the company from 1961 to 1998. Lisa studied communications and brought her knowledge and skills to the McDermott Public Relations Department.

## **5.2. The Oil and Gas Industry Establishes a Firm Foothold**

*Seismic companies have been exploring in the Gulf of Mexico since the 1930's, and during that decade several companies had drilled wells in Gulf waters. Still, it was Kerr-McGee Rig 16's November 14, 1947 extraction from oil sands in Ship Shoal Block 32 that was eventually to be recognized as the beginning of the offshore industry, defined as the first successful producing offshore well out of sight of land. The following week the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported this discovery as one of the most significant in the region that year. Below, some of the people who were working and living in the region during this seminal period recall how they were affected by the ongoing movement into offshore waters.*

*Bob Cockerham:* I was working for them (Kerr McGee) when they drilled that first well. I was working on the shrimp boats, but when they started to drill that well, well I found out about it, and I was hired out to 'em and I worked on that first rig out there a while. And then of course other companies started drilling out there. I must have worked for another company, all sorts of companies moved down here then. The Offshore Company was Danzinger then. I worked for them for several years. I spent roughly 20 years with those people, 10 with another, drilling out in the Gulf... When we first started out in the Gulf, the companies would go out there and drive pilings and set up a platform. And we would haul the rigs out there piece by piece. They were what we called "land job rigs." And we would set 'em up on this platform, put 'em all back together up on the platforms... We finally decided to make a drilling barge. ... After we built this rig right here then the companies started building what were called "floaters," do away with them platforms. And they build these big rigs on bigger barges where we could float 'em out there and drill the wells while they were floatin'. The first of 'em were built on what we call catamarans, the twin ships. They put two ships side by side and built a platform crossing 'em, built the rigs on 'em. Now we would take them out there, then we would anchor 'em up. It would take 16 to 20 anchors to hold 'em...



**Figure 5.1. Kerr McGee Rig 39, the Frank Phillips, with a Drilling Tender and Converted Navy YF Barge. Photo Courtesy of Chester Pipsair, OOGHP.**

*Alden Vining:* In 1950, I got introduced to the oilfield. I was a summer freshman in high school and I do not know, for some reason, Kerr-McGee was down here and they were doing a lot of hiring in the summer time and I had an opportunity. I was working at a dry goods store on Front Street making about 13 dollars a week, I think it was, working six days a week... I had a cousin of mine that worked for Kerr McGee and he needed a deckhand on the boat. I think I was 15 then, so he came down and asked if I wanted to go to work. It was right after school had let out. So, I went to work on a boat and boy, I am telling you what – this was a good job because we made about 50 dollars a week and we made about 150 dollars a month because you worked three weeks on and you got a week off. Of course, you did not get paid for your week off, but you worked on the boat. You had all the food you wanted. You really did not work hard. We went around to all the... towed the barges and stuff and the drilling rigs all over the place. I saw some of the things that they did on the drilling rigs then which was mostly inshore stuff. After the summer was over with, I went back to school for my sophomore year and the next year in the summer time, I guess it was 1951 – I am not quite sure – I went to apply again for Kerr-McGee. I was still 15 years old and I went down there. They were fixing to send some stuff back out into the Gulf because I think in 1946 or 1947, they had drilled a well out there and they had wrote in some kind of Tideland dispute whether the federal government owned it or the state owned it. There was a 3 mile or 10 mile... [The one I worked on] was the Frank Phillips. It was located right off side of Oyster Bayou. I think it was Block 28. It had about 30 feet of water where we were located. I went to work out there as a galley hand and they had these old converted LSTs that all the machinery on it would be the pumps, the generators, the living quarters, and the pipe storage, and all this where the people slept. And they would tie this thing up to the back of this wooden deck platform, which was just wooden pilings and things, and somebody would go out there and drive these pilings and they would set this drilling rig on there, and they went ahead and drilled. That was a very good experience because we made about 90 cents an hour on that particular job, and I thought it was good because, you see the roughnecks on there, I think they made a dollar twenty-five and they got overtime. We got overtime, too.

*Tess Dilsaver:* [I got a job] with Kerr McGee. And I had worked for this small insurance agency, and to go from a small agency, two people in the office, to this wild place, it was, well, it was just mind-boggling. But it was so much fun. It was such a revelation to see, I had no idea what I was getting into to go to work for 'em. But the people were just wonderful people. Most everybody was from Oklahoma or Texas. And everybody was so cooperative and so helpful and just pleasant to be around and made my job just wonderful. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. But there was just so much to learn... I worked in the front office. And everything was so new. I'd get these reports with all this crazy stuff on it, I'd never heard of it before. I mean a monkey board and a Christmas tree and a roustabout and a roughneck. What's that all about, you know? And so we had to take reports and here's all this stuff and it's Greek to me. And the people that I worked with were just wonderful people and they just kind of laughed at me. And they said, "Me-, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send you out to a rig. And then you won't be so confused." Which I thought was a really good thing to do. Well, back there in '46, '47, '48, it was really primitive around here because this was all so new... And it took forever to get out to the rig. But anyway, I got on that old boat and I bet it took me seven hours to get to the rig. And then when I got out there, everybody was so helpful. They showed me everything completely around the rig and introduced me to everybody... So they showed me all along the rig and I was out there two or three hours, I guess, and then we came back and on the way back, I mean, it was hazardous in those days because fog set in. Of course, it was primitive back in those days because you didn't have all this communications that we have now. So it took us forever to get in. And, I mean, you couldn't see the end of the boat because of the fog. It was quite a day. It was a LONG Monday. But anyway, it really opened my eyes to what was happening and it made the job so much more interesting 'cause you knew what you were workin' with. But in those days, transportation was so slow because equipment wasn't made for that yet. They hadn't developed the thing to get to the boats out there in a hurry and there was no helicopters and maybe seaplane if they had to have it, but those were few and far between. So everything was a very lengthy ordeal to get equipment and men out to the rig and it would take many, many hours to transport, to change the crews out. And when you needed a part for the rig – and I found out in a hurry that the rig never stopped – you could not stop a rig because of the expense that it entailed. And the people in charge of the rig had to make sure that what they anticipated they may need would be out when it was needed...

*Aubrey Fields:* It's right off of Point Au Fer... That was Magnolia's first well, looking for dry hole. Now that Kerr-McGee hit the first well. And I was at that quarterboat thing and Governor Kerr and McGee came out and they had a big barbecue on the Island... Some mud company put it on. When McDermott first started out there, they used to have the damnedest equipment you ever saw. But it kept getting better and better. At one time they had a old boat they called the called the Oil Mack and it, then they got a derrick barge with a crane on it. And they cut the bottom off of the boat, and put it on top of the barge for the living quarters.

*Clyde Johnston:* When I first came here, as fast as the stuff was hitting the door – they had a company here called Magnolia Petroleum which is Mobil Oil and now, it is Exxon Mobil, Magnolia – just as fast as it hit the door, we were going in the trucks and hauling it over there, and price was not a factor and then there were not what they called MRO contracts or special pricing in it. It was just mispriced. We were making tons of money for the company. Unfortunately, we were not getting it... Bethlehem also was a manufacturer of drilling rigs and

drilling equipment and we, at that time, it was so lucrative anybody that could make a down payment on it could buy a drilling rig. And I am talking about a little barge type deal that you could . . . if you would make a down payment on it, Bethlehem would finance the rest of it. I am talking about it was a lot of money back then, about 300,000, 400,000 dollars a rig. There were a lot of guys – doctors. There was a Doc Drilling Company, there was a Blackie Drilling company. They bought NGS from Bethlehem. There was the Old Reagan Tool. What is it now? They said if we are going to bring a steel barge in there with a key weight, they would rig it up and all. We would furnish the pumps, the drilling rigs, the draw works. The whole thing, the derrick. So, we were hustling hauling stuff there, back and forth. And we were just one right after the other when it was booming. And the barges were just one rig companies. Just about had enough money to put down. It was rented out to the oil companies for a well and they would pay the notes to Bethlehem, just like buying a car. But then, that changed.

*Doc Laborde:* [Then] my brother who was an attorney was also friendly with this company, Sid Richardson, from Fort Worth. They were doing some exploration down here in New Orleans and were drilling some wells down in Plaquemines Parish, and it was their first effort in the marsh where they had some boats and barges and all to service the rigs. And they thought that they needed some kind of marine guy, an old Navy hand to help ‘em with that. And they probably didn’t really, but as a result they hired me to look after that part and do the maintenance on the drilling rig and all. So I was down there on this barge for a couple of years. That was from the end of ‘46 until maybe mid-’48. And I took advantage of the opportunity to learn as much as I could about the drilling of the wells. I got some books and asked a lot of questions and all, along with what I was doing. And one day I heard from a friend of mine that Kerr-McGee had made a discovery offshore Morgan City. And it was out in the ocean, and I said, “Gee. That might be a good opportunity for me with my seaman ship background, and what have you.” So I went and talked to ‘em and sure enough, they were having real problems with what I’d call the marine side of their business. Their mindset from Oklahoma was that you get out there and build a platform, and do this much like you would on land. And the marine aspect of it was really eating their lunch. You can’t fight back. You have to learn how roll with the sea and the weather, and what have you. So they were very happy to turn that over to me. And they hired [me] as what they called Marine Superintendent for operations. That was in 1948. And so that gave me some further exposure to the oil business.

*Dub Noble:* After the war was over, and I got out of the Navy and came back to Morgan City, one of my friends that I had known was working for Humble Oil and Refining Company. He suggested I go and talk to ‘em, and go to work for them. I did. Went to work about January the 20th of 1947. And the reason I didn’t go to work before then, I wasn’t old enough. They wouldn’t hire me if I wasn’t 21. I didn’t make 21 until the end of the work period. I went out on the next work period after I was 21. . . . I went to work with them when there was nothing offshore. There was one drilling rig, one drilling platform, oil-producing platform, in the Gulf of Mexico and it was just south of Morgan City here. And I’m trying to remember the block it was in, Block 11. But, . . . that was not Humble, that was Kerr-McGee. . . . We would leave Morgan City here and go to Grand Isle, Louisiana where we were doing our exploration work on boats. . . . I went to work as a laborer who was assigned to the engine room. Now, I worked in the engine room for, let’s see, about two weeks, and then I came on deck. I was the assistant surveyor. I had had experience in surveying a few years before, building levees up in Missouri.

So I came up and worked with the surveyors runnin' the radar, and we used the radar to do the surveying for the Geophysical Operations offshore. We worked about two weeks there in Grand Isle. We discovered an area that [looked] very promising for production of oil. Within a few months there was a drillin' rig on it. Within another month or so it was producing oil. Also producing sulfur, tremendous amount of sulfur. The sulfur was contracted out to Freeport Sulphur Company to produce that, and we produced the oil.

*The growth in industry activity was temporarily slowed during the early 1950's while the U.S. government settled what were to become known as the Tidelands Cases, a series of Supreme Court decisions that granted to states control up to three miles from the coastline and to the federal government control beyond that. Many of those who kept their jobs were transferred to the Texas coast. By October 1953, The Morgan City Review reported, "A major program of geophysical and drilling operations for oil in the Gulf offshore region, which came to a virtual standstill during the long tidelands fight, is apparently getting ready to be launched. Involving an expenditure of millions of dollars, the exploratory and drilling program will be started before settlement is reached on the submerged boundaries of the respective states under the so called tidelands legislation passed earlier this year (Morgan City Review, 1953)." Under the agreement, Louisiana was granted title to submerged lands out to three miles and the federal government claimed everything under jurisdiction beyond that limit.*

*Laurie Vining:* [We] were taking oil barges; we have to shift oil barges, bring 'em empty out and bring a full one in. And we've had to take a tender and bring 'em to a dry dock or a repair. 'Cause I remember we towed one... they did some work in New Orleans on it... And we towed it back to Morgan City through Intracoastal Canal. That's one gave us a fit! It was wild! It wouldn't follow straight. It was either going one left or right... And then it wasn't too long after that when this Tidelands dispute shut just about everything, I guess most everything offshore. That was in 1950, if I remember right. Of course [it] delayed the tugboat. They didn't have any work for us. So, I worked on one of those LCTs for just a short while as an engineer... They used those for supply vessels. That's what they were using them... It was just a little bit. I guess they were finishing up... And then when they sent all of us to Corpus Christi, of course I've got to jump back in there. Before they sent all the rigs to Corpus Christi, remember, we did some more work with the tug after I got off that LCT engineer job. And we met a rig in Galveston. It was in one of the bays above, between Galveston and Houston. And we towed it to Corpus Christi. Boy, and I remember that trip. We got caught in the freeze down there, before we got to Matagorda Bay. We had to stop. 'Course we deliver that rig to Corpus Christi. And then 'course we came back to Morgan City with the tug and then right afterwards, in the meantime they sent some rigs down there and they sent four crew boats down there. That's where I went to live. Good old Corpus. So that was '51. I went down there in '51 and until way up in '52 sometime, I'm not sure when... When I was working in Corpus Christi... we had the crew boats down there... We had those rigs in Corpus Bay, working four weeks on, and a week off. 'Cause when my daughter Judy was born, I had just gone back to work. She was almost a month old before I got to see her... For us I think most everybody held onto their jobs and transferred it over there. Because we had three rigs in Corpus Bay. And there was one it was inside back of Corpus up there.

*Burt Ross:* You see actually, I hired out in September of '49. And would you believe I got laid off December. Actually, I got laid off Christmas Day. My boss came out to the rig and asked me what was I doing still working. And I told him that I was working in the galley. He said, "Well I didn't get to tell you, but we had to lay you off. So when you go in this week don't come back next week."... Most of the local boys that were hired, were hired through the galley. This was one way of giving them a job and holding 'em until another job, a higher paying [one], came free, you see. So there were just numerous of us that were hired as galley hands to start with, although we didn't have any oilfield experience whatsoever, period. We just went from there. [We were laid off three months later] because they didn't have the work for us. Then, the first of February they told me to come back to work February the 13th, so I was off a month and what, 12 days. Then they rehired me [as a] deckhand, I believe... See my problem is I've had so many jobs. I worked in the galley, I was a deckhand, I was an operating mechanic, I relieved as a floor hand. I relieved as a mechanic. I did all of these jobs... In '51 I was transferred because of lack of work here. They transferred me to south Texas and I stayed a little over a year down in Falfurrias. And then I was offered a job to come back, or stay there. Which I decided to come back because I was being drafted. In '52, I believe it's July the 24th, this date in '52 that I was drafted, and it was July, I think, the 16th of '54 that I got discharged... [I went to] Germany. I took basic training in, in Camp Roberts, California and then I was sent the other way. I was very lucky, 'cause the Korean War was going on at that time... You see us kids in my age group when we were goin' to high school, we had nothin' to look forward to but when you got 18 you would be drafted and go into service. So that's how like we fooled around in school, not really studying and not worrying about nothing because we knew our future was in the Army... You couldn't think no further than the war. But really and truly my parents were excellent and I've often thought of this. They always thought if you could finish high school, you would have it made. Because in their generation they only finished grade school and maybe only one or two years in high school. And they thought that if their kids went to finish high school that they would have it made.

*Joe Young:* I graduated from college and worked in the oilfield in 1951 on the seismic crew. [My degree was in] geology. At that particular time, geology jobs were scarce as hen's teeth. You had to take whatever you could get. Oil companies were not hiring anybody unless you had a master's degree at that time. They did not hire anybody with bachelor degrees at all. Even after... Well, I would say a real exceptional person with great grades and, I mean, really exceptional. But otherwise, you had to have a master's to work in the geology department at that time because there were so many after World War II, so many guys who went into the geology field. It was just completely saturated. So, it was tough to get a job as a geologist.

*Tensions between shrimp and oil activities continued throughout the 1950's and became the subject of the 1952 movie, Thunder Bay, starring Jimmy Stewart. The movie was filmed at Kerr-McGee's offshore rig and marine base, at shrimp and seafood plants in Patterson and Berwick, and inside a drilling barge at the Magnolia Petroleum Company's base in Amelia. Local residents helped feed and board the movie stars, organized shrimpers to rent and pilot their vessels, and played the roles of extras. Three area residents involved with the movie describe their experiences.*



**Figure 5.2. Seismic Exploration in the Gulf of Mexico.  
Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection,  
Morgan City Archives.**

*Clarence Duplantis:* They made a movie, *Thunder Bay*, right here... [They] took some snapshots of us on the job. I was welding on a tank. Then after that they showed how it was going to work. So when they went offshore, there was James Stewart down here, and Joanne Drew. James Stewart was our foreman in the show. But I went and saw myself in the movies after they made the movie. When they went on the drydock they went offshore, and when they headed home you could see them shrimp coming out of the [pipe]. I don't know how they got in there. They were putting shrimp in there in the pipe. You can see them coming out of the pipe. "Oh," I said, "this is something." And then they had all that on the movies, so I went over there to see it myself. But when they went on television, they cut us all out, a bunch of us out. They just kept the main ones, James Stewart and Joanne Drew, the main players... I was late. My wife said, "Why you late?" I said, "I wanted to see myself again!" And then I get, at the end of the year, I get a letter from Universal Picture Company. My wife said, "What is that for?" I said, "I guess they want me to go to make a movie in California now." But it was the withholding. They paid you for that, though. The movies paid you for everything that you did for them.

*John Dilsaver:* Well, we were in New Orleans at the Roosevelt Hotel. We'd been there a couple [of days] on business, and we were checking out. In fact, we were in the lobby getting ready to leave, and I was paged. I was paged in the lobby and I went to someone, I don't remember who, that had a message. It said that a fella, Lew Leary in room so and so upstairs, had been there looking for me. So, we took time and went up to his room, knocked on the door. He come on out. Right off, he said, "You're John Dilsaver." I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, we have some exciting business to talk about." It was exciting to him whatever he wanted to talk about. And he told me that someone from Morgan City, somewhere that he made contact, [was] looking for someone to go to work for him, and the movie company... Universal or International. [He needed] someone that knew enough about that territory that they could acquire equipment such as automobiles, trucks, boats, whatever they needed to be used in the movie during the time that it was being filmed. So we had quite a, about two hours or so, lengthy discussion about it. And I told him what he was asking was no problem, 'cause there's plenty of stuff around that we had.

So we made a deal, and then I agreed to go to work for him as soon as they were ready to start filming the movie. So from the very first day, the outset of the thing, I worked for him, Lew Leary, 'cause he was a unit manager, and he had total and complete control of everything that went on. And he was a very easy man to get along with, and he knew what he was doing. He was a businessman... Once it got started, I'd get up in the morning about 3:30, 4:00, and I'd go and meet the crews, all of the movie stars, what have you. And mostly meet at a restaurant named, the Blue Bird Restaurant was the name of it. It was owned by the Ordognes.

*Marcelle Ordogne:* We had *Thunder Bay* that came here, which was a movie with Jimmy Stewart and some people. They stayed in our motel and ate in our restaurant. We used to have to soap the windows because all of the locals would come to look at all of the movie stars. This was a big deal in Morgan City. It was about the oil industry. The movie was made about the oil industry and some of them were scared to fly out into the Gulf, so they would have to leave three or four hours earlier from the motel to go to their location [by boat] to film and it was just an exciting, exciting thing... Jimmy Stewart was the most wonderful man. He would come down and talk to us and at that time my son, who is 51 now, was about six months old, and he would bounce him on his knee. They missed their families, you know, and they just kind of took us in as their families and we would have to go to New Orleans and buy special meat and special cuts for them. They ate totally in the restaurant, all of them. Dan Duryea and J.C. Flippin, I think they are all dead now. And Jimmy Stewart's wife came down, Gloria, to see him. That was such a big deal. I remember I would go with the maids to clean their rooms and I'd go see Jimmy Stewart's room just to see and he would have these old pajamas, you know, like real people. We loved him, we just loved him... They were probably accustomed to living in better, fancy places, but this was just a little shrimping town, a fishing town and they filmed most of it in Berwick.

*A slump in the shrimping industry in the 1950's sent some shrimpers as far away as Mexico to secure their catch and compelled a new wave of shrimpers to make the transition into the oil industry. Several Morgan City residents offer their perspectives on this shift.*

*Lester Fryou:* [In the] Morgan City area, Amelia area, I think it was Magnolia, which is Mobil Oil today, Kerr-McGee, hit a little well or two, did a little drilling right off the coast over there. And that's when the oil industry started flourishing. But Morgan City, at that time, was strictly fishing, shrimping. A lot of shrimping. The docks in Morgan City, you had boats there five, six abreast, all along that dock... One thing about shrimping, more and more people got into the shrimping business and started depleting the industry. And then you start getting this oil company-related work in here. It was paying good. At that time, it was pretty good money. A dollar five, a dollar twenty-five cents an hour, which I started a dollar five cents an hour as an oiler. And that was pretty good money in those days. I did shrimping myself, in the fish and hoop nets. And you could buy a tub of big shrimp, a number three tub of big shrimp, which was a hundred pound or more of shrimp for five dollars. Five dollars. I mean it. At that time, when we come in after a week offshore, well we'd come in with [a] three, four hundred dollar trip. Boy, we had a pretty good trip.

*Laurie Vining:* I came out of the service, I shrimped a little bit at one time. And my brother and I, we made shrimp trawls for Riverside Packing Company. And then, as the work got a little bit slower, what happened was the Riverside Packing Company started letting me, the crews [who]



wanted to, buy the boats and fish and [they] paid the boats off as they were fishing. And the guys that were having us do our net work, they would have been stuck paying for it themselves. So we kept on doing it for quite a while after. As a matter of fact, the net shop burnt down and we rented another net shop in Morgan City for a while. And then after that I worked for the shipyard up here, 'til I went to work for Kerr-McGee Union.

*Doris Mullendore:* With the boats, I ended up, I always said “Unofficial Port Captain” ‘cause I was the only one they could ever catch home. I say at one time I could give you every barroom’s phone number from Corpus Christi to New Orleans. ‘Cause every time the guys wanted in and they didn’t have the relief or it wasn’t time for them to be relieved, they would run the boat aground, tear up the wheel, and guess who got called. ... [We operated] just regular crew boats, which at that time was usually just a captain and a deckhand. They were I guess anywhere from 55 to 70 foot size. They weren’t real big because they weren’t that far offshore at that time. This would have been in I guess 1957, ’58 ... [The guys came from] all over. ... A lot of them come from work for shrimpers, too, when the shrimping industry kind of went down, after they found out the company wasn’t in here to take over their livelihood away from them... I guess they thought that they were going out there to mess up the oyster beds and to mess up the fishing and the shrimping and everything else.

*In the postwar economy, and especially after the settlement of the Tidelands Cases, the pay offered by oil companies was higher than that offered almost anywhere else. For this reason, young people who had planned to enter other occupations often found themselves working for the industry. Many of these remained for their entire careers. Below, Lou Trosclair describes how he went to work for an oil company.*

*Lou Trosclair:* I was born in Berwick, raised in Berwick, went to Berwick Junior High School, then had to attend high school in Morgan City. I finished in 1948 and went to SLI in Lafayette College. Finished in 1952. Went to work for Shell Oil Company in June of 1952. [My degree was in] education. [I planned to be] a teacher... A friend of mine went to teaching and he was not making very much money, and I started looking around at different oil companies and they all needed hands and I went to work for Shell Oil Company [in] June, 1952... Shell was in Berwick and I went over there and I knew Mr. Rogers and Mr. Drackett, two elderly men that I knew and they both worked for Shell. They introduced me to the production foreman. I talked to him and he made an appointment for me to go to Franklin and put in an application, and Mr. Brown, who was superintendent of Shell, gave me a job... [Franklin] is where the main office was for Shell.

*The rise of the offshore industry did not mean the end of onshore activity, and many people moved back and forth between the two. Workers were moved from one field to another as their particular knowledge and skills were needed, often with their families in tow. In the marshes, men lived on quarterboats; offshore their early quarters were on vessels pulled up alongside the rigs and platforms. The following paragraphs provide a glimpse of how onshore and offshore work intersected within the lives of oilfield workers.*



**Figure 5.3. Eddie Rink and Freddie Thibodeaux Setting Seismic in Grand Lake, 1949. Photo Courtesy of Houston LeJeune, OOGHP.**

*Santo Rousso:* And so I started out as what they called a geophysical helper. I helped put the cable out, and bring it in, clean up, develop seismograms. I got in pretty good with the observer, and I helped him fix a radio. He said, "I want you in the darkroom." He took me off the deck and I worked in the darkroom, which led to my career with Mobil... See, he was a senior observer. I was promoted to junior observer. We worked offshore about six months. Then we left from here and went to Mt. Pleasant, Texas, to a land crew. We worked the land about three or four months, and we moved to Ballinger, Texas. And from Ballinger, we moved to Lovington, New Mexico. ... We made many moves. So from Lovington, I got transferred to Oshkosh, Nebraska. And I became a senior observer then. And then I guess in Oshkosh awhile, and I got transferred ... the crew got transferred to Kimball, Nebraska. And from Kimball, they reactivated the water crew, and I was reassigned to a water crew. That was in 1951. It brought me back to the Gulf Coast. The crew was working out of Port Arthur, Texas, and I was living here, and I was working 10 and 4. Ten days on and four days off so I could live in Morgan City. ... We were in deeper water. We worked all along the Texas Coast, from Sabine Pass west to Corpus Christi. I was stationed in Aransas Pass. ...I would say [we were working] about a hundred miles, up to a hundred miles offshore. ... We was just doing seismic work. ... All we did was map the underground location. The purpose of our job was to determine if there were any oil-bearing structures. We couldn't necessarily guarantee that there was any oil or gas, but we could tell if there was an anomaly, a place where oil and gas could accumulate. ... From '51, we worked along the Gulf Coast until about '59, then the crew transferred to Panama City, Florida. From Panama City, we went to Clearwater and worked out of Tarpon Springs with our boats. We had the Paul Nash. That was a company boat that was company-owned then. And that was the recording boat I was on mostly. Then we came back to Morgan City and worked awhile ... My family was with me. ... I guess we were like gypsies. It was close-knit. It was like one big family. We didn't have TV's in those days, so you got to visit a lot.



**Figure 5.4. Seismic Recording Crew at Work in the Marsh.  
Photo Courtesy of Russell Poencot, OOGHP.**

*John Ryan:* Well, I worked on gravity, surveyed, run instruments, worked offshore, and I went to Weeks Island. I was living in Franklin, and I went to Weeks Island, which is down below New Iberia, in September of 1951, in production, as a roustabout. ... We just stayed on a boat all the time, a quarterboat, and I wanted to get into production. I had been promoted to a junior surveyor, and I was on the staff payroll then. But they were looking for production people, and I hate to admit it, but we found the letter by mistake ... They didn't tell us that they were looking for production people. That's the way the oil companies worked sometimes. Anyway, I was living in Franklin, and Shell had a division office at Franklin, and ... I got a chance to talk to them and I got me a transfer. I was tired of that. I worked every way in the world schedule until they finally come up with 7 and 7. I worked 5 and 2, 6 and 3, 10 and 3, 10 and 5. I worked 5 and 2 and had to be back on the quarterboat – whether it was at the mouth of the river or the other side of Lake Charles down there on the Gulf – on Monday. No. Sunday night, to go to work Monday morning. We didn't leave till Friday ... By the time I got home Friday, sometimes it would be the wee hours of Saturday morning before I'd get home, and I'd have Saturday and Sunday, and then I'd have to leave Sunday evening ... [I was married] and had a baby. ... Well, anyway, I went to Weeks Island, I went there as a roustabout. They gave me a roustabout A. I was fortunate. They had the laborer B and the A. They gave me the A, which pays a dollar ninety-five. But the only way we could make it then [when I was in exploration], they let us work fifty hours a week, and the ten hours on Friday was time and a half. ... Anyway, I went there, a dollar ninety-five an hour as a maintenance man. And of course I roustabouted there... I stayed there, and I went to gauging. And I worked shift work. I worked eight-hour shifts. ... Primarily, I was construction. All putting up tanks, separators, compressors – construction. When the rigs would move off of location, we'd go out and repair the keyways, or if we had a contract crew to lay the flow line, or to hook it up and get it on, and then the man that was in charge of production would come and open the well and see that it was tested. But I stayed there until I came to West Lake Verret up here in June of '58. I had just bought a house in New Iberia. It never fails. You buy a house, they're gonna move you. And my poor little old wife, I tell her, if she had cried one more time, that river would have run over. But we've managed. But anyway, I came to West Lake Verret, and I stayed up there. Of course, I was the only maintenance foreman. I reported to a district foreman... He had block 18, which was just offshore, Eugene Island. But we took care of the workovers, you took care of the whole nine yards there. Oh god,

if you could get you a weekend off, you got it as best you could. That's just the way it worked. ... And then, I moved to Cameron. Phillips had a house that had been restored after [Hurricane] Audrey came. It had never been lived in, and they were good enough to rent it to me. ... Phillips Petroleum. They had four company houses. Fellow Wilsie Shores was the foreman there for Phillips, and they rented the house to me, and we moved down there. I could have lived in Lake Charles, but that driving, that back and forth, if you're familiar with that country ... Well, they got a bridge there across the Intracoastal [Canal]. They had an old ferry at Gibstown, and it stayed broke about half the time. Oh, lord. But anyway, I stayed down there, and we had, like I say, the two fields while I was there in Cameron, the lease was number 0796, and the well was number seven, and we did it with the Bluewater rig. We put that tree on the bottom of the Gulf. The first one. And this was, I guess it was '59.



**Figure 5.5. Using a Marsh Buggy to Haul People and Supplies through the Marsh. Photo Courtesy of Russell Poencot, OOGHP.**

*Dub Noble:* March 1st, 1954 we went into marsh operations on a quarterboat over and around Golden Meadow, Louisiana... I was doing surveying for the marsh operation. This is doing the same thing we were doing offshore only it was in the marsh instead of out on the water. ... We used marsh buggies to take us where we wanted to go, but the quarterboat that we lived on was placed in the canals and bayous, wherever it was we could get the quarterboat closer to where we were gonna do our work. We started off in Grand Isle. I worked practically every stitch of marsh and land below Highway 90 in the next fifteen to eighteen years. After a few years working at survey I decided I wanted to learn something else, so I went into studying, which, when I did this for roughly seven years, I never read anything but electronic books and learnin' more about electronics in my spare time. Later, I worked with what they call the operators. The operators were the ones who did the electronic recording of the information that we received from the ground, and recorded it, so that we could use it later in the office to play back the information. In the beginning the information we received came out on a sheet of paper about eight inches wide and about ten feet long. Bunch of wiggly little lines on it. These lines were computed to tell us the information that we needed to know.

*Even as prospects for oil in the Gulf of Mexico increased, U.S. petroleum companies were investing in overseas operations and sending workers from southern Louisiana around the globe.*

*Roy Boykin:* I got involved in the offshore oil in 1948. It was just beginning out here. Another feller in Lafayette, his name was Ellis Comeaux, come over. He was one of the first Halliburton operators offshore and I was number two. And I worked out there for, oh, six, eight months and then I got a chance to go overseas to Venezuela. Stayed over there four years and returned from Venezuela, ended up here in Morgan City... They would send us out of Lafayette over here and we'd go out for a week and work on the rig for a week, stay on the rig, you know, anything they had for us to do. And then, we'd go in for a week. We wasn't used to the office, we were used to working on the yard, or something, so maybe they'd give us two days off and then the rest of the time we'd work on the yard, and then after a week we'd go back out. Well I went out on this job for Kerr McGee here and I stayed out there for my seven days and then my relief, he didn't come [to] relieve me so I had to stay another week. So, I finally got relieved, I got back in and there was a feller in the office there, he said, "Hey Boykin," he said, "Would you like to go overseas?" I was kind of miffed 'bout having to stay two weeks out there in the Gulf and I said, "Yeah", I said, "I believe it'd be better than this offshore." So that's the way I ended up in Venezuela... It was inshore. It was all on land, what it was.

*Ira Grow:* [I] come back from Arabia in '50. [I had] stayed a year and went over in '49. We was drillin' in the desert then, in the Arabian desert right off of Kuwait, but at that time they had nothin' over there. The only supplies we'd get, you'd have to meet a "go through," an Italian ship that you'd meet on the Gulf and you'd get supplies from them and they never had any warehouses or nothin' like that over there. Fact, when we had the war, I think Kuwait, there was nothin' there but mud shacks... When we first went in the city of Kuwait, they told us that they know to look at the cross in the square. You'd think that they was a very religious person, you know, with a cross there, but they claim that that wasn't a cross, that was a whippin' post... We left out of New Orleans 'board a ship. We brought an old Navy LST, I think they loaded it in Orange, Texas and then when they got to New Orleans, that's when I got on it and signed up in the Merchant Marines. And we went to the Persian Gulf and they had two of everything for the rig. We brought everything, two of everything that they had that you need, we brought it with us. And we had supplies for at least a year on the ship. We never had to get nothin', you know. It took us 72 days to get over there. That's what it took us, 72 days. And then we went over there and I stayed about a year, I guess, and I come back. Well, I was running a speedboat. We anchored the ship offshore and I'd run the crew into the bank and they would drive about 40 miles in the desert and drill.

*Another war, this time in Korea, took young men away and brought veterans back to the oil field.*

*Wallace Carline:* I was born in Plaquemine, Louisiana in 1931 and I moved to Morgan City and worked in the oil field as a kid in school. [I started as] just a roustabout, just working in the crews, driving piling and just doing... I was too young to do anything else, just strictly as a kid in high school, during the summer months... My brother was an oilfield contractor, so I always went and worked for him during the summer. He let me work for the whole summer and then I'd go to school. I was going to school at LSU when the Korean War started. I went to Korea in '51 and came back in '53. Then I went back to the oil field and I started working back in the oil field. I worked for my brother who was an oilfield contractor until 1961... [My brother was] dredging, pile driving, pipelining. He started back in the '40's, early '40's.

*Walter Daspit:* I graduated from high school in '45, and I joined the Merchant Marine when I was 17. In 1946, there was a general seaman's strike. All seamen went out on strike... When the seaman's strike was over after about three or four months, I went back to sea again. Somewhere around 1950, I was about to get drafted during the Korean War so I joined the Air Force. Right before getting discharged I came across a magazine that had schools for higher occupations and one was Sparling School of Deep Sea Diving. It showed a picture of a diver wearing heavy gear and it said that divers make as much as 200 dollars a day. I said, "Well, that is for me." After I got out of the Service about '52, I went back to sea and got enough money to go to diving school. I began diving school in the fall of '53 and got out in January of '54.

*Howard Thibodaux:* I attended Morgan City High in the fourth grade through the eleventh. Back in those days we just had 11 grades instead of 12 and once, before I even finished high school, I had worked during the summer for Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Company. I was 15 years old and went to work on a tug boat for the summer, and after finishing school, I tried working on a dredge boat which I didn't care too much for. And I quit that in nothing flat and went to work running a grocery store for Mr. Greenwood in Greenwood, Louisiana. And his son had a tavern and I tended bar for him at night. Then I finally went back to work on a dredge boat in 1949. I worked out from Avery Island and then when the Korean War started June 25, 1950, I was on a dredge boat at Intracoastal City. I had missed World War II by 15 days. The draft law ended March 31, 1947 and I was 18 the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, so I missed that one. The Korean War, I was ripe. I was 21 and instead of being inducted in the Army for 21 months, I decided to volunteer for the Air Force for four years and luckily I ended up right in Biloxi, Mississippi, Keesler Air Force Base, studying electronics and radar. And when I got out of radar school, July 12, 1951 and my wife and I were married July 15, 1951... Of course, after I was married, I didn't want to go overseas, so I volunteered to stay as an instructor in Biloxi. I was there seven months and then got shipped to Korea for a year. I was in a tactical reconnaissance outfit working on the identification sets on the planes and then when I got out after four years, I almost stayed in and then realized that I would never be separated from my family again and so I decided to get out and took three months vacation. My wife was working and so I wasn't in a hurry to go to work. She was working for her brother-in-law in a hardware store, but after three months, McDermott had a project right next door to my home in Amelia.

*Garver Watkins:* My first job, I worked for my dad. He was in the boat business. He had several boats. In those days they were nice size boats, but nothing compared to what you have today. And we supported oilfield-type work. We would bring toolpushers or surveyors in to different locations. They would hire my dad's boat on maybe a daily basis, maybe four or five days. They were never long jobs. I guess that was my first job, working for my father. I guess the next summer, I worked for my uncle. He was in the boat business also. His name was Arthur Levy. He was one of the main boat owners in this area. He had several of the big, big vessels that worked mostly both Shell Oil Company, and I drove boats from him. I drove boats for him all the way from Galveston, Texas, to below Houma, doing seismograph work for people. From there, I guess, I went into the service. I was drafted into the Army, and I spent two years in the service. I went to Korea, and I came back. I made another attempt at going back to school again, to Southwestern again. By that time, my father was in pretty bad health, and he couldn't take care of his business and my mother couldn't take care of it. So, I dropped out of school again and was taking care of the boats for him. I was running one boat, and we had a skipper taking care of

another. We had just two boats left at that time. Those were pretty rugged days. With the money we would make from one boat, we were putting it back into the other boat. It was not very profitable back then. Back in those days, the boats that we had were wood boats. They didn't have bulkheads in them, and as the business grew, the regulations got more strict. They had to have bulkheads—water tight bulkheads—and none of those boats had that. I would have cost us a fortune to do that, so we just sold the boats—got out of it. I went to work at – I applied for a job at McDermott. This was in 1956.

*Though getting a job offshore was becoming common for local men, for each new recruit working in that environment was a first-time experience and required a period of adjustment. Whether it was perceived to be positive or negative depended in large part on the individual's prior experiences. Changing jobs and companies also introduced new expectations and circumstances.*



**Figure 5.6. Triple C Boat Company Quarterboat, 1955. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Burt Ross:* The very first time I went out some of the crews were coming in because of a storm. I had never been offshore before. So here, and the boats we were going offshore in were almost submarine. You know they were heavy iron boats and they set way low in, in water and they had these port holes around the side. You couldn't hardly see out. But anyway, there in Atchafalaya Bay, not even offshore. Before you got to Eugene Island Lighthouse – Magnolia had a quarterboat there. In my first trip offshore, that's where I was going to work a – the quarterboat. And buddy, they must have had four to six foot seas right there in the Atchafalaya Bay and I thought, "Boy, this is terrible." And I wasn't even offshore. I was just in a channel going through the bay. So it was, it was scary. I say scary, not knowing what to expect... It was just a real heavy chop... The only thing with this first trip I'm tellin' you about was the diesel smell. Oh, Lord, yeah. These were crew boats... They would take... one of them could beat the other one by about 10 or 15 minutes in a four hour and 40 minute trip... Now, this boat that I'm talking was probably, maybe 45 foot long, a crew boat that gets air conditioning, good visibility all around, fresh air in, in there. That's the main thing 'cause you start feeling bad and you don't want no stale air, you want fresh air... This was what was really bad... I have visions of seeing

two or three guys trying to stick their heads out of the same door and each one throwing up, and the next thing you know, they look and it's all over their arms and everything else. It's terrible, really.

*Harry LeBoeuf:* My first day offshore was, it was at night. I went out to, just at dark and I went on, it was on a drilling rig. They had Mister Gas Two. It was a jack up drilling rig and the boat, it was pretty rough and that boat backed up to that rig and the skipper said, "Get in that basket." They lowered a basket on the deck and I crawled in that basket and they pulled me up on that rig. I had no idea what they were doing to me. And I was going to test the first well that they had drilled on that particular block, and so I had a lot of leisure time on the platform before the well was completely drilled where I could test it. I was eating three meals a day – breakfast, dinner and supper – and after about another week on there, I found out they had another meal at midnight. So I started making that one, too.

*Roy Parr:* I came out of the Army in December of 1951. I had joined the Army on a one-year basis with six years reserve. And what happened was the Korean War broke out about six months after I was in the service. And two years and three months and nine days later I was at home. I came home in 1951, December. And on April the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1952, I went to work for the old Humble Company... and all they had open was – they just built two brand new quarterboats and all they had open was cook's helper job. "I'll take it. I'll take it. You give it to me, I'll take it." So I took it. And man, I kept tryin' my best to get out of that kitchen into the rigs, and I spent six years in that damn kitchen, but, 'course I kept movin' up in the kitchen to where I was drawin' top pay in the kitchen. But I was still tryin' to get out. And finally we shut that particular kitchen down and built a new roustabout gang, so I went to work in that roustabout gang... My first day to work as roustabout, see I had been attendin' trade school for carpentry, cabinet makin' and carpentry. So I go around tellin' everyone bye and I went into the welding shop and guys start crowdin' around. Well, there was an anvil on the stand. And some guy, two or three of 'em, they tipped it over and it come down on my foot. And it broke my little toe right where the little toe sticks out. And I had my steel-toed boots on, but when it came [thumping noise], it caught the end of that little toe. So, I stopped by a bar and took a shot of whiskey and went to the doctor's and ask him about it. He said, "Well it broken." I said, "Yeah, I know it's broken." I could see it, it looked like a dang old, little old weeny sausage with a white bean on the front of it. So he said, "Well there's nothin' you can do about it." Said, "Just keep it pretty well compacted together." So next day I went out to roustabout gang. I was limpin'. Guy wanted to know what was wrong. I said, "Ah, I stubbed my toe." And finally about the end of that week, he comes to me and says, "You goin' home on days off. Now tell me what really happened." Said, "I broke my toe." He said, "You crazy? You worked all week long as a roustabout..." I said, "Look, I been tryin' for six years to get into a roustabout gang, I wasn't about to turn up sick the first day."

*Lou Trosclair:* I went, to Gibson in 1955. I was still a roustabout, but the only thing, I was an A. That was top pay then... When I got to Gibson as a roustabout, it was the same thing I did in 1952, painted and whatever we had to do, cut right o' way, or lay a pipeline, whatever. And then, [I got] a gauging job, which is taking care of the wells itself, make sure they flow and they are on the right choke and everything. They gave me a job working nights, a relief gauger. And all these elderly men all got like 30 day, three weeks vacation and they would always take them on the night shift from 12 to 8 in the morning. So, I stayed on the night shift for about six months as a



relief gauger. And then, after I finished that, relieving, I got a promotion. They opened a new field at Turtle Bayou which was a big gas field for Shell, and I went there as a gauger... I stayed there at Turtle Bayou until 1956. And then Shell opened up the first offshore platform, Block 18... I was not married. They called me in the office and asked if I wanted to go work 7 and 7. And I said, "Well, what do you mean 7 and 7?" That did not mean much to me hearing just two numbers. They said, "Well, you can work 7 days on and 7 days off." So, I went to Block 18. That sounded like a good deal, to work 7 days and get 7 off. So, that is what I did. Well, it was the first time I have ever been what they called "offshore." It was not very deep water – maybe 8 or 10 feet. And it was not that far from land but still in all, it was our first offshore production platform. We ate good. We had good beds. Air-conditioned quarters. It was very nice. You grabbed a boat on Thursday. You had to be at work on Thursday noon. So, we would catch a boat out of Berwick or Morgan City 8 to 10 o'clock in the morning, go out there, and then go to work. Then, the next Thursday, we would get off at 12 noon and come home. Then, you were off until the next Thursday.

*Alden Vining:* [In 1954] I went to roughnecking for Phillips 66. They went way offshore into the Gulf of Mexico... We really got a taste of what we thought was way offshore because it was probably about 150 feet of water and it got rough out there and we had the big derricks and everything and all good equipment. Now, in those days, we really did not know whether they were going to drill the well or anything. In fact, I only remember being a roughneck hitting one oil well. I mean, the success rate was not that good in those days. It looked like it took quite a while. But that was dirty, dirty, messy, hard work as a roughneck. In those days, it was very unsafe... In a typical day, your day ran 12 hours. But you would get up in the morning – you ate your breakfast at six o'clock, put on your dirty clothes, your old clothes and you went out there. We were either going in the hole or coming out of the hole with pipe. And it was always muddy. They used a drilling mud in the oil field and that was always over you, particularly on a drilling rig. You were always in mud. Drilling mud is used for several purposes. They pump drilling mud down while they are drilling to prevent a blowout. It creates a higher static head in case they hit a gas pocket or something. It also lubricates the bit down there. It cools the bit. It conditions the walls of the thing. And it helps carry out the cuttings as they drilled. It gives them an opportunity – they can filter that mud back, get rid of the cuttings, and recycle this mud. But, for some reason, you were always in the mud and every time that you went to a different sized pipe of casing into the hole, you had to go down and do what we called nipple up and nipple down. In other words, you would have to install – break out these great big old flanges and huge bolts. Somebody would put a wrench on them and somebody with a sledgehammer was beating on them. Pop, pop, pop – breaking all this stuff. It was always dark. It was always windy. It was always cold. It looked like there was always water dripping because this was underneath the drill floor. Another bad thing about the job was we went out there, it took so long to get out there, I always got seasick going out there. We stayed out there for 10 days and I would get seasick on the way back. I would always quit. I would say, "Well, I am not going back." Of course, I did not get any job while I was in and I always, after about five days of being off, I would get on the boat and go on out, go out there and work. I worked out there and I got hurt, I think, in 1957, on an accident. A snug line was removed inadvertently and I just about almost lost my arm. It kind of shook me up because, in those days, there were no helicopters and I guess I might have lost my arm. I do not know how in the heck they even stopped the bleeding or anything but they lowered me down, they put me in a basket, they put me on a boat. It was kind of rough. I

remember we came in to the lighthouse where it was calm enough and they had one of these big old seaplanes that landed there and they put me in a seaplane, took me out there by that overpass where Phillips was and brought me to the hospital. I did not have any broken bones but I had a bunch of torn ligaments and muscles and stuff. I guess it took me three or four months to heal up. Then, I went back out there, worked there a while.

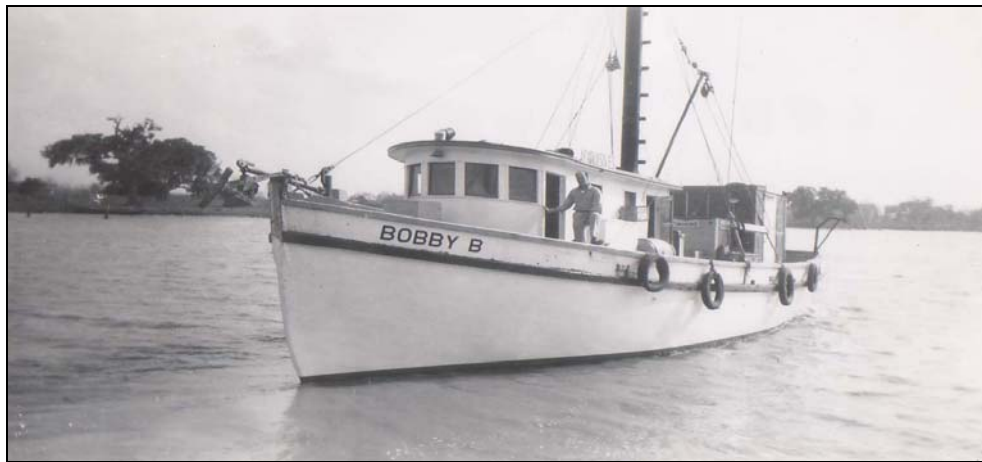


**Figure 5.7. Launching a Seaplane into the Water from the Dan Slaton Seaplane Base, 1955. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*By the 1950's, the offshore oil and gas industry began to generate a host of new industrial sectors. Large companies and small enterprises were attracted to the potential offered by the emerging industry. Though some companies worked in both inland and offshore fields, specialization for the offshore industry was already underway. Large service companies such as Halliburton and Schlumberger opened offices in south Louisiana, bringing in outsiders and hiring locals as well. In addition, locals who had the means began to enter the industry by purchasing or building rigs, trucks, boats and other items needed in exploration, drilling, and production. Future industry leaders such as Tidewater Marine got their start in Morgan City. Shipyards became specialized to service offshore vessels; in 1948, Conrad Industries purchased the Klonaris Shipyard in an effort to expand its oilfield operations. Also in the 1950's, Morgan City became one of two primary locations – the other being New Orleans – for the commercial oilfield diving industry. The following individuals were all involved in the early stages of developing oilfield supply and transportation companies and offer their perspectives on this period.*

*Lloyd Charpentier: Back in the early '50's, in the oil field when they first started, of course there was no equipment to do what they needed to do. So they converted fishing boats to haul supplies. They took PT boats, surplus PT boats and used 'em to carry passengers because everything was done by boat. There was no helicopters or anything back then. Then some of the companies built specialized boats to take and haul passengers, like Mobil Oil Company. They*

built some special boats to haul passengers 'cause they changed out hundreds of people a day. When they made crew changes, there was hundreds of people that changed that day, and they didn't have the equipment so they had to build it or either buy it and convert it and fix it to where they could do it in the early stages. Then from the PT boat design, they decided to build crew boats, special design out of steel. Of course, they didn't run as fast because they were diesel because of the safety aspect. They wanted the safety aspect because of the gasoline. PT boats, they ran fast, but they was also dangerous so they decided to use diesel engines and the diesel engines of course didn't have the horsepower to make 'em run as fast as the PT boats.



**Figure 5.8. The Bobby B, One of Parker Conrad's Boats. Photo Courtesy of Parker Conrad, OOGHP.**

*Parker Conrad:* [In the 1950's] I had these three boats. The Bobby B, the Shirley C, and the Johnny C were all working in seismograph work. And of course the history of the oil patch has been ups and downs. You know, we just go wide open like there's no end to it, and the first thing you know, the bottom drops out, and we struggle then for a few years, and it comes back again. Well, during the period when it had slowed down is when I decided to go into building these wooden shrimp trawlers for Conrad Industries. During that time, though, when I saw the need for repairs, not only on shrimp boats but also on some of the makeshift boats that were in use in the oil patch at that time, like landing craft from WWII, things like that. Matter of fact, I can remember before I was in the business, before the famous Tidewater became known and grew to astronomical sizes like they are right now, it was during those years that I had built some steel floating dry docks to be able to pick these boats up. Just about everybody around here had weirs, sets of weirs where they would use to pull boats up out of the water. Well, seeing the need for larger boats, I built these floating dry docks. This was in 1953, '54, '55 – I ended up with three floating dry docks, and picked up a lot of the boats around here, some of them from McDermott, who at the time did not have any facilities except ... as far as repairs, they could not haul out any vessels. So I did work for them also. They of course had such an amount of money in backing that they eventually built their own dry docks and went into a shipyard business of their own, and stayed in that business for many years, until just recently they sold to Bollinger Shipyard, and that's who has the McDermott shipyard in Amelia, which is just seven miles out of Morgan City.

*Richard Carline:* In 1957 when I got out of the service, jobs were a little hard in South Louisiana and I said I would go to work as a cook for a week. And I have been here [at Tidewater] ever since. I have never had any other job... We cooked three meals a day, breakfast, dinner and supper and usually cleaned the inside of the boat, helped keep the inside clean. And then if you had any spare time, you was outside working on the deck, help, keep the boat up on the deck... On these vessels at that time there was five people, the captain, engineer, cook and two deckhands... At that time we would bring out drill pipe, casing; mud back then was carried on deck so it was actually pallet material and if it's mud, they are usually about 55 to 100 pound sacks. And they used this to mix on the rig; this was mixed on the rig. It was all offloaded onto the rig by crane, it was all palletized. And we would bring anything... We pumped water, drill water, fuel to the rigs to keep them going... We would stay there as long as it was required to offload the cargo. And most of the time when we were offloading, we were backed up to the rig. We'd anchor and back up and tie off on the stern of the vessel... When we went to work, we brought our groceries with us. We took them with us for seven days. We would load them in a carry all and we usually laid out of Morgan City here... Back then we didn't have but three boats actually. When I started, we only had three boats, the Riptide, Floodtide and Uptide... As I was cooking, he was teaching me how to navigate and how to handle the boat and learn a little bit about the vessel. That's how I got into it, to the other end of it... I went on the deck and I worked on the deck as a deckhand. And on these vessels, especially supply vessels, you do a little bit of everything anyway. You learn how to work in the engine room. You learn a little bit about the deck. You learn a little bit about steering the vessel. You learn a little bit about navigation, so it was actually kind of a close knit family group deal on these boats. They all worked together as a team, so that's how, and then from there I went from a deckhand and then I worked my way up from a deckhand to a captain, got my 100 ton license and then from there I went to a 300 ton license... These [vessels] were actually built for offshore. Actually these were very small. They were only 140 footers, and they were really small. The Ebb Tide was the first one built. That was the first offshore vessel built with a cabin forward on it. Some of them had the cabins aft, okay, on the stern, but this was the first forward cabin forward on it... You could operate off, unload off the stern. See the problem, we'd back up to the rig. That's how we'd unload most of our cargo is on the stern where the crane operator can reach it. And with the cabins aft, you would have to butt the bow up in and it was a little harder to control than the other way around.

*John Ryan:* [Goldwater] had his finger in the USGS. They used a Bell, which was a twin engine helicopter. They wouldn't use a single engine helicopter. And anyway, before we went offshore, we was in Cameron, Louisiana. PHI [Petroleum Helicopters International] wasn't even born. It was out of Bell Aircraft out of Buffalo, New York, and Shell Oil Company contracted a number of helicopter and services from them. There was a place down there called Josie Harbor. It's right off of that Rockefeller Game Refuge down there. And there we used triangulation, towers and all, and a lot of times the geese and ducks would get up between us, and you'd lose a helicopter and the rest of your day was shot. And then they had those wooden tail rotors. Every now and then the pilot would get that tail rotor in that rizzo – that's those things that grow like cane in the marsh – and that'd pop that tail rotor. Well, of course, you couldn't control your vehicle. You'd just have to sit there ... [The helicopters were used for] flying the gravity meter. ... This was before we went offshore with the underwater. The meter was about that square. ... [The helicopter] had those floats, and of course on the floats you'd put a thin walled pipe with a template on the top, or you may have to shove thirty feet of it in that marsh, and put the

instrument on top. And they had a little motorcycle battery for the power. You'd just take it out of the helicopter after you'd get this thing shoved down, and then the pilot would have to sit up there and hold that blade, because if that blade wobbled, it would shake, and you couldn't get a reading. That's how sensitive ... Anytime there was an earthquake anywhere in the world, you can't work. You go to the house.

*Earl King:* In those early days, I loved to hear uncles tell those trucking stories because with the infrastructure we have today, that's when men were men. The equipment wasn't modern like it is today. The roads from Houma to Houston, and they worked out of Houma, you gotta imagine a two-lane highway all the way through all of those little bitty ol' towns. There was no equipment. When they got to the rigs, they had to roll that pipe on, manually. When they were hauling sack material, they just didn't drive a truck. They parked the truck and got out, and they would unload it by hand and put it on the barge. And I'll tell you something else my daddy told me. He's speaking for Texaco, and my daddy worked for Texaco a long time... If there was an accident on Texaco employees, they had a hearing. And both people got laid off. Suspended. If they were both at fault, a mutual cause. They would suspend these people from work for having an accident. You didn't have a lot of workman's compen[sation]... They would have a meeting. And my daddy said, "If you cause an accident, you can expect to be suspended for a certain number of days." And I said, "Really?" 'Cause I can't imagine. But he said, "That's the way it was." ... Those jobs are gone. The oil industry doesn't offer those jobs anymore. It's all contract, contract, contract, contract. Now, Dad and I were talking about this yesterday. He said, "Earl, it actually began a long time before this, that they saw the benefits of contracting... That's why Texaco got rid of their trucks, because it was cheaper. [Then] they wasn't involved with trucks getting in wrecks and lawsuits. And they weren't involved with having the employees..."... He said, "That's why your uncles had to retire. They wasn't ready to retire." They went on to other careers, but they just couldn't work there anymore. That's what they did. They didn't have no more truck driving jobs there. And they were just a little bit too old for offshore.

*Joe Sanford:* Sea Engineering had the first insurance offshore. They sent me here to Morgan City [in 1956]. The oil companies were starting to find out if you had insurance. My brother, Tom, who is seven years younger than I am, came with me as my tender. We became a pair and started hiring people... The manager of Sea Engineering, Jack Tucker, had a heart attack. He didn't know how serious it was. He offered to sell us his equipment. We set up Sanford Brothers Diving, just Tom and I... We lived on a salvage boat offshore doing jobs. When we came to town, we stayed on the boat... We were in Cameron, Louisiana right after [Hurricane] Audrey. We arrived about a week after Audrey. We were salvaging boats and doing clean up. [We stayed there] about six to eight weeks.

*The period of the 1940's and 1950's was one of relative calm in the Gulf of Mexico. In 1957, Hurricane Audrey gave both companies and workers a taste of what the offshore oil and gas industry would eventually have to address if it was going to succeed in the Gulf. Jake Giroir and Charles Wallace talk about their experiences during the storm.*

*Jake Giroir:* That storm came up like that, and people didn't think it was going to be a storm. It started in the Gulf of Mexico, right off of Mexico, and it come up and just got bigger and bigger, and people wouldn't move. And when I went over there (to Cameron) after everything cleared

up, ohh, they had houseless people, boats and everything else. It took some of those shrimp boats and put them 100, 200 yards out in the marsh... We didn't have anybody living out there. We just was drilling the wells.



**Figure 5.9. Morgan City Borrow Pit after Hurricane Audrey.**  
**Photo Courtesy of the Morgan City Archives.**

*Charles Wallace:* I was on the drilling tender. What happened is one morning – the hurricane was in June, I think – it was the first hurricane of the season. It came out of the Bay of Campeche down there. Anyway, every morning I would have to get up and make a drilling report, but I would get up about five o'clock in the morning and make a drilling report . . . get out the call to the Galveston marine operators... I would call the Lake Charles office. Charlie Small told me, he said, "Forget about the general report. You can call that report in in a few minutes. We got an announcement about a hurricane brewing out there in the Gulf." We all knew what we were supposed to do. But I was in trouble because during the night that night we had run pipe, and I told the engineers in the office that they were to cement the well with cement with ten percent gel. Well, ten percent gel, you cannot make it weigh enough to hold the formation back. And I told the engineers in the office. They said, "That is the way it was." They said, "Well, run it anyway." So that is what I did... Well, as soon as the pressure got up to around 2,000 pounds, I had them wake up everybody on the drilling tender, everybody. A lot of people had just gone to bed. Some of them were not supposed to get up until around noon. Some of them were roustabouts. Some of them were cooks. I had them wake up everybody and tell them to get up. And I had the roustabout crew standing by to turn the drilling tender on these. Well, the pressure kept building up and when it got to around 3,000 pound, it ruptured that pipe. Well... you could see how the water was boiling around [the well]. That water was aerated. The gas was aerating the water. Well, that was the reason that I wanted that drilling tender out of the way because when you aerate the water, the drilling tender might not float... the drilling tender would have sunk in the aerated water. Well, I turned that drilling tender loose. That is when they called and told me that the hurricane was coming... I was in the middle of the ocean with the drill pipe and the derrick, the well blowing out, and the drilling tender was not on location and the hurricane is coming. And the worst one that had come for years and years was on its way... Well, I got on

the helicopter deck with a pair of field glasses and I watched it... So, I waited and I waited. It finally quit bubbling. What we were going to do, we were going to go there on the boat and get off and send the boat somewhere else so the boat did not sink... And I called a workboat. It showed up out there with all the completing equipment, all the stuff. When we got all that pipe in the hole, we got back on the drilling tender, and I told everybody to get on that workboat and we were going to go to the back. We were going to go ride that hurricane out ... Well, they basically called out there and told a crew to stay on board... One cook was supposed to stay. Everybody got on the boat and I knew the boat captain. I said, "Snookie, blow your horn," because they had battened down all the hatches and all the doors... It makes it worse when it is tight, you know. I said, "Blow that whistle two or three times. Get them to come back out here..." I said, "Look, there is a hurricane coming and you are not supposed to stay out." I said, "This has something to do with your life. We are leaving and this is the last boat. This will be the last chance you get. If you don't get on this boat, you are stuck out here for a hurricane." But they said they were going to stay and they ran back in there, bolted the door back. I said, "Wait another 15-20 minutes," and I had them blow the whistle again. Here they come. I said, "Look, I am telling you. We are leaving. We are leaving right now... You don't have to stay just because your boss said to. You do not have to." They stayed. So, when we got the jetties in Cameron, you could not see the changes. The tide had already come up to where everything was flooded just about. The jetties were under water. But me and Snookie, we knew where the jetties were and we came in all right without running over the jetties and the boat. And we got off the boat and they headed on up towards Lake Charles. When the tide got through coming up, they had workboats and crew boats running up and down the streets of Cameron. The water was that deep. And they were surrounded with barges and all kinds of boats got trapped up there on the banks. Every one of those drilling tenders broke loose... There were four of them out there. All wound up in the marsh. And they had to hurry, hurry, hurry to go in there and pull them out before the tide went back out.

*The 1940's and 1950's was also a period when little attention was paid to environmental impacts associated with the industry. With natural gas worth little and more difficult to handle than oil, much of what was found associated with the oil was burned off, as John Ryan describes. Early efforts to control negative environmental impacts stemmed from federal conservation statutes aimed at reducing waste.*

*John Ryan:* We'd hook all those rigs, that was production's responsibility to see that they had water and gas. The first gas that was sold at Weeks Island was sold to United Gas – and it was primarily used when the sugar mills cranked up – for a nickel a thousand MCF [million cubic feet]. Here, it was nine dollars and something. People couldn't even pay their gas bills. ... We burned it. Ain't no telling how many jillion feet of gas we burned at Weeks Island to get the oil. But a nickel a thousand. And United would call us if they didn't need it, and we'd go shut the wells in. Of course, we didn't flare gas well gas. Just off the oil wells.

*A national recession in the late 1950's caused a slowdown in offshore oil activity. As the major oil companies began relying more heavily on contractors for many of the tasks they had initially handled offshore, getting and keeping a job with one of those large oil companies became more difficult.*

*Aubrey Fields:* [In the 1950's] I went offshore doing this roustabouting and gang pushing and all that. And the oil field was starting to get a little bit bigger then. When we first started at Eugene Island, the only thing you'd ever see was maybe a shrimp boat pass by. And that was it. Now, when everything was really booming, they had these big supply boats that looked like railroad trains coming in and out. It was really something... Well we had a lot of contractors coming out, doin' work for us, we'd work a lot of welders... I don't know about any other companies, but Mobil, I don't know of one man that wasn't any good workin' for Mobil. 'Course you had some better than the other, but they were dedicated people, they really were. A lot of us got out the service and we were so glad to get home, this was great. We had a lot of contractors. We'd hire them and they'd come out as contractors and worked. But when they got out there, they toed the line.

*TR Naquin:* In 1957, I went to work with the Pure Oil Company. ... There was very little turnover, very little. In those days, if you had a job, you wanted to latch on to it. I was fortunate in going to work for them because when I came back in '57 the young lady who was the head of the Chamber of Commerce at the time, we finished school together and I told her I was interested in going to work and it didn't make no difference what it was, just so I could get a job. And then the next day she called me to go to work for Pure Oil Company. After I put in an application for a clerk, I went to work for them and I [stayed] nine years with them.

*Red Adams:* When I was 17 I joined the Navy for a couple of years and then got out. And this brings us to about what... '52. [I] worked offshore as a roustabout for about five years. This was with the California Company... [Then] I went to pushing the crew. Then I was over three crews at one time. And a little period in that time I came to Morgan City for, oh, six to eighth months. We drilled a well off of Morgan City... This was still California Company... We were contract laborers. We weren't working for California Company. He'd paid me or he'd pay the fella I worked for and he'd pay me. These were mostly hard working people, in the labor crews. Most of them come off of farms and things like that, that heard about the oil field. And it was a better paying than most places at the time. Harder work, but better work. And out there, if you were single, which I was at the time, but living with my mother and father, I didn't have a big expense of living there. If you were a single fella without a place to stay, going out there for a couple weeks, that was beautiful. Because they paid you and they fed you. The whole thing. Then you'd come in and you'd find a place to live for a... back in those days generally for fourteen out and seven in... Then it came to about '55. And then we had a good dip then. And then it picked back up. We are cycles, you know?... [On my first day of work, I was on an] LST, loading sacks. I was a roustabout. Being the lowest rank, the lowest rank rung on the ladder, carrying mud sacks and carrying chemical sacks. Stacking them all in the LST. And putting them on pallets and moving them by booms to the rig. These were LST's that were anchored next to this platform. This is before you had the rigs that could sit on bottom and then move up and go someplace else. The drilling offshore, all of it was done at this time off of a stationary platform... These were very small and usually the ones I worked on out there were like maybe twelve, fifteen, twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four wells on this platform. And they had little rigs. And these were shallow wells. And they would wrap the rigs around over the next hole that they would drill.



### 5.3. East St. Mary Parish as a Fabrication Center

*Building on the assets of its labor force, with specific expertise in welding as well as a strong work ethic, its access to waterfront properties, and a friendly business climate, east St. Mary Parish soon developed as a center for the fabrication of offshore platforms. Amelia, with its access to Bayou Boeuf, became a center for fabrication. Dupont Fabricators got its start at the Mobil site in Morgan City and later moved to a new yard in Amelia. Harry Aldman and J. Ray McDermott were in business together importing ships. In 1956, McDermott expanded its operations by opening a fabrication yard in Amelia, under the name Bayou Boeuf Fabricators. After a year and a half, when it had become clear that fabrication promised to be a good business, the name was changed to McDermott. As the company grew, the Amelia yard became the prototype for its other facilities.*

*Edward Dupont:* I came to Morgan City in 1941, when they built the big floating dry dock for purposes of picking up ships, and stayed here about a year, year and half. Went into the service and then came back. I went to my home town first and then I came back to Morgan City, in 1948, where we built the first standing offshore platform that they did drilling off of, which was small compared to what they make today. My two brothers were the contractors who built it, E.W. and A.P. Dupont. We built this thing; it was kind of impossible because we had no crane to do it with. We put 60-foot Jen poles on a ton-and-half truck and raised and balanced it. We picked the pipe up and balanced it real well and raised it up where it had to go, up to 60 feet in the air, which they wouldn't even dare try today. Luckily there were not any accidents and nobody ever got hurt. And from then, we built them bigger every year, or every two years, whatever it was... They were my two oldest brothers. [They were building for] Mobil. That was 1948. We worked in the Mobil yard all that time. I don't remember how many of these structures we built, but we built them on this small, little space. It was crowded, but we built them, and then loaded them on barges and moved them offshore... That's what they did with the first [structures]. They built them here and brought them offshore. They had a few close to the shore that were wooden pilings. They drove pilings and built platforms on them. But what went into deeper water was all made out of iron, and those are all rusted to pieces by now... We all worked in the oil fields, one place or another, and we came here to do a little job. We had a welding truck and we came here to do a little job, and this came up, and they bid on it and got it...I was working a little shop in Rayne, which is about 100 miles from here, and [my brother] came by and picked me up. He told me that he was going to Dallas, but he didn't tell me what he had in the car. We got down the road a piece and he said that we had to find some dry ice. I said, "What you need dry ice for?" He said, "You'll see when we stop." We stopped at Lake Charles and he had a couple hundred pounds of shrimp in the car. And we drove to Dallas and found the Mobil office. He brought the shrimps up there, and, of course, that attracted everybody's attention in the office. And they explained what they wanted and had a few prints, and that's where it started. The shrimps were for the bosses and the engineers to get acquainted with. They had a few prints of what they wanted built. It was not too elaborate or anything, just looked more like what you'd refer to as a windmill, but a little bit heavier. And I guess the biggest pipe on the first one that we made would have been 12-inch pipe. It was 12-inch pipe, out of half-inch material. Today it's 24, 36, 60 and bigger, with material up to three inches thick, which is a lot different. I guess the first one that we built would have weighed 50 tons... Kerr-McGee had [a steel structure] too, which was set on a location that was Mobil's lease to begin with. Mobil said that it was a dry

hole, and Kerr-McGee set their rig on it and found oil and they're still producing today... There might have been just 15 of us. And that included the truck driver and all the welders and the burners (cutting torch handlers). They had no patterns in those days, they was just cutting. If you got it, that was good; if you got it close, that was real good. They finally developed patterns for how to cut the pipes, which was a big benefit to the oil company because there was no waste of material. You had a 6-inch pipe that went to a 12-inch pipe at an angle. So you fit it up to be able to weld it. It was a lot of guesswork at first, but we caught on pretty quick. My job in particular was to put pipes together. They'd come in short and we put them together as long as we needed. We just cut it a square cut... It wasn't hard to find workers. I guess my two brothers employed more people around here than anyone else at the time. We got a few people from out in the rice country that had never done nothing but ride a tractor. We brought them in and taught them how to use a torch. Cotton fields, rice fields, anywhere—if they wanted to work, bring them in and we'd teach them how to do it. [It was] all white. There were no blacks at all at the time. The only black ones we had working back then were maybe rolling and stacking pipe. We didn't even have them as truck drivers. At one time, in the Mobil yard, I had 50 men working for me, and they were all black. That was in '49, maybe '50. When I say work, I mean work. [The company was called] E.W. and A.P. Dupont Incorporated. We worked strictly for Mobil for quite a few years. That eventually changed. Different oil companies came in and bought leases out in the Gulf. We built platforms for them, for Shell, Texaco, and Kerr-McGee. McDermott finally got in, too. When they started, they was more or less setting out platforms in the Gulf, driving pilings and whatever. And they finally got into the fabricating part of it, which they are known world wide for.

*Clarence Duplantis:* Well, I stayed there after [Chicago Bridge and Iron left], and they had some work at Mobil. They were building some oil tanks. So I went over there, and we worked on them tanks... I wasn't working directly for Mobil. I was working for a welder contractor, but that's what we were doing, building them tanks for Mobil. They had some here, and they sent some offshore to them platforms, you see? They built some of them tanks for somewhere else, I don't know where they shipped them. They'd ship them on boxcars, I don't know where they would go... That's when they really started offshore... It made Morgan City almost the capital of the oil industry at the time... Morgan City was a business town. In other words, it was on the map. At one time, they had people sleeping in some pipes, you know, during the winter time. They didn't have no room for them. And people would drive from out of town to come to work. Some people would come from New Iberia to here to work. They had a shipyard here, and then McDermott moved in, so they took over the [Chicago Bridge and Iron] Works. They started to put in that offshore pipeline. I worked on that pipeline for a while, because they was making a big barge. I mean, that barge was long. But then they cut a section off, and made like a drop that would go into the water so that pipe would slide easy, go down and lay down in the Gulf, I guess. We had to weld them on all around there. We had a little tent on us for the sun. And then we'd get a plunge, everything was all right, then we'd move on. Move the barge over, slide the pipe down... In the section here, they had a section they had dredged out. In other words, it was like a little port they had... [McDermott came in] after the shipyard left from the port. I believe it was in 50, '51. [The shipyard left when] the war ended, and they had no more contracts. Chicago Bridge went back, all their labor went back to Chicago. They had work over there, so they went back over there. They just had a contract with the government here for building drydocks.



**Figure 5.10. Platform under Construction at McDermott Yard in Amelia.  
Photo Courtesy of Dolores Henderson, OOGHP.**

*Clyde Dyerson:* I guess in those days, why things were not quite as controlled as they are today and you liked people, you liked the kind of work they did, you got along with them, so you didn't really bother to bid it. You'd say, "Well, call Ernest and see if he's got some people come over here and build this jacket for us." 'Cause that stuff was small, I mean 18 feet by 18 feet by maybe 20 feet high and then 18 inch legs and 16 inch pipes. So it really wasn't much of a big fabrication job and the piling was very small. So Ernest would bring a crew over there and I'd oversee, or whoever the engineer in charge was would oversee that. If something was a little bit bigger, then we had to bid it, and we bid it between Dupont Fabricators and McDermott because they were that rivalry there and so forth and so on. At that time I was the inspector of the work going on in Dupont's yard as well as McDermott's yard. Then I think he had a younger brother named Murphy who moved down Highway 90 a little bit and set up a little yard down there. And it was always to Mobil's advantage to have as many fabricators as you could, so we kind of gave a little job to Murphy every now and then, trying to get him to where he could be competitive against Ernest or against McDermott so when we went out for something to bid on, well, we'd have an opportunity to have three prices coming in instead of just two.

*Lisa Topham Williams:* Morgan City is known to be an offshore construction camp, because all of your primary job forces come from something, whether it be Bollinger Shipyard or Conrad Shipyard or Tidewater, who operate a fleet of vessels, crew boats, tugs and so forth. It's all kind of centered around the oil and gas industry... [McDermott] did not start out as a fabrication company. It started more on the marine side. We have always been a service provider to the oil and gas industry, but we started out as more in the marine installation and we did not start out in south Louisiana. We started out in east Texas in 1923, and it was actually started out with a contract to build wooden derricks. You know, today as we have evolved a lot, everything is steel. We started out with wooden. It moved to south Louisiana in the early '40's when things started to move to Louisiana and people realized there was oil and gas right off the coast. Then the Company gravitated to south Louisiana. And in 1947 is when we installed our first structure off the coast and you could see light, I think. You were so close to land, you could see everything... We went to where we were strictly marine from '47 to '56 and in '56 is when we started the

fabrication side of the business and we have been in South Louisiana every since, in the same location. We have just expanded over the years. We have basically been in the same location and we have just added on tracts of land.

*Bill Bailey:* We had did some work for some people, I don't remember the company, with Avondale Shipyard, and they delayed. And the time we got back to them they had picked up some work so they raised the price on us and so we decided right then, I suggest[ed] we just build our own damn yard. And meantime we had been in a joint venture with Morgan City, that location down there, with Raymond Concrete Pile. They were building platforms out of concrete pile which didn't work very well.

*Griff Lee:* Worked fine in very shallow water. If you didn't need a jacket, you could use these. Were big round, 36 and 54-inch piles. And in the very shallow, marginal waters, they worked fine. But were not particularly suitable offshore.

*Bill Bailey:* There was a joint venture with Raymond at that location, which they had closed down. So I'd just take over that location, on the bayou there. That's the center of that big yard down there.

*Griff Lee:* In the earlier days McDermott had a very good goin' business buildin' small, 30 by 30 and 30 by 40 square platforms. Sat on four of these piles, and McDermott would fabricate the concrete deck. Raymond would make these piles. McDermott would install them and set tanks and production equipment out. This is back in marginal waters, not offshore. That yard had shut down. Of course Raymond was in charge of buildin' the piles someplace else. And so McDermott had a facility there. They'd be using it as a operating base, but the operating base was a houseboat. It wasn't exactly what's in Morgan City now. Back when I went to work for McDermott, it was a houseboat down there, that was it.

*Bill Bailey:* And old McDermott thought we was gonna fail so he wouldn't let us name, wouldn't let us put McDermott's name on it. So the first name was Bayou Fabricators.

*Griff Lee:* Bayou Boeuf Fabricators. The difference was that, as far as we know, was the first facility that was intended to fabricate offshore structures. A few before that had been built someplace else as a sideline. See, it's not a shipyard type of construction. Shipyards build hulls out of big pieces of plate with brackets and plates and all the rest of that. This was largely putting big pieces of pipe together. One of our problems was that if you look at a steel frame of a building or a bridge, they made out of all sorts of nice high beams and H-shapes and so forth. And you can get all sorts of plates in there, holding one piece to the other. You can't do that when you're welding pipe to a pipe. And so the technology to, we could weld it together, but we really had no way of analyzing what we had. How strong was it? Was it strong enough? And so while they were learning how to make the wells and how to do that better, we were trying to improve our engineering capability or design, to figure out how thick and strong the materials needed to be to make that joint. But the main thing about the fabrication yard, no place else had you tried to build that large a component on land, put it on some barge, and then carry it to location, and install it. That's the entire concept for offshore construction because we're on site. Is totally dependent upon the weather.

*Howard Thibodaux:* McDermott had a project right next door to my home in Amelia. It was a joint venture, McDermott and Raymond Concrete. They were building platforms out of concrete. I worked for them for 14 months and it didn't pan out, so they shut the yard down and that's when McDermott took it over as their own fabrication yard. Mr. Bailey asked me to stay on, not to look for another job. So I stayed there and we started off with 175 men working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week for the first year and a half. The reason why McDermott had opened that yard was, previously they would do all engineering, the design, they would purchase the material and either ship it to Avondale Shipyard in New Orleans to do the fabrication or to Livingston Shipyard, Orange, Texas. And of course the projects were never completed on time. So Mr. Bailey told the President, Mr. Charlie Graves, he said, "Why don't we start our own fabrication yard? Then we can guarantee on time delivery." So that's when they started the yard in Amelia. At that time, we had to purchase all the pipe for the jacket legs and deck legs and they used material that actually wasn't completely up to specifications. It was good material, but it didn't meet the requirements it was built for, so we would buy that and build the structures from it and then as the structures got larger, you needed larger diameter legs, thicker diameter material so you 'd have to have someone roll these for you. And once again, you were dependent on getting the material in time which never did arrive as you wanted. So Mr. Bailey said, "Well, why don't we get our own pipe yard and then we can guarantee delivery?" So that's when he talked them into buying Dupont Fabricators that had a pipe rolling mill over there. Mr. Bailey was only 32 years old when he started that yard, before the days of the calculators, the fancy calculators and no computers. He used a slide rule. He'd be speaking to you and working that slide rule. He could guarantee just about any delivery. In fact, I was living in Morgan City at that time when I first got out of the Service and we'd go to work at six o'clock in the morning in Amelia and work 'til six o'clock in the afternoon and we didn't have a telephone back there in the fabrication yard or anything. And I went to work, I left home one Friday morning at 5:30 to come to work and I didn't get home until noon Saturday. My wife didn't even know where I was, but Mr. Bailey promised one of the oil companies that if he started that project at Friday afternoon, he could deliver it by Monday morning and we started it and we delivered it by Monday morning... Mr. R Thomas McDermott had an office in Houston. He didn't make too many trips to the yard but when our President, Mr. Charlie Graves, talked Mr. R. Thomas into building the fabrication yard so they could have "on time" deliveries, Mr. R. Thomas said he didn't want his name involved in a failure. So Bailey said, "Well, we will call it Bayou Boeuf Fabricators." So he put that sign up. In 1958 is when things had mushroomed so much. They decided to open a shipyard. We hired Mr. B. J. Leblanc from Avondale to run the shipyard and Mr. R. Thomas made a trip to the yard and looked at the building and he says, "Bill, don't you think it's time we changed that sign and called that McDermott Fabricators?"

*Garver Watkins:* I applied for a job at McDermott. This was in 1956. I can remember that very distinctly. I went out there, and they told me that they didn't need anybody. It was filled up. It was a small company then. They had just started in the fabrication business... And they had a lot of people looking for work at that time. I can remember coming back to town. I spent some time at my wife's uncle's garage in Morgan City. I was telling him that I was looking for a job and couldn't get anything. He said, "I know Mr. Campbell. He's the yard supervisor out there." He (Mr. Campbell) had his car in the garage that particular day [to] have some work done on it, and he called him over and said, "You don't need a good man do you." He said, "I could always use

a good man.” “Well I got my nephew here looking for a job.” “Well send him out there, and tell them I sent him out there.” I went back out there the next day, and I had a job. I had a helper’s job. Just by someone putting a word in for you, you had a job. And that was on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, [1956], in July. I don’t know if that was bad omen or not. But I went to work as a helper, a dollar and a quarter an hour. They put me to work on the rack, where they built the braces for the structures they built. We would burn the braces there, and the welders and the fitters would put it together. To show you how much this company changed – in those days, a 14-inch brace was a big brace. We were maybe in 150 to 200 feet of water at the most. But mostly it was shallow water stuff. Jacket legs—some of them were 30 to 36 inches. And as they got deeper and deeper into the Gulf, everything expanded. You had 36-inch braces then, instead of legs. But from my experience on the rack, I worked up to a leaderman job. I ran the racks for a year or two. I can remember: McDermott bought some ships. They had—I don’t know where they got them—they had the bow cut off and the stern cut off. All we had was the middle of the ship. We had about 300 feet of middle left, and they wanted to convert those into barges... When I started out there, McDermott was not building jackets at that particular time. They were in existence, but they were strictly pipelines. They had a dredging company. They were in the canals and the marsh. They were laying down pipeline for people. They were not in fabrication business then. And that’s when they spread out. I can remember that when I hired out for them, there were not that many people working for them. I can remember that my number was 5,060. They started at 5,000 when they was hiring people. When they hired you out there, they gave you a number, and that number stuck with you. My number was 5,060. So, I was the 60th person hired out there, and they were open about three months when I went to work out there. It kept growing and growing, and it wasn’t too long, and we had 150 people. As the years went by, hell, we were getting bigger and bigger and the yard...they would buy more land. They leased another piece of land and then another piece and now they got the whole east side over there.

*The emerging fabrication industry was one of continuous discovery, innovation, and improvisation. Procedures and policies were developed as the industry evolved. Shipyards continued to compete for welders and skilled technicians, and trade schools were opened to help meet the oil industry’s growing demand. Few workers had higher education, and few perceived the need for it. Tensions between old timers and inexperienced college graduates were often high.*

*Bill Bailey:* Over the years we had to train everybody. And the only thing we had, blacks in the cane fields. We had whites never seen a welding instrument and so we set up schools and we were able to get in a few from the shipyards that could be trained. And our engineers taught night school. You know, we had people that couldn’t sign their name. We taught ‘em to sign their names. These people are very shrewd people... Probably most of the families only spoke French.

*Griff Lee:* ...We had basically at that time two kind of welders in this country. A typical structural welder is used to buildings and bridges. And the pipeline welder. Well, neither of those welders really fit the typical well on an offshore structure. So even if you got an experienced, code certified welder, he had to relearn what was being used on these kinds of structures. And it was an almost learn and train as you go.

*Bill Bailey:* What kind of code did we use at the first, Griff?

*Griff Lee:* Didn't really have any. We said we were using AWS, American Welding Society, but it truly wasn't applicable. It, it was the closest thing we had... And we used the American Steel Construction specifications for the design and that wasn't really applicable either, so. That's been one of the other interesting parts about this industry, we built our own codes. Basically built our own regulations.

*Bill Wilson:* See my dad told me back in 1952, that's when I entered college, Louisiana Tech, was 1952 and my dad told me at that time, he said, "You are gonna take Petroleum Engineering. Engineers are gonna run the oil field." In 1952, engineers were a seldom, were tolerated but seldom listened to, okay, and they had a prefix by name, damn engineers, okay. (laughing) And that was common even when I went to work in the oil field back in '57 that [engineer], I remember, they used to call him – and pardon my language because I am a Christian and I don't believe in using vulgar language – but I can remember those West Cote Blanche Bay days when [he] was a Field Engineer out there... The old timers then, the people that was 60, over 60 years old then, the bosses out there, had a little nickname for not just him, but for the other engineers that came and went, that spent time out there. And they always used that prefix, damn engineers. They never just said it and they usually didn't call 'em by name, they would just call 'em, "That damn engineer." They really didn't want 'em out there because they asked too many questions.

*Though locals made up a significant portion of the labor force needed to find and exploit oil and gas resources, the industry continued to attract new people to Morgan City. Specialized firms were established in the city to provide laborers to the burgeoning industry. A 1953 advertisement in The Morgan City Review showing a woman in a hardhat boasted, "It's a job searching for oil...but if you're searching for... machinists, welders, metal work, riggers, mechanic, marine hardware, boat supplies your search is ended if you visit... C.A. Boudreaux."*

*Red Adams:* [In the '50's Morgan City] was wild. But you have to look at the people that worked in the oil field. I mean you didn't have weak people. I mean strengthwise. Because it was such a hard job. I mean no boy that didn't have a little muscle to him [would make it]. And then the people that work in the oil field were very, very proud. It was one of the few industries, I would say of any industry, that if you were out there working and pushing a crew twelve hours a day – and I was pushing a crew, talking about a roustabout crew – I would try to do more work than you. And you would try to do more work than me. Drillers on these crews were trying to outwork the other crew. Make more hold, trip the sack faster. A lot of competition. But not competition where you are trying to stab someone. Competition where you're...it's friendly. I tripped from 12,000 feet in six hours. I've seen on the tower reports any time you did that it took you eight hours. You are just trying to, you are wasting time, huh?

*Ira Grow:* Morgan City was not really the place where most people from offshore lived. The industry was here, but not many people were working offshore. People from all over the world would come work here. The locals worked in the offices and the yards, but people could come from all over and work offshore. I have no complaints about working offshore, though... [The oil industry] was a big deal. It gave Morgan City a boost. Shrimping was changing places. Shrimp was big, but shrimpers were moving to Texas and Mexico. Oil moved in.

*Cecile Grow:* It brought a lot of business here. It also brought a lot of people looking for work. People would rent your shed to live in, because it was so hard to find a place to live here.

*Ira Grow:* There was no place to live or sleep. There were so many people coming here to work. When things got rough out there, it was dangerous. The tender would be moving up and down, and the boat was moving up and down, and you were supposed to haul things from one to the other. I remember one time that it got so rough, and the tender started to sink. Those hands starting getting off that thing like rats from a sinking ship. Out there, some guys got pretty sick from all the moving.

*Cecile Grow:* He never got sick, though.

*Ira Grow:* We made all kinds of friends out there. A lot of them were out of state, and we've stayed in touch. We went through the good and the bad, when things were rough or calm. We did lots of fishing... And they fed us well too. In the early days, it was nothing fancy, but they fed us well. Later, they had ice cream, soda, and just about anything you wanted. They were trying to please you.

*Cecile Grow:* And they used to fix everything out there. When it broke, they took care of it out there. Now they send it in to be fixed or replaced.

*Ira Grow:* Yeah, back then, being a good hand meant doing everything. Back then, it was a different breed of men. Everyone helped everyone. Working offshore meant that you could do anything.

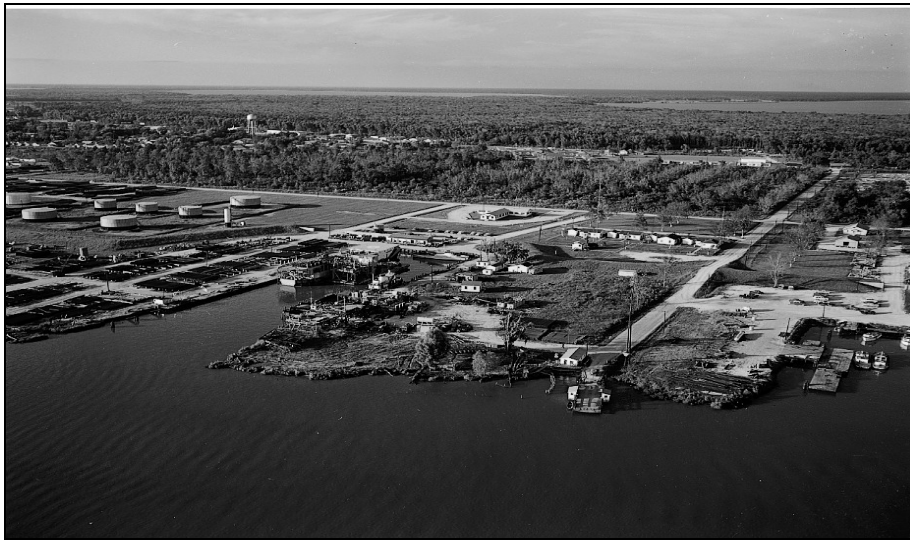
*Much of the work was hard, and some opted to leave the oil field before suffering long-lasting negative health effects.*

*Clarence Duplantis:* When you're working in the shipyard, there's all that old steel, and they cut on there, and first thing you know you'll be welding, you'll think it's your fire, but it's that man burning over there. That rust would fly and hit you and stick to your skin and then burn you. And it's all full of mud and rust. And you come out of there, you look like they've been dragging you in the bottom there. So that wasn't too good either. That's why we quit. That's dirty work, partner. Oh, lord... Working inside, when you start spitting brown you better watch out. You know when you weld on that steel, it forms like a rust, and then when you catch a cold and you spit all that ground up stuff and that smoke, and you can't afford to stay there too long, unless you're in the open. Now if you're in the open you're all right. Now I welded on some galvanized iron, and partner, let me tell you something. You talk about getting sick, when you weld on galvanized, if you swallow that fume, you swallow some of that stuff and you drink some milk. You had to drink milk, and that milk would make it clogged up, and you're gone with it. That's the only time you'd get a relief. You had to drink milk. ... I didn't have to do it. I came back to the store.



#### 5.4. The Industry Brings Change to Morgan City

*Coming out of WWII, Morgan City was a far cry from the industrial landscape it would become, despite the success of its shrimping industry and more than a decade of involvement in oil and gas. Though most of the major oil companies had offices in Morgan City, the fabrication, transportation, and service companies that would dominate the town's landscape were in their infancy during this period. Initially the oil companies brought in their own workers, but soon locals were finding jobs in the industry. However, many turned down promotions and better employment opportunities that would require them to move or leave the area. Several Morgan City residents describe their community and the changes it experienced in the industry's early days.*



**Figure 5.11. Aerial Photo of Kerr-McGee Facility, 1956. Photo Courtesy of the Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Marcelle Ordogne:* [I'm] a Texan that was taught to brag, of course, that landed in New Orleans to attend school and got a job with Shell Oil Company in the Production Department [in 1947]. I used to type the drilling reports from Lake Verret and all those, all where they were drilling, never realizing that one day I would live right in the middle of this. And I met my husband on a blind date in New Orleans and landed in Morgan City... He worked as a shell crusher, my father-in-law, and they opened this restaurant with the turkey that they got Thanksgiving Day, the first day, and they went on for 30, 40 years... Changing from Methodist to Catholic. Oh, I tell you, it was a great change for me, but now I am very involved in the Catholic Church and love it... It was so different. We would go to my husband's grandmother's and she couldn't speak English at all, she spoke French. It was just so different. [I became part of the community because] I got involved. I'd say, the first six months that I was here, I became President of the Business Professional Women's Club. I got involved with everything even though I was working and raising a family... We welcomed [the outsiders who came in] with open arms and they just became part of the community, really... These people who had come in were, what's that word, a different breed than the people who lived here and it created a big gap. They would all complain that there was not a lot of activity here. Most of them came from bigger cities and they

wanted more activities for them to get involved. We had a real small golf course that has developed into large one now, but for the men to play and later on they developed different oil related clubs, you know.

*Parker Conrad:* It was a very poor community, very poor. As you can see from what I was paying these workers here in this time book from 1948, well, they were getting 70, 80 cents an hour. Yes, this was very poor country here. [In the late 1930's and '40's] the economy was based mostly on shrimping and trapping. Even that has its ups and downs. But as far as equipment is concerned, let's say, in 1948, '49, and the first two, three, four years that I was here, in this particular location here, as Conrad Industries, I think this whole community, including Morgan City, Patterson, Berwick – I think they had one bulldozer in the area, and there was not one crane, crawler crane, there was not one cherry picker in this community. You could not find one. When I was just starting to install engines in the shrimp boats that I built, I had to tow them around maybe five or six miles from here to a place that was in the dredging business, and they had an A-frame on a barge that they used in their dredging operations, and I had to use those people to pick up a simple little diesel engine to put in the boat. I had no means of actually putting anything in the boat. As a matter of fact, in order to overcome that particular problem, I bought a little sugarcane derrick that they used to lift loads of sugarcane and put them in trucks to haul to the sugar mills. And this little A-frame derrick, stiff-leg derrick, I powered it with a five-ton BB winch and a five horsepower electric motor, and that's what I used for many years to put engines in and out of boats, and to lift the mast and rigging up. So that's how poor things were in the late '40's and '50's. It began to get better when the oil companies began to come in here in the early '50's, but it took a while before you could see any amount of equipment around here. So like I say, it was poor – this country was very poor at that time.

*Doris Mullendore:* [When] we moved into Amelia, at the time we moved, practically everybody out there spoke French. It was strictly an old Cajun community and that made it bad, but that's hardest during the summer time and stuff like that 'cause as soon as school started you got off - the other kids spoke English. They adapted and I adapted, too. ... Mama used to tell, "I live in America. I speak English. If you want to talk to me, you learn English." ... Daddy had contracted TB (tuberculosis) in the service, in World War I, and somewhere along the line they sent him to Portland because there in Indiana was too bad, so they sent him out there. So during World War II, he was a fire fighter in the Civil Service with Portland Army Air Base. Well, when World War II ended, he went to 'em and told 'em, "I want a place where I can hunt, fish and be outdoors." So they sent him to New Orleans to the Fish and Game Commission down there and they sent him to this area and here we have been. ... I graduated from high school here, Morgan City High School, and my first career job was a bookkeeper for a Buick Agency and about midway in my employment, he went and he purchased a crew boat, so that was my first start in getting involved in the offshore business. I was livin' in Amelia at the time. When [the owner] moved the business out there, my mama had just died, and I just didn't feel like I wanted to spend 24 hours a day out there, so I went to work for some pipe and supply ... and then I got offered so much more money to go to work for the Port Hardware and then the same thing more or less money and benefits is when I got into the diving industry. ... I had an opportunity to go to work for Mobil Oil when I got out of school, but in the application it said you might be subject to or be willing to move and I said, "Ain't no way!" But the girl that ended up with the job, ended up retiring with Mobil and never moved. And I said, "I did all right." ... Ninety percent of

our class lives in Morgan City, Berwick or Patterson. We graduated in '52, that's when all of this started, and the parents was either shrimpers or something and everything, they just stayed. There was a way of making a living.

*Earl Hebert:* People started coming in, I would say about 1945 or something when people from West Texas started getting transferred in and started doing basic work. Out of that initial group, I got my best friend for one thing, and I think they caused the local people to become better people. A lot of these people had been around in various cities and various schools and we had lived here forever and they brought in new ideas and they helped us to grow. Now, it wasn't easy. Some people had a hard time with accepting people. I heard stories where a person would be living here for 20 years and still wasn't considered a permanent person. But they brought growth to the minds and to the spirit. [Before the oil people came in], there was a shell crusher here. There was a lot of people worked at that plant. There was shrimping. Well this area has always been a one industry economy and at that time it was shrimping and trapping and fur buying sort of thing. But then about '45, '46 or '47 when the people started coming in, they started opening their eyes to other things and after they had been here for a while they decided, well, we ought to have a tennis court. People here didn't play tennis at that time. So a tennis court got built and some people complained, "Our tax dollars are going to tennis courts. We don't play tennis." I mean, you got all that kind of stuff. And then because of the influx of people, they caused us to have to build new schools. And they caused people to think about things. Okay, should we have a consolidated school that encompasses half of St. Mary's Parish or should we have a little school in each vicinity. And of course, I think we made a bad decision because we decided to have all these little schools, but that's a whole different ball game, too. But those are the kind of things that I think they brought to the forefront, the growth in the community. You know, there's a civic center for example in Morgan City, Berwick and Patterson. You wouldn't have those things if you hadn't had the outside influence. And then to really help it all out as time goes on, the people from here went to work for the oil companies and they started to go to Nigeria and they started to go to New York and they started to go to London and they broadened their interests and their knowledge and then they brought that back here and I think that helped us to grow.

*Haggai Davis:* Every major oil company in the United States had a field office here in Morgan City, and this is a phenomenon that you can just write down and talk about forever – that every one of them were competing against one another for this oil industry offshore and every one of them was located here in this town. And they were doing all this on two forty a barrel oil. We are talking about 40 dollars today. But it was two forty. They were hiring. Nobody firing anybody. Then they got to merging later in the years and merging. Oil went up and they still cannot make any money, they say, at 40 dollars. But none of them are here anymore.

*Gail Davis:* It was just unbelievable, and Haggai was right in the middle with his companies. All the service companies were here. We knew all of the people who were involved with those companies.

*Even in the post-WWII economic boom, many Louisiana residents worked hard to earn their livings. A recession in the late 1950's reminded residents that, like others, their newest industry was also subject to economic ups and downs.*

*Robert Shivers:* And I got into home buildin' business and I built houses there in Hull, Texas for about two and a half years. And, I had a sister, her husband worked for Gulf Oil here in Morgan City, the Gulf Oil offshore construction what her husband was doin'. So, I came down to build 'em a house.[I came in early '57], but Morgan City was on a wild boom then. They were near their peak in activity, and all the shipyards and machine shops and electric [needed people with] any kind of a skill, you know electrician, spray painter, what have you. In fact at times people got in the personnel business, they'd send a bus up to Arkansas or Oklahoma, go into their courthouse squares spend two or three days and sign you up, asking if you wanna come to Morgan City, Louisiana. See, these people like McDermott Fabricators, they needed personnel so badly that they'd pay a bonus... That's how desperate they were. With that there, then of course, houses was being built by the dozens around here and, of course that made it a lot harder on me because I was having trouble getting workmen, carpenters, anybody of any skill. But over the time I had a man there that worked for my grandpa and he worked for my daddy and he was 58 years old when I went in business. So, he worked for me in Hull and then he come on over here to Louisiana and live next door to me and he worked 'til he was 65. And there's two other men that had worked for my daddy for years in the oil field over at Wakkanai and they came over here and worked for me. I had three men there from, uh, Hull Texas, come down and work for me...

Late in '57 they had a little slump here and a good many of the rigs was tied up and some of the major oil companies – I suppose most of 'em – I know Gulf Oil sold off their drilling rigs. At that time they had company-owned rigs and, uh, Sun Oil done the same thing. And I don't know who else might've sold their rigs off, and so that dampened everything because there wasn't so much going on. However, I'd say that didn't last but two or three years and it come right back.

*Marcelle Ordogne:* It was so hard, in those days. The help [at the restaurant] didn't have transportation and we used to provide transportation for those waitresses and cooks. Now my mother-in-law had this man from Dallas, this chef, come down and in those days, that was something to teach her cooks... [The restaurant] was 7 days a week and when it opened, it was all night. It was 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And I remember for years we closed one day a year, and that was Christmas day... In those days, we had a Chamber of Commerce man called Lou Trayburn, and he would encourage seminars to teach the waitresses and the people working in the stores around here. That was really a big thing and he was Chamber President for many years. But I know our waitresses used to go there and in those days, they wore stiff uniforms, white uniforms that were ironed. Oh, poor things, they had to iron those uniforms. And they all wore a handkerchief... the handkerchiefs in the pocket. They were white.

*Bill Wilson:* I decided to go into business and I went into the service station business. Right about the time that General Eisenhower was the president of the country, the country got into a little short-term recession about the time, after I had been in business about six months. My impatience in wanting to achieve more than I should at that point in time, gave me a serious setback with that recession, a business failure... My wife, having been raised in New Iberia, Louisiana, said, "Well, since you are going to have to look for a job, how about going back near my home for a while and look for work there?" So I set off for New Iberia and Lafayette, went to work for Texaco after putting in many applications and hearing the story, "You don't have

experience.” But Texaco took a chance on me. I had had financial training and service the four years that I was in the Air Force. They had sent me to school in finance and I had had quite a bit of correspondence education from the University of Pennsylvania during that four years. Not a graduate of that, but a lot of credit hours in finance from the University of Pennsylvania and Texaco, while most all the other companies – all the other major oil companies and service companies through the Oil Center in Lafayette where I applied for work – all turned me down. Texaco said, “Well, we’re not hiring and there is a recession on and everybody else is laying off, all our competitors are laying off, but Texaco never wants to miss an opportunity to hire a right person for our company, so we are going to take a chance on you.” This was 1957 and Mr. M. O. Reed was the Drilling Superintendent for Texaco in New Iberia District and he said, “Son, I am gonna stick my neck out on the window and hire you, but I am gonna get a report on you ever’ week. I am gonna send you out there in the field. We don’t have any banks to work in (laughing) and you are not gonna have a suit to put on. You are going to get a hard hat and a pair of boots and your first day that you are goin’ to go to work, you are goin’ to go to work down at Ivanhoe Landing as a welder’s helper.” And I said, “Yes, sir. I will do anything that you want me to do.” So my first day with Texaco, I worked at Ivanhoe Landing as a welder’s helper. I just handed that welder rods. I chipped the flack from where he made the welds. And a few days later, stayed there a few days, they told me, said, “We’re goin’ to put you on what’s called ‘Extra Board’, that means that you work anywhere we are shorthanded, doing anything that’s required to be done and you may even have to work without any days off. And at some period of time, we’ll tell you, you are a permanent employee, if we are satisfied with you. Until we tell you that, you’re an Extra person, Extra Board, that’s what that means. You are just an Extra person and we can let you go at anytime.” A few days later, they were shorthanded on a drilling rig. I had never roughnecked, didn’t know anything about that at all, but I was a six foot, two inch and 200 pounds. They were looking for that, those kind of guys, pretty strong, had been an athlete and so they said, “You are going to work on this drilling rig.” So for the first two years I was with Texaco, I floated from one crew to another as an Extra person, working on drilling rigs, working on pile driving barges, driving locations, rig building crews, building derricks, roustabout work, whatever. I even was a flunky. They had camps out on the water, we worked 6 days on, 6 days off. I had told the Drilling Superintendent when he hired me that I was in debt from my business loss, that I’d like to make all the overtime that I could and they poured it on me. I’d work as many as 18 to 20 days without a day off, out on the water away from my wife and kids, not being home at all, working on drilling rigs, double over, double shifts, trying to make as much money as I could to pay back my debt. So I even flunkied in the kitchen at one time. They were shorthanded, that’s a cook’s helper. That would be like a waiter, mopping floors, waitin’ on tables, cleaning up the camp, making up beds, cleaning out stopped up commodes.



**Figure 5.12. Crew in the Galley on an Offshore Rig. Photo Courtesy of Chester Pipsair, OOGHP.**

*Verdie Laws:* We moved from Beaumont, Texas where my husband was working, and in 1958 there was a rather severe recession and this was the only place he could find a job. So we moved here, thinking that a year from that date we would be long gone and here we still, here I am still... He was a machinist... He worked for Cameron Iron Works... I had worked briefly when we first got married for about three or four years in Eunice, [Louisiana], nothing related to the oil industry. And then we moved here and then I had children and then I didn't work for a long time... We were married eight and a half years before my children was born and one of the reasons we thought we were going to be long gone was because this was a very closed community. We didn't find that people were friendly or outgoing or even accepting of outsiders, but we didn't have anywhere else to work so we had to stay. It took a long time for it to change, in my opinion anyway... I find that natives, if you will, to the area are more accepting now. Newcomers have an easier time than we had.

*Elaine Naquin:* I didn't mind [coming to Morgan City] in the least. Of course, [in 1959 when I went to work] the main people I met was associated with work and all. And of course I met parents that the girls went to school with and so on. So of course that's about all the activities we really had together was the fact of maybe going to a PTA meeting or something like that. Otherwise, plus having to do housework and keep care of two kids and all that kind of stuff, you didn't get much time to take and do anything else when you are working. ... There was, I say, about eight or nine [people working in the company when I got] there. ... [The work] was supplying oilfield rigs with all the equipment they needed. They need a part of an engine or something like that we managed to get it for them and get it out to them.

*Local youth were accustomed to working during the summers when they were not in school, on shrimp boats or elsewhere. As the oil and gas industry grew, offshore summer jobs became a lucrative source of income that helped some young residents put themselves through college. The regular hands generally had much to say about their reluctance to work with the "green college boys," but as the following stories indicate, some of these green boys proved to be useful.*

*Burt Ross:* There [was] never no school, so to speak... We didn't have that in my day. You're on the job training. They used to say, "There it is. Go get it."

*Walter Daniels:* I've been associated with the oil field since I was born. My father was one of the original rig builders of the oil-drilling rigs that started off over in west Texas and moved through there into Louisiana and he ended up in the little town of Gueydan, Louisiana, working for the Pure Oil Company back in 1930. And his famous statement was that he ended up in Gueydan and he never would have stayed there except he never made enough money to leave. Gueydan was a little farming community, a Cajun farming community that was somewhat transformed because of local oil-related businesses where there were small oil fields in the local area. As I grew older, many of the men in Gueydan would commute to Morgan City where they would take boats to go offshore and work in the oil field. ... When I was in medical school, my family supported me and helped put me through school, but every summer I would try to get a job to make some money to help myself during the rest of the year and between my second and third year in medical school, I got a job in Point LaHache, Louisiana, working for Shell Oil Company as a roustabout and there were several students who were on one crew. We did the work in this little area down at the, near the mouth of the river. The next year, I got a job working offshore on an oil rig, which was quite an experience. We worked ten days on and five days off. It was for Rowan Drilling Company and it was a drilling rig. I worked as a roustabout, which means that I did a little bit of everything – cleaned the area, painted, chipped paint, took over from the roustabout's drilling when they needed a break; just anything that needed to be done. It was quite an interesting experience. The days were long, worked 12, 14 hour days, the food was very good and a lot of it, the conversations were unique in that the, out of the ten-day hitch, the first three days you were out there, you talked about how much sex you had gotten when you were home on your five days off and the next three days was kind of a dead period, wasn't much going on, the next four days, everybody talked about how much sex they were going to get when they got home – and that was every shift. I met some people during that summer that I continue to have some contact with. The foreman of the rig was a long time employee of Rowan. When I came to Morgan City, he was still working for Rowan and I saw him a couple of times, just socially here in Morgan City. That was five or six years to 10 years later. So, my summer of working offshore on a rig gave me some insight into the things that happened and that workers were exposed to on offshore rigs. As an approaching senior medical student, I was doctor on the rig. Everybody call me "Doc" and any little thing that they had that would go wrong, they would search me out. Well, my book learning was quite extensive, my practical learning was very little and I'd take care of minor injuries and things like that. One day, this guy came running, "Doc! Come quick! Come quick! Joe's stuck a fishing hook in his back!" They used to fish after they would get off their tour of duty, they would go fishing for speckled trout. [They] had great fishing out there. We always had a lot of fish to eat. So I went out there and this guy had thrown his lure and as he threw it, it hooked in the back of his right shoulder. So, he's sitting there and this lure is dangling from his back and he had taken his shirt off and cut the shirt away from the lure. So he said, "Doc, you got to get this thing out." I said, "Man, you've got to go inshore where they have a real doctor and deaden it and get this thing out without hurting you." He said, "Oh no, man," he said, "We'd lose our safety record and I'll be in bad trouble for getting hooked fishing on this rig." He said, "I don't want to do that," and I said, "Well, I can do it, but it's going to hurt." He said, "Well, do what you have to do," and so, what I wanted to do was cut the hook away from the lure and run the hook through the skin and come

out. He said, "Oh no, you can't do that." He said, "That's the best lure I have." He said, "I want to save that. Here's my knife." He said, "I just sharpened it." He said, "I want you to cut that thing out of my back," and I said, "Well, if you can stand it, I can too." So, I proceeded to whittle this lure out of his back and he did fine. So, some of the injuries were not industrial-related.

*Clyde Hahn:* I had worked in summer as a roustabout... I went down there and roughnecked on an old steam rig. I was 16, [really I was] 15, but I'm 16 [as far as they are concerned]. Well, they had nobody else so they hired me. Anyway, I worked down there, I got burned up darn near in a hotel fire... so heck, I said, "Well, I'm gonna go back to school."... Then I came down here for that summer job and that's how I wound up offshore. And we worked on old offshore rigs... The first thing I did, I got put to clean the tools, driller's tools. Guess what, I lost his key. It went right down through the cracks in the floor. But he wasn't too mad, he was a nice guy... We had a fella, Spike, he was a professor, he'd gone to college at Nicholls. And he got a summer job out there and he thought about stayin' because we made more money than he did, and he paid his bills and everything. We was makin' more money than he was as a professor. Because it was good money. That's what got everybody out there. And they paid good, oh they paid good, and it wasn't bad work. It was always right there, it wasn't like on a rig on land, you're always movin' and tearin' that thing down and puttin' it together. Out there, you know, even the old barge rigs, I worked on a lot of those old barge rigs around here, and that all moves and you just, when you get there, it's all hooked up. All you do is put the water in, sink it, and start spuddin' in. It's a lot less work actually than a land rig. A land rig's a lot more work than those good old barge rigs. Those barge rigs, I loved them. I worked on them several years until they got rid of 'em.

*Valine Mullen:* I was born and raised in Chauvin, Louisiana down in the heart of Cajun country. Graduated Morgan City High School. As a child my family kind of moved around, but it was moving around all in the same area. We would move from Chauvin, we moved to Amelia and then like to Schriever and back to Chauvin, so it was a lot of moving around. So I had a lot of experience with different schools which made for a very large base of friends which was kind of nice. So I am only a high school graduate. I never went off to college. Decided marriage was better for me, a foolish mistake, but three beautiful children in the end after all of that. I guess my first job would have been in high school involved anywhere near in the service industry, oil and gas, it would have been working for Triple A answering machine or answering company. And back then my job was to handle the offshore calls which amounted to, they would call on the telephone and we had a separate mike radio kind of thing and I had to key the mike for whenever somebody spoke off the telephone. I had to make sure the said, "Roger," and cut off and then let the other person speak and key the mike for them on their radio thing. So it was kind of complicated in a way, but it was interesting. You heard all of their conversations because you had no choice. Somebody had to listen to key the mike in and out for the person on the phone... If say a wife needed to speak with her husband or a boss needed to speak with an employee who was offshore or on a boat, then first of all they would call the company's answering service. We would then have to go through the process of trying to raise that person on a marine radio because they didn't have the marine telephone operators that they eventually got at that time. So you would contact them through the transmission, through the radio. Once you got them on the radio, then the person on the phone got to speak into [the mike]. From the phone I would hold the mike to the phone and I had to key the mike. In other words, I had to press the key down and allow that person to say what, and when I thought they were through, then I would release the



mike from them, give that other person a chance to talk and hold the then receiver on the opposite end for them to hear to the radio. So it was kind of like I would have to second guess and sometimes if I cut them off because I keyed too soon, then I would have to say, "Well, hold on." So it was kind of an interesting thing because you are like taking part in their conversation by just sitting there and you felt kind of eavesdropping, but you couldn't help it.

*Jerry Cunningham:* I was single, and it was good paying wages. I think I was making a dollar thirteen an hour, which was big money in those days. And I could make enough to go back to college in three months' time. I could pay for a year's college. At that time, college was three hundred and fifty dollars a semester, I think, books, tuition, everything. I could make enough in the summertime to put myself through a year's college. So it was ideal for me. And they would work me, my dad had the connections, they would work me during the Christmas holidays, Thanksgiving holidays, spring break, and all that. So it was ideal. They were always-manpower was in critical shortage always. There was people that came in from all over the world to work in Morgan City.

*The decade of the 1950's marked the beginning of significant social turmoil in the United States, especially with regard to racial issues. Efforts to achieve integration focused first on the schools; in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separation of schoolchildren on the basis of race created inequality (Brown v. (Topeka) Board of Education). Louisiana, like its southern neighbors, was slow to change. Neither schools nor worksites were integrated and non-whites were restricted in the type of work they could do. Thus, despite the need for workers in the oil and gas industry, many non-whites were kept out. Some individuals began to work their way in through jobs that were not perceived to be related to oil and gas. In Morgan City, friendships and trust between blacks and whites facilitated the entry of some blacks into the industry. Although Native Americans of Houma, Biloxi, and Chitimacha descent lived in southern Louisiana, few of them lived within Morgan City and the communities immediately surrounding it, and they did not occupy distinct neighborhoods or create a distinct, discernible workforce there. The following residents share their experiences during this period.*

*Dolores Henderson:* First I have to thank my mother for wanting us to have more education than she did. ... She had finished only third grade, but she could read her newspaper and she did read it. And I noticed that her grammar was never really bad... As we grew up [in the 1940's] and as we spoke, she added words to her vocabulary and then it made a difference too that she was a domestic and the people for whom she worked were better off than she was and they spoke pretty well. I think all of that makes a big difference, the environment. So she wanted us to do better than she did... and the people for whom my mother worked had like a daughter-in-law whose father was [a] military retiree and she never wore her clothes a lot and gave us a lot of clothes, so I was really dressed with evening wear when I went to college. You know, with it all, you just made it because you wanted to make it and you worked hard at it, at surviving... The late '40's and the early '50's just about all blacks were either domestics or they drove truck, and then you had the few who worked at the Shell Plant. There were those who had worked at the mill, but the new mill was just about going out. The lumber mill was just about going out, so it was mostly the Shell Plant that people were at. And the ladies were working, if they were not domestic, they were working at the Shrimp and the Crab Factory. Now the women who worked at the Shrimp and the Crab Factory made much more than the women who worked as domestics

and that's how a number of black people were able to buy their homes then, build their homes, because they had been working in the factories. Our schools were separate. Separate was not as bad as what was happening being separate. Being separate meant your books were always out of date and you never had enough of them. Your courses were out of date. Since then, I have friends who are writers and college professors and alike who said they never realized what was the difference. If you are not a part of it, generally [it] just never even occurs to you. At that time, I couldn't go to the Public Library... [Now, Mrs. Dreher], that's a lady that I will never forget. She was so nice to us... She was a librarian for the Morgan City Public Library which was just a little shabby little one room deal then and mother worked for her and I think I was probably around 11, and sometimes I would go and help mother, basically to do the dishes... But what was so great was she knew that I liked to read 'cause I would read upstairs with the kids and I will never forget the day she took me into that library, which was against all rules, and through the back door of it and let me select my own book, my first book. After that though, later on during the year, my sister used to work up there helping her to clean the library and she would get a chance to read, yeah. I say, I guess it's like when people weren't allowed to read, like the people took a chance and taught [us anyway]. When I was in high school the library had probably a hundred books and I guess I read all of them.

*Pierre Jackson:* I can remember going back to when I got older [in the early 1950's], I worked in this area. At that time it was a shrimp area. ... Well, the shrimpers were still shrimping, and then the oil people began to come in. They were starting to work offshore, more or less. And I remember some of the old timers that come here with a lot of companies, like old man Isaac... I think he came here with Kerr-McGee or Mobil, one of the big companies. At that time I was shining shoes around the barbershop, so I would hear a lot about the oil patch and the shrimpers, how they were more or less battling. They said the oil patch was knocking the shrimp and what have you... And as time progressed along, I would go out – at that time, my color wasn't actually hired to work directly for a major company. What they would do, they would hire blacks to go out as laborers, and we would haul sacks of mud, which were hundred-pound sacks of mud, and we'd go out to the rigs. We wasn't allowed to communicate or what have you with the workers that were working for these companies. ... I went into the service. I spent two years away from here. And I come back and they still weren't hiring.

*Lester Fryou:* I went to work for McDermott 1951 as an oiler on the drag line... We had a lot of blacks in my early days. Not on the spud barges. Not in the dredging department. In the dredging department, I can remember that there was one black man on one of the dredges. But other than that, in the dredging department that was it. Now, the fabrication yard, yeah. We had a lot of blacks, a lot of blacks, and a lot of 'em had supervisor positions. They had one there, Frank Henderson, he was one- I mean, just a good guy, a smart guy. He would do some of the load out. He'd do the load outs for us. Jack-up the platforms and lay tracks and dollies, put 'em on track and dollies, and load 'em out. And he had, see, he had at least three leadermans under him... All black.



**Figure 5.13. Seismic Crew Drilling Holes for Dynamite.**  
**Photo Courtesy of Nelson Constant, OOGHP.**

*Dolores Henderson:* During that time [after my husband, Caleb, returned from WWII] he'd worked at a shell plant in Morgan City and at a lumber company. And then finally he was able to find this job McDermott Fabrication yard. Of course, it was quite a mud hole out there and basically he did the kind of labor that black people did at that time. Now, it was the digging of the ditches and the clearing out different areas. But as time passed, he began to work in the fabrication part of it... One of [Caleb's] friends, Woodrow Parker, had originally come to Morgan City working with a cement company that was laying the pavement in this area and, when that went out, Woodrow started working for McDermott. At that time, the shell plant was just about dying out and Woodrow got Caleb a job at McDermott... Somewhere along the line, Mr. C.T. Campbell, an engineer, had noticed his abilities or skills and he started having him to do certain things. And Caleb devised a way for them to move out the heavy equipment easier. And after having done that, Mr. Campbell saw that he was advanced to the position of supervisor. He stayed at that position awhile and somewhere along the line he devised an even easier way to move the materials. The "load out" I think he called it, an easier way for the load out. And so he was promoted to superintendent... I thought "Hey, this is a chance for a better living." The other thing that I thought then and I still think now that both Caleb and I have the ability to get along with people. It's not a matter whether you are black or white or you were in a certain category or whatever, we just treat people like people and what mother used to always say, "Treat people the way you want them to treat you." Another thing she had always told us was not to be jealous of anybody because that could consume you.

*Bob Long:* My daddy started in the oil field around 1953 to '54. But he was working on the boats. You see, he was a diesel mechanic... They would send him out over all kind of places on the Gulf Coast, Mississippi, and everything. And if the boat wasn't there, when he'd get there, he'd have to sleep in the truck... When I used to ride with him, I was a kid. I was real young, and school was out he let me ride with him. And in Port Arthur, Texas, we had to go there and fuel up. So the guy told my old man to bring it (the boat) in. The black guys...see the man... a black

man on a boat? Running it, too? The man thought this was a big old thing seeing my daddy come up to the dock and park the boat... [But] that's how it was in Morgan City. If you could do a thing they'd let you do it.

*Roussell Ruffin:* I worked over the at the Rousseau family for 17 years up until I think, 1959, I believe it was. I quit and I went to work for Kyle Taylor Lumber Company which had a pipe yard where Patterson Truck Line is located now. They let me operate crane and drive trucks and I was the Yard Foreman... The man used to have a lumber yard, but when the oil field moved in, he was an oilfield service company. He was handling pipe, loading and unloading these boats and stuff, but it still went under Kyle Peeler Lumber Company. It still out there, Patterson Truck Line there. So his dad, Kyle, sold out to Patterson Truck Line and I went to McDermott for about maybe six weeks, but back then they didn't hire any black crane operators. They didn't hire any black welders and all the black people were the laborers, you know, cut the grass, doing the rough stuff. So Brown and Root opened a pipe yard, so I left McDermott because I knew how to operate a crane, but McDermott wouldn't let me do it so I went to Brown and Root as a part-time crane operator. It got so they knew what I could do. By working at the grocery store, I came in contact with a lot of people. We used to service the oil field, service these rigs, delivering grocery stuff, so one good man that I knew gave me real good recommendations at Brown and Root and I started running the crane, then they made me a gang pusher, pick a crew up... They took me off the yard and put me in the transportation department, and, uh, I stayed there until 1970, in 1970 I got laid off. And I went to work for Service Truck Line, driving truck. We would haul to Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, all the oilfield sites. So, uh, by the way, while I was at Brown and Root, they used to build some small structures. Them jackets and stuff, not the big, big like McDermott built. And I worked with the welders out in the yard, you know, handlin' the stuff with my machine. And, after that, after I got out of there, I went to work for Service Truck Line and stayed with Service about four years. And I thought I was tired of the highway. Once you're a truck driver, you know, it's, it's in your blood. So, I went to work for A. Z. Terminal Corporation. Which they moved to Carver, Texas, now. I was a foreman over there. Stayed there about four years. And I left there and I went to Berry Brothers. I was the assistant to the oil superintendent. Supervised the loadin' and unloadin' of oilfield stuff. Drivin' the truck, operatin' machines, whatever, needed to be done. And in 1979, I bought me a rig myself.

*Clyde Dyerson:* I found when I came down to this part of the country [in 1958] that the relationship if you will between Caucasians and blacks seemed to be a lot more relaxed if you will than it was in Kansas City where I grew up and born and raised. I mean, it was two different things up there. I guess, one of the things was that in Morgan City for example, as opposed to a lot of other communities, the town was fairly well racially integrated. I mean, there were black families that lived a half a block from where my in-laws lived. In fact, there was a black family that lived right next door to 'em, you know and you never even thought about it... I guess that carried over to some extent into the workplace, at least from the standpoint of acceptance and friendliness and not being outcasts or so forth and so on. Unfortunately like so many other places, they did not get the good jobs. By that I mean they weren't promoted probably as rapidly as some of the white folks; however, in our pipe mill, well, the Superintendent of the pipe mill was a little Frenchman from up around Scott, but everybody else in there, foreman and so forth and so on, were black. We had quite a few black foremen. We had a couple of black Superintendents and of course, they were not General Superintendents or Yard Superintendents

or any thing like that, but as far as I know, I never had any problems. In fact, just about every year around Mardi Gras time, my wife and I were always invited to the Black Mardi Gras Crew Ball in Thibodaux. So my relationship with them was quite good... There were white men I didn't like at all and there were blacks that I didn't like at all, but some of 'em I liked a whole bunch. But I looked at people individually and I think to a great extent, most people down here do the same thing. But like I say, it's obvious that they did not have the opportunities that others did have, even in McDermott and we tried to play a fairly even role with these people.



**Figure 5.14. Brown and Root Pipe Laying Barge. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*While offshore work separated working men from their families, for many families who had previously experienced the constant moving about that came with onshore oil and gas jobs, the transition offshore meant opportunities to settle in one place. Some men went to work in the oil industry after tiring of moving about in other jobs. The following pioneers describe the transition.*

*Jerry Cunningham:* [My dad] was an Oklahoma boy. He went to work in the late '20's and the '30's for Shell Oil Company up there doing land seismograph work. And then he moved down here doing seismograph work in the swamps and so forth, and that's where he met my mother. My mother's a French girl from South Louisiana... I was born in 1940, and before we moved to Morgan City in 1947, I think we lived in 38 towns. Daddy was doing seismograph work all over the nation, especially the South...

*Mary Samaha:* [When my stepfather was working onshore], we could not build friendships. We would mostly be in a school [for such a short time]. We were like gypsies you could say. And actually by this time Louisiana was run over by people in the oil industry. And because they were such a rough and rowdy group, they were known as "oilfield trash." And it became very difficult as a young girl entering high school because people looked down on you. They really didn't accept you because you weren't in their class. And they knew you weren't going to be there very long. So this is how we lived from one town to another. And I don't even remember how many towns that we lived in because we traveled all the way from Buras, Louisiana all the way up to Ferriday, north Louisiana. I think we would repeat the towns. We lived in Jennings three different times. We lived in Thibodaux two different times. We lived ... just all over the

state. Wherever the rigs would take [us], wherever the locations were. ... And like I say we had maybe 24-hour notice ... I'd come home from school sometimes. Maybe my mom was aware, "Well, hey, we are moving." But we weren't aware. We'd come home from school and Mama would have everything packed. And she'd say, "Look, we are leaving. We are going to such and such a place." And I'd say, "Oh no, well what about my report card?" She'd say, "We'll just have to call them or write them and they'll have to send us a report card." Because you needed report cards that go from one school to the next school. ... Or sometimes Mama would come during the day. She would come into the classroom and say, "Can I get Mary Beth out of the classroom because are leaving?" And she'd go and she'd tell them, you know, "I need a report card." And they would fix it up. Right away. ... [Dropping out] wasn't possible because I always wanted an education. ... but I was a C student. ... I think I was capable of doing a lot better, but by changing schools... We were in Jennings when I was in high school. The longest we ever stayed anywhere was my last year in high school, and that's where I graduated from. And in the middle of the year mom and [the rest] were transferred to Morgan City. And I wanted to graduate so I stayed with some friends. Then I met them in Morgan City. By this time the offshore drilling started... that was in 1947. And this was the beginning of building life for something of permanence. Because you were able to live in one place and live like normal people and because the men would go offshore. ... A whole generation of people [lived like I did]. I was nine-years-old when I started traveling with the oil industry, moving from one place to another. ... until I got married, in 1948. I was 18. By this time we were in Houma. We moved to Houma in 1947. ... They were living in Morgan City and when I met them in Morgan City, she says, "We are going to Houma." This was in June. And we moved to Houma in August of '47. And we were living in trailers. By this time you could not get trailers to rent so they bought a trailer. And we'd haul the trailer ...but this was only in Morgan City and...and not in the other areas... However, it was a great education because we learned how to cope with so many different situations... And the only friends Mama really had were the rest of the crew and their wives. I mean they were a close-knit group of people. But we were very close-knit group of people because we moved together. And they were lifelong friends. ... It was a rough life. When they would get their checks they would cash their checks and they would head for the barrooms. And they would play cards and drink. And they would have a big ..and then they'd come home and sleep it off and ready for work the next day. But they weren't mean. ... Sometimes they would work eight hours, three shifts, eight hours. Come home. It would depend on where the location was. And what the driller or the toolpusher at that time wanted, what kind of hours. Sometimes he'd work 12 hours and off 24. Because they were never off. Every six weeks they had what was known as the men would change power. The men had changed shifts, and he would have maybe 32 hours off.

*Billye Grice:* I came to Morgan City in 1954. And when we came down the road from Thibodaux to Morgan City and it looked so desolate and cold 'cause it was January 1st, my husband says to me, "Do you want to go on or do you want to turn around and go back?" And I thought about it a minute and I said, "No, out of curiosity, let's go on," but I have thought about that every day since I have been here because it really is a difficult place to live, an unusual place and a different kind of atmosphere that I had never seen. [I did not think we would be here long] because usually you stay two or three years with an oil company and [my husband] was with Phillips. I guess he'd been with them about two years. So he had done his training for the company and so they wanted him to move down here. We lived in east Texas and then in Alvin

around Houston. And so they wanted him to move down here and we had heard nothing but horror stories. And a couple of the women that I really didn't care for, I thought was going to be here, but they weren't here. And when I got here, met other Phillips people and the oil people, and it was just absolutely wonderful. I really enjoyed these people, just had the best time, just for about three or four years just because the supply people were entertaining us and anything we wanted we got. We moved and so we found out we were going to get a company house. So we had a new little house to move into and that was great, so I just thought, hey, this was gonna work out. But I remember they came to the door. They were making a survey to build a new school out in this area and so they asked me how many children I had. I said, "Well, I have two children, but don't worry about me, I am not going to be here." "Okay." This was along about 19. what '57, and it is now 2004 and I am still here.

*Ray Boykin:* And I worked [offshore for Halliburton] for, oh, six, eight months and then I got a chance to go overseas to Venezuela [in 1949]. Stayed over there four years and returned from Venezuela, ended up in Morgan City. And got back in offshore oil business as an operator... That was one thing about workin' at Halliburton, you got to make most all the rigs out there. You didn't go just to one rig all the time. There was rigs all over the Gulf. [In] fact, probably in the time you worked with company, you made all the rigs in the Gulf, the different ones, different companies and everything. At that time there was Magnolia out there, Pure Oil was drilling out there, and Kerr McGee, that was the main three at that time that was drilling, back in them days... [When I was working in Venezuela] we'd go out there, sometime we'd go out and stay three months at a time at some remote location out there. And you was down there where you had to do it all 'cause you didn't have no communications or nothin'... It was pretty good experience. I guess it was good training for me at the time. And so I stayed my three months down there, then I come out of there and stayed up camp up there 'bout another three, four months, then after awhile, they sent ya back for another three month tour down there.

*Joe Sanford:* On December 31, 1959 we got married. On New Year's Eve we got married. I told my brother, "Don't call me. I'm going on my honeymoon." A friend loaned me his car and we went on a honeymoon. I stayed offshore till the day of our wedding. I got marooned offshore for three weeks. They didn't know where I was. My brother stood in for me at the rehearsal. My boss was Warren Borngren with Gulf Oil. He said, "You're not going to make it." "I have to. I'm getting married." They had a helicopter waiting. I went down to inspect a rig. We'd towed it back on location. It had drifted down off the coast of Florida, which is why it took three weeks. I took my suit off and saw a small helicopter. I said, "I'm going on that helicopter." I told the tender to get everything. I'm gone. Warren said, "There's a helicopter. I'm going to town." He never did tell me he's coming to the wedding till we got to town. He said, "I'm coming to your wedding. My daughter's in there with your wife." It was a close squeeze, I tell you that.

*Susie Sanford:* It was always like that. You couldn't plan anything because sure as you did you got a job and that was more important. If you didn't have a job you were sitting by the telephone hoping for a job.

*Emmet Sellers:* [I] spent 22 months in the service, got discharged, went to SLI (Southern Louisiana Institute) in Lafayette at the time. I went for a couple of years. And then went to work with the government... I was a basic engineer. I went to work... First of all, I worked with the

government – U.S. Coast and Geo[logical] Survey. We did surveying around airports and obstructions for airliners coming in. We had to plot these photographs on paper and then they made photographs of it. I got married when I was working there and we were traveling all over the United States, so I wanted to settle down, and I went to work with Texaco in June of 1950... I came home on a vacation from my government job and applied to a couple of companies – Union 76 of California and Texaco was in New Iberia at the time. I got a job with Texaco. I was kind of reluctant to take it because I was newly married and it was working. I was deck handing on a boat with Texaco working 12 days out and 4 days home and being newly married, it did not appeal to me so much. When I hired out, the guy told me, he said, “Take this job. That is the only opening we have now. I assure you by the end of this summer,” he said, “By the end of the summer, I will have you roustabouting or roughnecking.” So, I took the job and sure enough, I started roustabouting a couple of months later.

*Though offshore work meant the family could stay in one place, it did not put an end to long hours and absence from home; nor did it eliminate the danger of the job. Women took responsibility for household duties and often formed networks with other wives; they were generally discouraged from contacting their husbands at work and talked proudly of having gotten through major difficulties without contacting their husbands. Many women rejected the idea that they were doing anything extraordinary, claiming that they simply did what they had to do. The following women offer a glimpse of their lives during this time.*



**Figure 5.15. Looking Straight Up a Derrick, Drill Pipes Stacked Against One Side. Photo Courtesy of James Broussard, OOGHP.**

*Joyce Cockerham:* The first time I saw Bob, caught him up there [on the derrick], I'd like to die. It was horrible. I drove up there to bring him his- I don't what it was. I brought his lunch or something. And he was up there, and I looked up there, and those pipes were coming toward him and he had- I don't [know] what he was doing with 'em, but he was way up in there. It like to scared me to death. I wouldn't look. That was how scary it was. It's not a pleasant thing to think about. But after a time you get used to it... He was in the oil boom when in started in Louisiana... [His clothes would get] very dirty. But, it wasn't that bad. Muddy, you know, dirt... [I washed them] in a bathtub with a washboard. That's how I washed them. But the wives always had supper waiting for their husbands when they got home. It's not like today. You always knew



what time they were gonna be home, and you had supper waiting for 'em on the stove when they got in, so they go to bed and sleep. 'Cause Bob always worked nights. He slept during the daytime. When he was in the drilling part of it. When he got to be supervisor, well that was something different... They worked seven days a week, but he'd work so many hours a day and then he'd come home, and then go back. But when he worked offshore, that was a different thing. He had work seven days in and seven days out. Then when he was started with the Homeco, he went out there and didn't come back in 'til the job was completed... Oh, that was a wonderful thing. I had some free time for me. I didn't have to cook every day... He would be gone a week or two at a time. But of course, he called while he was gone... At that point, he could call and check on me, and see how we were doing. Maybe once a week. "Well, I can't come in." And when he started working Homeco, he was camp to camp 'til the job was finished... [He had] no schedule. That was fine, because the more days he worked the more money he made. He got a base salary, plus two hundred dollars a day for every day that he was on the job. So that's where the money was at. As long as he was working, he was making a lot of money... That was his love, though. That was his life. He loved it. He enjoyed every minute of it.

*Joyce Cockerham:* I didn't drive when I was first married. And, in Napoleonville, I decided, "Well, the car's sitting there." Never had been behind a car [steering wheel] before in my life. Walked over to the City Hall and got my driver's license. Started driving. I went and met Bob at the levee. He said – of course, you know what he said, "How did you get here?" I said, "I drove. I was tired of seeing that car sitting out by the trailer and me not driving." And so I went and met him and brought him home. He was mad 'cause I had driven the car. He says, "Do you have a license?" I said, "Yeah, I went and walked and got it."

*Frances Cockerham:* Daddy was gone most of time, unlike most of the neighbors' fathers. We worked a different schedule than most families. Holidays were celebrated when Daddy was home. Santa Claus didn't necessarily come Christmas Eve if Daddy wasn't here. You might get a few things, but had a bigger Christmas when Daddy was home. You had a different feeling because all the kids you went to school with, families operated on a different schedule. We would take off even after he was offshore. We were settled here. I was young as three or four. If he had a place where we could go for the day, or we could go for a weekend, we would go. I can remember taking boat rides out to Marsh Island if he was out there, and he had the trailer, and we would spend a couple of nights in the trailer. And visit with him. Then we'd come home. When he was working maybe a month at a time out there, when he couldn't come home. If he had a long week off, he was on his seven days off, we would do things then... Where fathers did most things – I can remember being fourteen, fifteen, and we had a hurricane coming in, and I'm the one boarding up the house because he wasn't in. And, it was normal to me to live this way. It was all my life. I know a lot of people thought it was very weird.

*Barbara Stansbury:* My first husband which was Merlin Boudreaux worked for Mobil Oil and he worked offshore. He worked 7 and 7. He started working in about '45 or '46. At the time he was killed, he had just made motorman. Before that he was a deckhand. [We got married in] 1948... It was [considered a good job]. We just took it for granted because that's what he did. [When he was offshore] we'd write. He'd write a letter to me... I would answer and as long as he got a letter, he was satisfied. They would send it out by another boat that was going out there... It was

after the War and there wasn't too many jobs around, so when you found one, you took it. Jobs were not that plentiful and there were so many men after 'em... We were good friends with this driller also. So there was a lot of socializing with the people, you know the people that worked offshore, they had socialized with each other and the wives did also. Some of 'em were from Texas, but mostly from around here, the group that was on this crew. We'd get together and go fishing sometimes, go to a show in New Orleans and things like that, go out... Well, one time in particular my daughter was real sick. My mother was in New Orleans and I called her for her to come down and give me a hand. I mean, she was really sick. [To get hold of him] I guess I could have through the office, but it made it bad for the company because they would have been short-handed. [I told him] when he came in. I never had to call, I never did have to call him in except for deaths... You had more or less to learn to take over like bills, see that the bills were paid, because they were gone, you know, and make the money last... In that time it was considered good pay, but considering now, no it wasn't, things have gone up so much. I can tell you what his checks were, I mean after everything was taken out, about 125 dollars every two weeks.

*Gladys LeBoeuf:* I ran the whole show the whole time. I had two girls so that wasn't too much trouble. My daddy was a farmer, and he was home all the time. And my mother, too. All she ever did was raise children, a house full... At first before [Harry] started working for Texaco, he was working like 15 and 4, so [6 and 6], that was an improvement... I went right on [teaching] and going to school. I was teaching and going to school at nights and during the summer. [We did] not [see each other] a lot. He worked on his time off... We all helped each other out.

*Fannie Hobbs:* Well, it was an adjustment because I had to be mother and father to those children, and I can remember one Christmas, my son was about 10 or 11 years old and he wanted a little BB gun. So I, we, got him one, but that year Barney could not be home for Christmas and Larry was upstairs in his room and he was about to cry and I said, "Son what's wrong?" And he said, "It's just not fair. Daddy is never here." And he said, "Butch's daddy" – that's his cousin – "takes him hunting and everything and I can't even shoot my gun." And I sat down and looked at him and I said, "Son, your daddy is offshore trying to make a living for us. Because of him we have a roof over our heads and we have food on the table," and I said, "You should be proud of your father." And I said, "You want to shoot your gun, get in the car. We are going to go out to the city dump." I took him out to the dump and he said, "Can you take Joe Boy with us?" And I said, "Yes." So we picked up his little friend and they were thrilled to death and we went out there and they were shooting tin cans, but they were happy. I just learned to adjust and make the best of it. And I think the hardest adjustment was coming to Morgan City, because as I said, four children, a German Shepherd dog, a U-Haul trailer and 7 months pregnant and I had one day to find a house. And my husband could not help me because he was moving from- the office had been in New Iberia. They were moving everything to Morgan City. He had to stay there for them to put the telephones in and the desks and so forth, and he couldn't leave and I had one day. By some miracle I found a little house in Berwick and by that night we were settled in... I was lucky to get the house, very lucky. I had to beg this woman.

*Judy Wilson:* You just handled it. You'd just say, "What would he do?" and if you can't figure out what he did, you'd say, "Well, what would I do? What do I think I should do?" And you just handled it. [The other women were in the] same boat, same boat... I had a friend that lived down the street from me that her husband was, did the same thing, you know and so she was from there

and had family there. I was very fortunate in that I had family that lived there. It would be really rough if you lived away in a strange place... He missed some holidays, you know and I guess maybe the first two or three years when he was working so much, there were times when he might miss a birthday or something like that, because we have always celebrated birthdays and he might miss a birthday. And the big holidays were Thanksgiving and Christmas, but sometimes it would work out to where he was home for one and then he would miss one, you know, the way the dates fell. But we knew – it wasn't something that either he grieved over or I grieved over –because we knew that in trying to do what was right as far as paying back the debts that were incurred as a result of the business failure, that this was just a sacrifice that we would have to make... I guess it was rough on the kids because when he was gone, I was in charge. When he was home, he was in charge. And it was hard on all of us really, because, making that shift, that transition... When he would first come in, naturally he was coming in from off the water and he wanted to come in relax, be with the kids, take it easy. And then when he was getting' ready to go back out, he wanted to have sort of that same atmosphere when he was getting ready to leave and there was always a certain amount of dread on his part. And I guess there was some trepidation on my part too, though, realizing that he was going to be gone, but I have, I have always been sort of a- I am not a clinging vine. I am not totally independent, but I am not afraid to make a decision and having worked for a number of years before we got married, I made decisions and that caused problems between us sometimes because of the fact that it was hard for me to take that hat off when he was home and leave the decision making process up to him, because that is basically the way life was back then. The husband made all the decisions and the transition was difficult... He never came in on the same day or went out. It was just a constant rotation, you know, 6 and 6.

*By the end of the 1950's, the oil and gas industry was well established in Morgan City and the surrounding communities. The ascendancy of the industry was confirmed in 1959 when the Morgan City's annual Shrimp Festival, the oldest chartered festival in the state, became the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. The Festival's president commented to reporters for the New Orleans Times-Picayune (Thibodaux, 1986):*

Adding the petroleum industry to the Festival's official name is actually long overdue. For the past decade or more, men and women of the oil, gas and boat industries have worked shoulder to shoulder with shrimp and fishing industries and other townspeople in staging the Festival (Thibodaux, 1986, p. 24).

## 6. THE OFFSHORE INDUSTRY TAKES SHAPE: THE 1960's

*During the decade of the 1960's, oil and gas exploration and production and metal fabrication provided the economic base for the growth of Morgan City and St. Mary Parish. The offshore oil and gas industry and those who supported it were forced to innovate as oil companies moved into deeper water and as rigs and platforms confronted several large hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico (Pratt, 2004). The innovation spread to the North Sea as southern Louisiana mariners and divers were recruited to transfer their knowledge and skills to the offshore industry taking shape over there. The significance of offshore oil and gas and Morgan City to the Louisiana economy meant that local businessmen and politicians gained influence in state and national politics.*

*The number of new offshore wells in the Gulf of Mexico continued to grow, reaching a peak of 1,474 in 1968 (Manuel, 1977). As the industry expanded, the region began to experience broader economic impacts, marked by increases in manufacturing, trade, finance, insurance, real estate, and other businesses (Manuel, 1977; Gramling, 1984a). In response to this activity, overall population growth continued into the 1960's. In Morgan City, the rate of growth peaked at a nearly 40 percent increase per decade in the 1950's and 1960's (Gramling and Joubert, 1977). By the end of the 1970's, though, population growth rates were just over 20 percent, marking a return to the rates of earlier decades. In both the 1950's and the 1960's, the white population grew at a faster rate than the black population. The differences were due in large part to migration; net migration was positive for whites and negative for blacks in both decades. The major contributor to white in migration was employment in the petroleum industry.*

*Lack of sufficient housing, schools, and public infrastructure continued to plague the region (Gramling, 1984b). To address ongoing housing shortages, during the 1960's a new housing development was constructed in Bayou Vista; that community was home to 5,121 residents by 1970 (Gramling and Joubert, 1977).*

### 6.1. Profiles

**Bill Williams** was born in Mansfield, in northern Louisiana, in 1910 and began as a roustabout for Shell Oil Company in 1931. He was soon laid off, and made wooden frames for cars until 1933 when he headed south to Houma to seek a job with Texaco. He did not find Houma welcoming and did not pass the physical exam necessary for getting a job there, so he returned to northern Louisiana and began working for Texaco in Opelousas. He switched to production to avoid moving around and eventually landed a job at the cryogenic plant in Morgan City. He retired from Texaco in 1974.

**Harvey Scott** was raised in Alabama and moved to New Orleans when his father went to seminary there. Afterward, Harvey moved to Bogalusa, Louisiana and his father became the pastor at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. The family then moved to Manning, Louisiana where Harvey went back to school. Harvey joined the Navy in 1945, went to boot camp in San Diego. He was stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii and then in Jacksonville, Florida as a machinist mate in the Naval Air Corps. After leaving the Navy, Harvey returned to Mansfield, married, and became a roustabout in the

Neighborton field. He worked for McCullough Tool as a roughneck and in oilfield sales all around Louisiana and Texas for 35 years. Harvey retired for one day and then worked an additional 15 years as a salesman for BA "Red" Adams in Morgan City.

**PT Bailey** was born in Morgan City in 1927. He worked as a shrimp trawler for 20 years, joined the Navy, and returned to shrimping after his discharge from the service. His neighbor helped him get a job at Tidewater Marine in 1966, and he started as a deckhand. He became captain after several weeks on the job. After five or six years, the company moved him to Venice, Louisiana to be a Port Engineer. After four years, he became Marine Supervisor for Offshore Logistics. He stayed with Logistics as a Manager until 1983, when Logistics sold all its boats and got out of all aspects of the oil business except for helicopters. PT. decided to go into the seafood business with his son and now owns Bailey's Basin Seafood in Morgan City.

**Jewell "Judy" Wilson** was born in northern Louisiana near the Arkansas border in 1932. Because of circumstances at home, she lived most of the time with her aunt and uncle and visited her mother and brother on holidays and summer vacations. Her uncle had worked in the oil fields in Texas, northern Louisiana, and elsewhere prior to moving to southern Louisiana with the Texas Company. Judy finished high school in New Iberia and returned to northern Louisiana after graduation. There she married Bill Wilson. The couple returned to New Iberia when Bill took a job with Texaco. Jewell worked for insurance companies when she first graduated from high school and again after her third child started school.

**Wayne Willet** was born in Quebec, Canada in 1930. He began his diving career when doing construction work in Canada and followed his boss, Max Rieher, to the Gulf in 1964. Wayne worked for Deep Sea Divers for two years until he went to work for Dick Evans Divers. He remained with the company when it was bought by McDermott in the 1960's. Wayne worked in the Gulf of Mexico and many other places around the world. He spent a total of 38 years in diving. He and his wife were married shortly after he began diving and stayed married 40 years, until her death in 1996. He and his wife had an agreement that he would never stay gone more than three months at a time.

**Dewey Wilson's** father was a Merchant Mariner, and Dewey wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. When Dewey graduated from Patterson High School in 1944, he went to the South Pacific on a cargo ship. His ship was sunk and he was given to task of transporting corpses for the Graves Registration department. This work lasted until two months after the end of WWII. After returning home, Dewey went back to school and sailed on steamships for several years. The shipping business was slow, so he and his brother bought a shrimp boat. When his father died in 1959, Dewey looked for work that would allow him to stay home to be near his mother. At the time, the Gulf Area Vocational School of Abbeville was organizing a school in Morgan City. Dewey became involved with the school in 1960. He was contacted by people from South Lafourche and began teaching in Golden Meadow on weekends. In 1964, the State of Louisiana's financial problems led it to cut back the marine program, and Dewey went to work for Tidewater as a boat captain. He soon found himself teaching classes for Tidewater as well.

**Arthur Lee** was born in Abbeville on a rice farm, but his father moved the family to Texas when he was only two years old. His mother died when he was 16. Two years later, when his father remarried, Arthur moved to Lafayette to be near his older brother. There he began working and attending Southwestern University. He completed college in January 1943 and spent three years serving in the Pacific during WWII. When he returned to Lafayette, he worked for a furniture company until he was recruited to Houma to work for Mr. Patterson in his trucking company. In 1961, Patterson Trucking acquired a pipeyard in Morgan City, and Arthur helped manage the largest stock of oilfield pipe in the world. Although the elder Mr. Patterson died in 1952, Arthur stayed with Patterson Trucking until he retired in 1986.

**Houston LeJeune** went to work in 1945 at the age of 18 for Sun Oil in Opelousas, Louisiana. He moved to Morgan City in 1948. Houston performed primarily seismic work for the company and became familiar with laying shot and the difficulty of working in the swamps. He observed special problems with blasting caps and power lines. He worked for the company for nearly 29 years around Sunset, Galveston, Padre Island, Laguna Madre, Bay St. Louis, and many other places in Texas and Louisiana. Houston was drafted in 1951 for the Korean War and served in the Air Force.

**Richard Carline** was born in the mid-1930's and raised on a houseboat in the Louisiana swamps. His family moved into town when he was around 10 years old, and he later moved with his mother to Houston. After finishing high school, he spent three years in the Army and then returned to Morgan City. He started working on

Tidewater's vessel, the Rip Tide, servicing Texaco rigs off the coast of Louisiana. He learned how to navigate and became a deckhand. Richard worked his way up to earn his 100 Ton then 300 Ton and then 1600 Ton licenses. He has worked in and out of the Morgan City office since 1968, returning to the boats whenever he tired of desk work. Among his responsibilities, Richard delivered vessels around the world, helped develop training courses, served as operations manager, and oversaw new construction. He worked in the Gulf of Mexico, Nigeria, Angola, and the North Sea

**Vince Guzzetta** was born in Berwick, Louisiana in 1936. After three years at LSU, he joined his father, Vincent, Sr. to start a seafood business in Berwick called Deep South Seafoods. Vince's job was picking shrimp. The company also received packaged, processed, and frozen imported Mexican shrimp to send all over the United States. In the mid-1960's, Vince and his father converted their seafood business into an oilfield service company and renamed it Guzzetta Offshore. They took out seismic crews and carried mud, pipe and other supplies to offshore rigs in Bahrain and the Middle East, South Africa, Nicaragua, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and other sites in the Gulf of Mexico. The Guzzettas also owned Guzzetta Oil, a distributorship for Conoco, and seven gas stations in the Morgan City area. They left the oil industry in 1990.

**Wilma Subra** grew up in Morgan City. When she was in the seventh grade, she began working during the summers in her father's office and lab. That experience initiated her lifelong interest in chemistry. She attended the University of Southwestern Louisiana and graduated with degrees in chemistry and microbiology. She continued graduate studies in microbiology, chemistry,

and computer science. After graduation, Wilma got a job at the newly created Gulf South Research Institute. She and her husband had two children. After 14 years with GSRI, Wilma decided to open Subra, Inc. to provide technical assistance and information to communities on the petrochemical industry and its effects.

**Peggy Michel** was raised in San Diego. She met her future husband, Drew, while in college. Peggy graduated with a degree in art history in 1965. The couple married and lived in San Diego for several years before deciding to return to the South. They settled in Drew's hometown of Morgan City where Drew began working for Ocean Systems. When Peggy looked for work, she discovered she was "overqualified." After changing her resume to downplay her college experience, Peggy was hired as Personnel Manager for Twenty Grand. When Drew got a job in New Orleans several months later, the couple moved and Peggy went to work as Personnel Manager for Crestwave Offshore. She left around 1970, had a son, and then she and Drew started PDC Enterprises, a company that manufactured and sold electronics equipment for diving companies. Peggy was responsible for sales and managing the company. She and Drew closed the company after 10 years and Peggy returned to college to earn a degree in accounting. She worked in the financial field and for the Foreign Service during the 1980's and early 1990's.

**Johnny Johnson** was born and raised in Tennessee. After graduating from the University of Tennessee and serving in the U.S. Army in Korea, he joined his friend, Mike Hughes, and began commercial diving as an adventure. He moved to southern Louisiana and freelanced in the Gulf of Mexico for about six months, working out

of his garage. In 1964, he, Mike, and several others co-founded World Wide Divers, Inc. in Morgan City. In 1969, World Wide merged with other companies to form Oceaneering International, Inc. in order to establish a company large enough to work in the growing offshore industry in the Gulf. Johnny soon found himself moving out of diving and into management. He also served as the president of the Association of Diving Contractors from 1980 to 1982.

**Mike Hughes** became interested in diving as an engineering student at the University of Tennessee in the late 1950's. Upon his graduation in 1962, a cousin enticed him to move to Morgan City to work in the offshore industry as part of Gulf Coast Diving Service. In 1964 he and four others broke away and formed World Wide Divers, Inc. They then created Oceaneering and helped to develop sophisticated underwater inspection techniques and a diver-medic program for the offshore industry.

**Chester "Blackie" Pipsair** went to work for Transworld Drilling Company, a subsidiary of Kerr McGee, in 1960 and stayed until his retirement in 1991. He began as a crane operator and worked his way up to Marine Superintendent. He was responsible for moving rigs from one location to another. Though Blackie worked most of his career in the Gulf of Mexico, at least once a year he traveled overseas to deliver rigs. He found his work interesting and challenging because each job presented a new set of circumstances and problems to be overcome

**Ira Robertson** was born near Shreveport and moved to Morgan City in 1960 where his brother-in-law, Caleb Henderson, got him a job with McDermott. He worked as a welder for McDermott until he moved on to

Avondale in Bayou Black in 1963. He advanced from tacker to welder to welder foreman. He and his wife raised seven children.

**Bill Fullerton**'s father worked for Gulf Oil Co. After his parents divorced, Bill was raised by his grandparents in northern Louisiana. He moved to New Orleans in 1960 to take a position at the *Times Picayune*. When that fell through, he took a job teaching school. He soon met some divers at the Bourbon House in New Orleans. His friends got him a job as a tender in 1962. He then went to diving school in Oakland, California where he did a little abalone diving, and returned six months later to New Orleans to get into the diving industry full time. He retired from diving in 1980.

**Drew Michel** was born in Morgan City. He wanted to go straight to LSU after he graduated from high school, but his parents could not afford the tuition there. Instead, he joined the Navy where he became interested in electronics. In 1966 he was working for NASA in San Diego and, instead of agreeing to a transfer to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, he returned to Morgan City and convinced the head of Ocean Systems, at the time owned by Union Carbide, to give him a job working in electronics for the company. In June 1968, he transferred to Taylor Diving, where he remained for 19 years. He was a key actor in the development of ROVs for offshore oil work.

**Tom Angel** first moved to south Louisiana from Pittsburgh in 1961. He began working with Sanford Brothers in 1962 and retired from diving in 1988. He stayed with Sanford Brothers, which was renamed Sanford Marine, when it was bought by Westinghouse, then by Fleur, and

then by Santa Fe Engineering. Among his contributions to oilfield diving, Tom helped develop underwater photography and was a founding member of the Association for Diving Contractors. After leaving diving, he became president of Seamar, an oilfield service company.

**Paul Woodhall** began diving in 1961 when he was serving in the U.S. military in Japan. He began scuba diving as a sport but began teaching diving classes while still in Japan. After his discharge from the service, he remained in Japan training divers. When he returned to the United States, he opted to go to a diving school rather than go back to college. After finishing diving school in California, Paul learned that companies working in the Gulf of Mexico offshore oilfields were hiring divers, so he packed his belongings and headed east. He arrived in Louisiana in 1964 and went right to work repairing damage from Hurricane Betsy. He worked as a freelance diver for several years and then took a job at J. Ray McDermott in 1967. He remained with the company until 1974. When his tender was killed in an accident offshore in 1969, Paul became involved in organizations that were working to increase safety in the diving industry. He helped organize a union for the Gulf of Mexico divers and was elected president. He stayed in that position several years until the union became inactive. He then worked as a consultant overseas for six and a half years. He returned to the United States and was involved in a couple of business ventures and consulting contracts before going to work for BP in 2002.

**Logan Fromenthal** is from Morgan City. He attended the University of South Louisiana in Lafayette and went to work for Shell Oil as a laborer in 1964 at the age of 19. He worked West Delta Block 30 and West Delta Blocks 105 and 133 and was



promoted to gauger. Logan transferred to the Domestic Raw Material Supply (Shell's transportation group) and worked there for 30 years. He worked an additional two years in production, becoming responsible for all

the company's crude oil storage facilities in Louisiana prior to his retirement. He cleaned up several spills in southwest Louisiana. He retired from Shell Oil in 1996 and continues to do sales work in the oilfield.

## 6.2. Innovation and Change

*The 1960's were marked by industry reorganization and by technological innovation in all phases of oil and gas exploration and production. Offshore development had proven to be viable but expensive. From seismic operations to platform repair, new materials and techniques were applied offshore. In this dynamic period, people who had the resources, background, and skills to acquire and adapt to new technologies benefited while those who did not found themselves at a disadvantage. The following men and women offer a brief look at how the changes that took place in the industry affected the people and communities of southern Louisiana.*

*Ed Dilsaver:* The feller at Mobil asked me if I'd be interested in coming to work for them because they needed someone with my experience... so I went to work for Mobil... Mobil took over Magnolia. Magnolia, they was runnin' the first wells out here, but they was gettin' short on money. So what do you do when you get short on money? You take in partners. So everything in operation here was known as MCN – Mobil, Continental and Newmont... Magnolia had 50 percent, Continental had 37 and a half percent, and Newmont had 12 and a half percent. And Continental took care of Newmont's investment... At that time Magnolia was building platforms... and they shipped them offshore. But they was drilling in shallow water. And the structure wasn't that big, but they was sufficient for the water depth they were drilling in.

*Dub Noble:* [I] don't remember the year that it was, but they came out with magnetic recording equipment that we did on magnetic tape. Tape was about four inches wide and I guess about 40 inches long. And when we would shoot a seismic shot all of that information was recorded on this tape. We didn't have to fool with all that paper anymore. They would do that when it got into the office, and play it back onto a big machine that would add it all up. This was done at that time in the New Orleans office – it was Exxon by that time – of which I did go in there and work for about six months. They said I needed experience in the office. ... In 1968, they needed someone on one of the land crews doing seismic work to go and look after this land crew. Let me back track. About 1963 I was out of the operating end of it and was made supervisor of the operation, and at that time they were called party chiefs. I was assigned party chief of Party 17. ... In fact I found out when I came home for Christmas of 1963 that when I go back to work, I would go back as party chief. ... [It was] quite a promotion. I was then responsible for everything on that operation. Now in 1967, I went over to [Fort Myers, Florida] to take over a crew that they were operating there. ... [We were] in that area for about six months. They moved us out of there. That time Virga [my wife] came and visited quite a bit while I was down there, but my children were in school up here, so they more or less stayed here. Now I did take my family with me when I started movin' in 1968, when we were doing operations out in Mississippi. We covered operations all over southern Mississippi, south Georgia, south Alabama, most of Florida, central Louisiana, south, on land crews and south Arkansas. We covered this area and we did move around. All of the people on the crew, when we would move

from one area to another, the whole crew would pick up and move to the next place. And, Virga would go with me. We bought a great big house trailer and carried that and lived in that for years. ... All this time we were improving our operational equipment. Like the geophones that we were using, improving them, went from a old analog instrumentation to digital to the upgraded electronics. It just made everything much more sophisticated. ... We were always going to a school in either Houston, New Orleans, somewhere. Yes, they kept us updated quite frequently on what was going on and we had to go and learn how to take care of it.



**Figure 6.1. Kenneth Viator (right) and Jerry Salters Throwing the Chain on a Drilling Rig. Photo Courtesy of Kenneth Viator, OOGHP.**

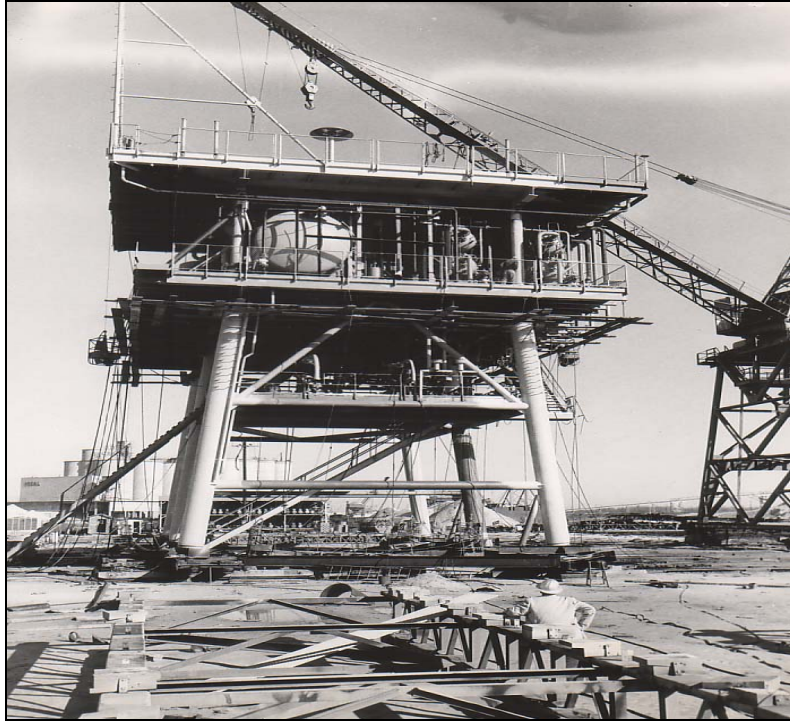
*Joe Young:* [On the drilling rig] I've seen pipe set on [a guy's] foot or something like that, you know, or a chain would break or something or something would pop and it would knock a guy back – those kinds of things. I think the biggest change that took place as far as drilling was concerned was the automation of the things that used to be done by hand. You still have guys on the floor but it is just not the same the way things automatically moved around the floor, where they used to have to all do it and wrestle it themselves... [The spinning chain] would make up the pipe – you would have the jerk line. The driller would jerk on that line to tighten that chain up and you had the spinning chain that the roughneck would wrap around that pipe – the pulling on the chain would spin the pipe and the guy, he was holding onto it while he was spinning to make up the pipe – turn the pipe with the chain wrapped around. That is what spun the pipe. So, you had a lot of pressure on there that if a guy did not know what he was doing, he would get hurt. You do not have that anymore. You put those tongs on there – automatically, the tongs spin it up. You do not have that chain to fight anymore. And just things like that. The pipe's standing and the derrick is moved out automatically. [They made those changes for] safety and speed. Just a more efficient operation. You had three guys on the floor and one on the derrick – you could get by with two men on the floor. Now, you do not even have anybody in the derrick. They can be doing other things. I think safety more than – a drilling rig did not used to be the safest place you could find. In spite of all that, there were not that many people that got hurt. A lot of people would lose fingers. In fact, if you see a guy that worked in oil, it used to be if he worked in the oilfield any time at all, he had a couple of fingers missing where he would get it in the wrong place and have a stand of pipe on his finger, he did not get it out of the way in time.

*Logan Fromenthal:* That attitude offshore changed because, when the new equipment began to come offshore and it was a more technical field than it was before, there was a lot of labor. And then it slowly changed to where the work was a lot more mental than it was physical. So, consequently, a lot of people who worked offshore who were not educated, meaning they did not have college degrees, if you will, all they knew was work. And they were really good people, just hard working people. I can remember some of the guys telling me that I do not know anything about remote control. I do not know anything about pressing these buttons and that some valve was going to open 20 miles away from us. That was just totally unacceptable and unheard of and it was nothing more than a fantasy. Well, when I came to work with Shell, I came to work to work. I do not want to sit in an office. And so, you had very few people wanting to be in the office. They wanted to be on the outside.

*Wilma Subra:* As the industry progressed, a lot of service companies grew up and it was really “Mom and Pop” type of operations. It was people who had technology of how to make a thing that the industry needed or how to produce a boat that would service the industry and it really grew out of “Mom and Pop” operations. And then the bigger companies would come in and buy up the “Mom and Pop” operations and become the big service companies. But you had people who knew what needed to be done, but didn’t have all the well-rounded education to know how to run a business, how to distribute money, how to do cash flow and things like that. You had people who had been earning a living by fishing and hunting and trapping and getting money and making it day-to-day, suddenly having this huge amount of money, but not the knowledge of what to do with this huge amount of money.

### **6.3. Fabrication**

*Though shrimping continued to occupy a major position in Morgan City’s economic and symbolic life, the offshore oil and gas industry gained preeminence during the 1960s. Morgan City’s offshore infrastructure – fabrication yards, shipyards, support bases, terminals – became fully developed. Morgan City and Amelia continued to be leaders in fabrication throughout the decade. The companies tried various strategies to develop and maintain a loyal workforce in the face of fluctuating prices and demand, and special efforts were made to discourage workers from organizing unions. In 1962, McDermott bought out Dupont Fabricators and made it a division of the larger company. As the offshore rigs and platforms increased in size, they made new demands on the fabrication companies. The following men and women describe getting into and working in fabrication during this period of innovation and change and point out the key roles played by people working locally.*



**Figure 6.2. West Verret Shell Production Platform Under Construction. Photo Courtesy of Jake Giroir, Morgan City Archives.**

*Valine Mullen:* [My friends' parents] all worked for service companies, pretty much. The reason we moved here was 'cause my dad had a job at McDermott. Our next door neighbor in Chauvin moved right next door to us in Amelia because their daddy had a job at McDermott, and prior to that they were commuting every day to work. And back then there was no four lane highway. It was just two lanes and it would take them an hour and a half sometimes to get to and from work, if not longer. So it was advantageous for us to move closer for him to be able to get to his job easier and so that's why we moved. I guess back then a lot of the men were having to break away from the shrimping and fishing and things like that, so they started going to work offshore. There was more money year 'round where the other things were seasonal. So they started to apply for jobs in those kinds of areas. I don't remember [my dad] taking any welding classes or things like that, but I guess they kind of learned as they went. They started out maybe as a helper or something and learned as they went. Companies would hire you like that. They had to teach somebody, so I guess they started 'em the best way you could. I think they taught each other, too, along the way... [Getting a job in the industry], I think at that time it was a good thing. It was like, that's where the money is, and they started offering insurance and things like that, a retirement plan. These people didn't even know what that was at one time, so this was a big deal. So you have to go out for seven days. That's no big deal. You come home and you're home for seven days, that kind of thing. I think they saw it as a good thing. I don't think it was a bad thing. I think they saw it as a way to be able to buy that car and to buy a house and to take care of their families, in a way that was more steady and secure than what they were used to... Because that was kind of like secure, because as long as there was oil with the industry going on and booming, you could find a job. A job was not hard to find... That old thing, experience, counts for something, counts for a lot, I think.

*Howard Thibodaux:* Mr. Bailey sent me to get all the guys some hamburgers and drinks so we wouldn't have to quit work. We stopped long enough to eat the hamburger and got back to work. And it was like that just about every project. He was right there with the men. He knew all of them by their first names. He knew the families and the, whenever they had any kind of a Christmas party or something, I mean everyone participated in it. It was really a family business and back then even if things slowed down, you know, like we was talking about the big slowdown in the industry, well at that time, McDermott didn't really pay the top wages. They paid good wages, but it wasn't top wages, but they didn't lay people off when things got slow. They would find something for you to do, if it was just cleaning up the yard or anything. Of course, that was back before the days of the union, you could do this and of course, he was an advocate to keep the unions out of the yard. They tried in 1958, were badly defeated. They tried again a few years later and were defeated again.



**Figure 6.3. Preparing to Remove a Jacket Leg from a Platform Skeleton. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Schouest, OOGHP.**

*Lester Fryou:* Then, you see, you had the rig builders come to play. People that would build just rigs... They'd build the complete drilling rig, the substructure. Everything had to be completed [before the structure went offshore]. The jacket was built, and the deck built. That jacket was the first thing to be sent. Then the deck always left about a week and a half after the jacket left. By that time all the pilings had been driven in, the jacket, then the derrick barge was still there. So, here come the deck. You'd pick the deck up. Then, after a while, whoever's building the rig, the substructure, is gonna come after, or the deck's in place, and all the legs, and welded, and then they come and they pick up the substructure, the drilling platform, and set it on top of that... [McDermott had to subcontract parts out because] it would involve so much different type of work. You had so much machinery. Draw works. You had so many different people coming into the yard. You had so much traffic into our only yard that we didn't have the room. Another thing, 'cause we didn't have the equipment, McDermott would subcontract a lot of components, different components [to] different other companies. Little companies. Little pop- mom and pop places and stuff... They'd subcontract parts of the project to little companies all over the place so they could meet that schedule, that date. You see, a company wanted this platform next month, on the first of next month, you got to time this out. Well, you got to think about how many people you have and where they at, what they're doing. And if you don't have those people to

put on this component here, well I better go out and get it. I better get somebody else to do it for me... We hired people from all over the country. I remember McDermott going out, and then sending people into Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, all places.

*Clyde Dyerson:* I got a call from Ernest Dupont wanting to know if I would like to come back down to Morgan City and go to work for Dupont Fabricators, which at that time was a Division of McDermott, having recently [been] sold to McDermott. And I told him, "Well, I appreciate the very quick offer, but I'd like to spend a couple of weeks thinking about where I want to go with my future." After two weeks I finally decided that, all things considered, that's where I'd like to be. Came down and talked to Ernest, that afternoon he took me over to see Mr. Bailey, and Mr. Bailey said, "Well, I like your looks, we'll put you to work." And basically, my first job was Dupont. He had decided that McDermott had to have a pipe rolling mill because the design of the platforms was getting to the point where most of the pipe mills in the country were not capable of building or manufacturing pipe of the diameters and wall thicknesses that were beginning to be required. So he had bought a pipe bending, plate bending roll and was in the process of trying to figure out how to put it in operation. That became my very first job with McDermott, to design, build and operate – not operate personally but from a management standpoint – the very first pipe rolling mill on the Gulf Coast. It became quite the successful operation for us. We got into the business of not only fabricating the pipe for ourselves, but selling it to other fabricators and for other uses. And it was quite obvious before long that the direction the design and the drilling offshore was going, we could not keep up with the sizes and thicknesses of the pipe required, so Mr. Bailey decided we would build a second pipe rolling mill which became my responsibility at that point in time. So we set up and started operating a second pipe rolling mill and this mill was capable of rolling 20-foot long sections rather than the 10-foot long sections that started off in the old pipe mill number one... I remember early on when we were trying to get pipe mill number one set up and operational, we were having problems in joining two pieces of pipe together because even with that pipe roller, you couldn't get a perfectly round piece of pipe. And when it came time to join them together so you could weld them, we had to use lugs and wedges – it is just an L-shaped lug that you weld around and then you put the two pieces of pipe and start driving metal wedges in there to push either one down [or] up until you can get it all lined up. And that was gonna be the thing that ate our lunch if we didn't solve that problem because, I mean, we could roll pipe and we could weld it a lot faster than we could join it together to make a longer piece of pipe. So I did some research and I got a hold of a hydraulics engineer out of Houston and told him what the problem was, and we sat down and we worked and we worked and we worked and we finally came up with a design for a hydraulically operated pipe re-rounder which would go in and had a bunch of arms and so forth and then it had shoes that would fit up against the inside of the pipe on both sides. And so it came time to figure out where we were gonna put it in the pipe rolling mill. Then Ernest came down and said, "This is what I want, this is what I want, this is what I want," and he says, "I will be back in a couple of weeks." Well, he was trying to get some kind of business going down in Central America... We couldn't get it done the way he wanted it done, so we had to do something. I went ahead and said, "Okay, this is what we are going to do." Well, the first place he went when he got back in town that morning, he went down to the pipe mill number one and it wasn't like he wanted it. He got in his little green Oldsmobile, and he come flying back up there and walked in my office and he says, "Pack your books, you are gone, you are fired." "Why Ernest?" "I told you how I wanted it. You didn't do it. You're fired. Go home." "Okay." I

went out and got some boxes and I was putting what few belongings I had, books and drafting and so forth and so on and I guess just before lunch Ernest came in and says, “What are you doing?” I said, “Well, Ernest, you fired me. I am getting ready...” “Aw, put your books away, you know.” And I guess in that first six months I worked for him, I probably got fired a half a dozen times. I mean, that’s the kind of a guy he was... He was good at heart, but he had a temper that was uncontrollable at times. He realized it and as soon as he realized it, that’s when he would calm down and go the other direction. But it was interesting, it really was.

#### **6.4. Oilfield Vessels**

*The 1960’s was a period when both newcomers and long time residents found opportunities to get into business. Many of the companies that got their start in the 1950’s expanded as new companies were being established. Alden “Doc” Laborde and Lloyd Charpentier share their perspectives on the history of Tidewater, which became one of the largest offshore vessel companies in the world.*



**Figure 6.4. Gulf Tide, a Tidewater Offshore Vessel, 1955.  
Photo Courtesy of the Jesse Grice Collection,  
Morgan City Archives.**

*Doc Laborde:* I also started this Tidewater Company that was to service these rigs because, again, that was a big problem. And that’s what I was doing at Kerr-McGee. We started out there with a lot of these Navy surplus vessels. We had supply boats. There was a Navy boat we called an LCT, Landing Craft Tank, which was the forerunner of the present offshore supply boats. It had a bow gate, and it had a flat deck, and it had all the controls aft, on the stern or the back end of the vessel. And, it would hull tanks and take ‘em ashore. And then drop that ramp, and it’d run up on the beach. At the end of the War, those were surplus and were available. So, at McGee, we had acquired several of those and used them very successfully in supplying these offshore rigs with the drill pipe, the mud, and the fuel, and what have you. But, it was apparent to me that you could build a much better one than that. The main thing about it was that on a boat like that, your propellers, and your propulsion, and your rudders and all that are on the aft end. And you can control that pretty well. But, the bow, the front end, it kinda, you know, freewheels. And still,

that's the end that you wanted to get up to rig and unload and load. And so it occurred to me that we could move all of this thing up forward. Move the pilot house, and the living quarters, and all that up forward, and then just have the whole rest of this vessel clear, and the stern clear. So, then you could back up toward a rig and hold that stern in, in rough weather especially, and could unload with the cranes. So, again, I got about – this is about the same time we started ODECO – I got ten guys, and we each put up ten thousand dollars and built one of those, built the Ebb Tide. And it was a strange looking thing, and people kind of laughed at it. But, that's become the standard. That's the way all of them are built today. We went on with that and built about four of 'em and then, you know, it became obvious that there was a big opportunity there. By then, my brother came in and he kinda took over Tidewater. And then, ODECO was overwhelming by that time, so I just left, got out of Tidewater and stayed with ODECO. And my brother took over Tidewater, and, of course, developed it. Mostly through his efforts, [it] turned into I guess the biggest one in the world today. Still going strong. But, its genesis was this idea of reversing the deck setup on that thing, where you could run anchors over the stern, and handle cargo, and maneuver that stern like you wanted to around these rigs. Especially, these jack-up rigs up there on those slanted legs. You had to be careful maneuvering around in there. So that was another little breakthrough, if you will, that just kind of drifted in from somewhere. Didn't set out to do [it], but it worked out nicely.

*Lloyd Charpentier:* I was Army from '61 to '63 and I came to work for Tidewater in September '63... I started as a deckhand engineer in 1963 at Tidewater. I had worked on oilfield supply vessels prior to going into the military – I think about five years – and went in the military for two years and come out and my brother was working for Tidewater. He had just started, about eight months, and he talked me into coming to see Tidewater, and they hired me and that's about it... [My brother] told me, "You ought to come see Tidewater for a job." So I come interview. They called me the next day and asked me to bring my clothes and I have been here ever since... My first day offshore, I was running a crew boat and we were doing the pipeline. Phillips 66 had laid a pipeline from the beach to Block 1 something Eugene Island area, which is about 60 somethin' feet of water, and they laid this pipeline and this local contractor got this contract to survey the pipeline because they had to bury the pipeline below the mud line and their job was to take and follow the barge that was laying line and check it to make sure that it was being jetted down. We did what we called "live diving." We used to do "live diving" at the time. We would jump over the boat and you would just follow the diver. You had to be very, very careful because you didn't want to pick up the diver's air hose in your propellers. That was my first job offshore. That lasted for almost a year. My first trip offshore for Tidewater was a very bad one. It was a crew boat and we had to go to the rig and pick up a crew change and we had a really bad norther come through. It was late September and it got really, really rough. In fact, we would never have made it to the rig. They had to turn us around and send us back in. So that was my very first time offshore for Tidewater. But it was a very exciting just to go out there and see this rig jacked-up out of the water, in blue water like it was an island in the sky. It was kind of unique, a unique deal in the very beginning... I started off as a deckhand engineer 'cause they didn't have any captain's jobs open. When they had an opening come up in about six months I think it was, I went to start, I started running a boat, was captain of a boat. It was a 65 foot crew boat at the time and we went up from 65 foot crew boats to 85 foot crew boats or 90 foot to 120 foot. And I left the [crew] boats in like '64 or something like that and started running the supply boat and ran



a supply boat for Tidewater January '73. January '73 they asked me to come on staff, and I have been on staff ever since.

*Lloyd Charpentier:* To get back to the very beginning of Tidewater, ...we had three vessels called Rip Tide, Ebb Tide and Flood Tide. That was the first three vessels that was built specifically for the oil field. ... [The Mr. Charlie] was the first offshore drilling rig. It was designed and built by Alden Laborde through Murphy Oil Company. And he decided that they needed to have some kind of vessels to carry equipment and cargo out to the rigs, and he designed the open deck vessel, 120 footer. And Charlie Murphy from what I understand really didn't want to be in the boat business, so Alden Laborde which was the guy responsible for the first drilling rig and the first offshore supply vessel he had designed and built, called his brother, John Laborde, that was in Dallas and asked him to come head this company up. So they got investors together and built the three vessels. And Ed Kyle had a mud company that was in Berwick and our first office was in [the] corner of his warehouse. And that's where the whole inception was, right there in Berwick, Mr. Ed Kyle just had a few employees, one secretary, one operation guy, and it went from three vessels to a lot of vessels. ... When I came to work, Tidewater was in Berwick, next to the old IMC dock. International Mud Company, they called it. That was Tidewater's first full-fledged office after we left the mud dock with Mr. Kyle, and we operated out of that until '69. And in '69 we acquired Twenty Grand and at that time, Twenty Grand had a pretty nice office at what they called Twenty Grand Point at the time in Morgan City. So we moved everything there and got rid of the old office. Actually, Tidewater was called Tidex back then. And you say, why Tidex? Well, Tidex was kind of a people company and Tidewater Marine was kind of the asset company. ... So anyway Tidewater spread from the Gulf of Mexico to Venezuela and on to Africa and Australia, the North Sea and now we have vessels wherever they are drilling for oil.

*The converted wooden shrimp trawlers that had been servicing rigs and platforms were deemed inadequate as the need to transport crews and specialized equipment farther offshore grew. Steel hulled vessels designed for the task began to dominate the landscape. Providing water transportation, a necessity for offshore mineral exploration and production, became a significant source of employment in St. Mary Parish and Morgan City. Workers were recruited from across the Gulf coast. Many shrimpers made the transition into the offshore industry in search of a steady income and were drawn to working on boats. The capture of waterfront property by oil-related interests in Morgan City also contributed to a reduction in shrimping activity there (Gramling and Joubert, 1977). By 1970, only two percent of the town's employed citizens were fishermen. The following men talk about making the transition from shrimping to oil.*

*PT Bailey:* Originally I was a shrimp trawler for about 20 years. After I got out of the Navy, I resumed my work in the shrimp industry. And I did that for 20 years and by [1962] things got really bad for the shrimpin' industry. The country was under recession. The prices dropped down to about 25 cents a pound and we couldn't make the living anymore. So I had the opportunity to get a job in the oil industry on boats bringing supplies out to the rigs... It was mainly my neighbor who was a personnel man for Tidewater. And they were looking for experienced people, which I was a experienced captain, but I didn't know too much about the oil industry. So he told me he'd give me a job at 30 dollars a day runnin' a boat. And when I signed up with him,

he says, “Well, we gonna have to put you as a deckhand to see what you can do.” And he said, “That’s 25 dollars a day.” And after a couple of weeks, he gave me a job as a captain on a small, what they call a standby boat. For emergencies you sit on board on the rig in case something happens, you could pick up crews... It really didn’t require too much skill to do that. [Being a deckhand on an offshore vessel] was an experience. You know, I was used to operatin’ shrimp boats, larger shrimp boats, not small shrimp boats. In fact, we’d go all over the Gulf of Mexico. Campeche, all along the coast. And anyway it was quite different, just sitting there, doin’ nothing. And it was really boring, I wasn’t too happy with the job, but I needed the money. I had a family to raise. And, well anyway, he raised my pay from 25 to 27. And the other guys were making 30 dollars a day. I said, “Why aren’t you paying me the same thing as the other guys, ‘cause I can do the same work?” He said, “Well when you gonna get a license?” So I had to get a license and told them, I said, “Well what does that entail?” They said just go up to the Coast Guard. So I went over there, I told them, “I wanna license.” They said, “Well, you gotta meet certain requirements before you can get it.” And that was, you had to have a number of years at sea to qualify. And you had to have two years of sea time what they call it. Fortunately I fit right in because the vessels I was running was over 50 tons or over gross weight. So that qualified me immediately.

*Parker Conrad:* The shrimping business was also a feast or a famine business. Some years everybody made money, other years they didn’t do so well, and when they didn’t do so well they all had boats to sell, and when things were good they all wanted to buy boats. And so it was a feast or a famine, a hit or a miss, so I decided to start in 1962 to start building steel barges. And this is how I got started building steel. Before that I didn’t know anything too much about ... ‘cause the dry docks that I had built by other shipyards were out of steel. I could not at that time build them because everything I knew about and all my facilities here were strictly wood. ... In the early 1960’s, that’s when I realized it was going to be more profitable than building shrimp trawlers.

*Vince Guzzetta:* I graduated from Nicholls and I went to LSU where I spent three years, graduated with a BS in merchandising in 1960 from LSU. And then, I joined my father in his business at that time... He was primarily into the seafood business. At the time when I got out of college, I went to work with my dad. I was married. I went to work for 45 dollars a week picking shrimp as a college graduate, unloading shrimp boats. He originally started in the shrimp boating business and we would process shrimp and ship them all over the country, cook them. Then, it sort of transferred to the oil industry as the oil industry started to grow in this area... The shrimp company was Deep South Seafoods... We unloaded shrimp boats, packed shrimp, sent them to different parts of the country. Also, we had some boats that came in from Mexico with Mexican shrimp and they were all processed and packaged and we would unload them and put them in our freezer and ship those maybe nine or ten truck loads at a time all over the United States from Mexican imports. So, that is where we originally started. That is what my dad did. And then, I joined him when I graduated from college. We really saw the shrimp industry slipping a little bit and the oil industry was sort of taking over in the mid 1960’s. And we sort of said, well, let’s kind of move along with the tide and we sort of crept into the oil business with boats... In 1964, we decided we were going to try to build the boat. Prior to this, there was a lot of oil companies were hiring wooden boats, shrimp boats. I guess, in the 1960’s and the late 1950’s, they were hiring anything they could find. They would hire these boats to go offshore and check on their

oil rigs or bring people offshore. They were using shrimp boats and anything they could find. Shrimp boats were actually being rented to the oil companies. They would take all of their shrimp gear off and the shrimpers would do better renting their boat to the oil companies, so they would do that – they would de-rig as a shrimp boat and rig up as an oil boat. One of the original companies in the Gulf was Kerr McGee Oil Company out of Oklahoma. Kerr McGee did a lot of the pioneering in the offshore oil industry here out of Morgan City. That is how we got interested. We said, well, let's try to build a boat. We were close to this company in Houston at the time, Stewart and Stevenson, and we knew one of the guys over there. They were building boats. We worked with Stewart and Stevenson, got financing on a 125 foot boat that was built in Houston. In 1965, it was ready to go and we were in the boat business, I guess.

*Butch Felterman:* [In 1964] we converted a shrimp boat, a steel hull shrimp boat, into oilfield work. And that was the beginning of the oil business for me. For awhile we owned both kinds of boats... For this first steel hull boat, we did most of that work ourselves. I had a welder who worked for me. And my brother helped me with that boat... We actually went to them... It was a GSI. GS Fiscal Services, Inc., and they were doing a lot of exploration work. And we went to them and told them we had a fine, almost new boat that we'd like to convert, and go to work for them... We built a strictly oilfield-type boat and put it on with GSI. And less than a year later they had to cut way back. They laid off a bunch of boats including both of ours... So we put the shrimp rigging back on it and went back to fishing with it... The oil companies looked a lot at the ability to get the job done and at your equipment. They wanted a good piece of equipment, a good boat that wasn't going to give them a lot of trouble and be broke down a lot, leave them in a bind. Because the oil company, when they had something to send offshore, they wanted it to go. They didn't want that rig out there to be shut down because of a lack of a small piece of equipment or any equipment. So you had to be able...to have the ability to deliver the goods. And in order to do that you needed a good crew and you needed a good boat. They looked at that a lot, at your past performance and whether you had a record of being able to do a good job... For the most part [the crew] were people that came from Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, and Texas. I don't know if we had any from Arkansas. One reason being is that when you take a 7 and 7 schedule or 14 on and 7 off schedule, doesn't really matter where you live. You don't have to live right here. But most of the people were from this area.

*As oil companies expanded across the globe, Morgan City began exporting equipment and personnel to offshore oil fields outside the United States. Some of the early offshore vessel captains describe their work overseas.*

*Lloyd Charpentier:* When I came to work for 'em (Tidewater), we had some vessels down in Venezuela and Africa. And about the same time, we had some things in the North Sea come up. That was fun... In the early stages [the mid-1960's], I worked the Gulf of Mexico for about a year, went to Alaska, spent a year up in Alaska and come back and worked in the Gulf of Mexico for a couple of years and then went to South America. Worked down in South America for a while, come back and then went down to Trinidad and worked in Trinidad, and that took me on into '73 when I got off the vessels... The first license I had was what they call an "Inland License" and it read "any water other than the ocean and coastline," which was kind of unique because you could work any place as long as it wasn't in the ocean or along the coast. And then later on, when I come to work for Tidewater, moving offshore, you had to have a "Coastlines

License.” And then, I think it was in May of ’58, you had to change that license to an “Operator’s License.” So that was for crew boats and then in later stages for supply boats you had to get a license that was called “300 Ton License” at the time. A lot of vessels back then wasn’t required to have a license because of the tonnage of ‘em and then through the years the laws and stuff changed and it required everybody [to] have licenses.



**Figure 6.5. One of the First Offshore Vessels Built to Work in Africa, 1970. Photo Courtesy of Phillip Fanguy, OOGHP, from the Jesse Grice Collection.**

*Dewey Wilson:* In 1964... I went to work with Tidewater Marine, and when I went to work with Tidewater, Tidewater immediately had me start teaching classes there for their people. And then they had a boat, the Strong Tide, it was to go to Holland. And they asked me if I would take the boat to Holland, and I said, “Okay.” So I took the boat to Holland and then I started delivering boats for Tidewater. I delivered ‘em all over the world. In fact, I delivered 86 boats overseas for Tidewater, different places... They were working offshore supply overseas, all over. We went over to the North Sea, England, Germany, Holland and then we went a lot to Africa, West Africa, Angola, Nigeria, and took some to the Persian Gulf, Dubai, Egypt, Brazil, Mexico... When we went to Holland with the Strong Tide, it took me from Morgan City – we stopped in Bermuda and then we stopped in the Azores – it took us 21 days. And it depended how many stops for fuel we had to make. And, like going to Nigeria, I made it there in 19 days and as much as 28 days depending on the vessel, how fast, the weather... I’d stay over there just long enough to bring the captain, who would sign a contract – Tidewater had a contract where they signed a seven month contract, they would go three months on the boat in Nigeria or wherever, they’d come home for a month, they’d go back for the second three months and complete the contract, and then they’d get a contract bonus, if they completed the full seven months. But my job was just to get the boat there at that time... We’d fly back... Once I had a trip to Nigeria and I came in, I got in at 10 o’clock that night at my house in Patterson and about 8 o’clock the next

morning, the phone ring... and [the person on the other end] wanted to know if I was coming in. I said, "What do you mean coming in?" I said, "I just got in at 10 o'clock last night." "Oh, okay." About an hour later, he called me back and said, "Look, if you can make it, Mr. Bright," who was the president at that time, "wants to talk to you." I said, "Now what did I do?" [I] tried to remember. I got in there and they had a boat down, working out in the South Atlantic from the Caribbean from Antigua, and the navigator had quit and he wanted to know if I'd go. And I said, "Mr. Bright," I said, "I just got in last night." He said, "Well..." Then the man who was head of the project said, "We really need somebody down there." Mr. Bright said, "Now, you understand you're not under compulsion to go," and I said, "Well, I'll go," and he said, "Well, in that case here's your ticket, here's your extension."

*Richard Carline:* I guess the first boat that went out of here went to Venezuela was the Ebb Tide. It left out of here in the early '60's and went to Venezuela. It was the first vessel that went foreign for Tidewater... I made captain and I've worked in the North Sea as a captain aboard vessels in the North Sea... We were idiots, I think... Dewey was on one of these trips. We took a boat to England and we got caught between the Azores and the English Channel and we had cargo, we had pipe up on deck. I don't know if he told you, we had pipe on deck and at the time we were dumb coonasses, we would just go anywhere. But at the time we didn't think about the pipe holding water, you see. So we hit a storm between the Azores and the English Channel and for about five days I thought we were going to lose the vessel. We really thought we were going to lose the vessel, 'cause what happened is the pipes filled up with water and it maintained the water and it wouldn't dump out fast enough, so we had to dump all of our water off and then to allow the boat to [gain] buoyancy enough to float. The cook had the prayer beads and everything. That was a trip... The name of that boat that we was on... Break Tide. Well after that we learned a good lesson. After that we secured the cargo with block and chain to keep the water out of it. We learned a good lesson on that trip... That was early, '68 to '70's, maybe in the early '68. We were some of the first. In fact we went up in the North Sea with the East Tide, which was a 140, 150-foot supply boat which we had no business up there, if you know what I mean. They actually busted all the windows out of it and everything up there in the rough weather. Oh, yeah... They needed a captain. They just needed a captain, that's all. You know, we just rotated. Somebody needed some time off or something. They just got me. Well, we'd go anywhere. There were several of us here that would work just about anywhere, so they knew who the idiots were to call to send up there and that's what I think about us sometime. We were idiots in there because we really didn't have the equipment at that time to go into the North Sea.

*The U.S. Coast Guard began licensing offshore vessel operators, causing impacts to both mariners and the companies for which they worked (Austin and McGuire, 2002). The original supply boats had been war surplus ships or landing craft, which did not require Coast Guard inspection, but the situation changed as new vessels were built specifically for the industry. When the Coast Guard began requiring licenses, the vessel companies lobbied for a special license, good only for those working in the offshore oil and gas industry which would not have as many requirements as regular ocean-going licenses. This compromise meant the mariners to get their licenses, but in the United States they were restricted to working for companies operating in the Gulf of Mexico. In the following paragraphs, four men talk about the impacts of changes in licensing requirements.*

*Dewey Wilson:* And being uninspected like that, they didn't even require a licensed master. And then they started building new boats and, they were inspected by the Coast Guard and they had to have licenses. So there was a big demand at that time for any kind of license. And a lot of those guys at that time came off the fishing vessels and they had plenty of experience and plenty of local knowledge, but they had never been trained in navigation. ... In Morgan City, in fact they were trying to get a like an academy here, but I think that was a little bit ahead of the times... And during that time, I was contacted by some people down in Golden Meadow, Louisiana, and they wanted to know if I would come down there and teach a class. So I agreed I'd go there on a Friday, have a class Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning and then leave. ... I'd leave after I got through here. But that was an experience. The first time I went to Golden Meadow, they told me I'd be at the Golden Meadow High School to meet 'em and I went there on a Friday evening, and I pulled up and I saw all those cars and I said, "Oh, there must be a football game." So we had agreed to meet in the cafeteria, so I went in the cafeteria and the place was full. And the guy came in and I said, "Who are all these people?" He said, "This is your class." Ninety-five people showed up! I said, "Man, I can't handle these people." I said, "Look, these people work 7 and 7 schedule, why not spilt 'em up and take half?" He said, "This is half." I never forgot that. I said, "Man." So then the football coach let me use his big blackboard and I'd write real big so they could see and then I finally sorted 'em out and put one of 'em that had had a little training, a Navy guy or something, in between two of 'em that [hadn't], and we made it. ... They had a radio station, I guess it's still there, KLEB. And I'd leave here on Friday after school and I'd drive down the road and I'd go down there and that KLEB would say, "All right, all you people who are going to the licensing class tonight, Mr. Wilson is on his way down the road." ... That was what I was doing at the time, more or less giving 'em what they needed to get their license. And at one point, I went offshore with Kerr-McGee during the summer when I didn't have high school. I went offshore with Kerr-McGee and taught coastal piloting on their vessels with their captains. ... We ran into some of the people off the fishing boats that didn't have a whole lot of education. Lot of intelligence, I've always made that distinction. ... I had one man in particular, I won't mention his name, he hardly could read and write and he was working for this company. I told him, "Now, I, I'll help ya," and I started working with this guy. He took the test, and at that time they had a 300 Ton oil and mineral industry [license] and it was good for coastlines. And about three or four months after he got his license he said, "I think I want to get an ocean license, I want to study celestial." And I said, "Oh, good gracious." But, don't you know, this guy, I would show him something once or twice and that was it, he had it. But he had only been to school for like two years or something like that, but he was intelligent. ... [There were new] boats coming out. ... and [the people here] had been operating so long without licenses. One time I went to American Legion and they asked me if [I would] make some comments about this. I told 'em, I said, "The day is coming when you're not gonna be able to run a supply boat without a license," and I thought they were gonna throw me out. But, I was teaching classes for Tidewater Marine, Pan Marine at the time, and all of the boat companies. Those are the two big companies at that time here in Morgan City. And in 1964, the state of Louisiana had financial problems again and they were gonna cut the program down. So I went to work with Tidewater Marine and when I went to work with Tidewater, Tidewater immediately had me start teaching classes there for their people.

*Lloyd Charpentier:* There wasn't any schools back when I got [my licenses]... When I studied for my 100 Ton, I had a friend of mine, he had just taken his. So he had all the study materials, so he said, "Here, go ahead and take this. I don't need it anymore." So I just studied his while I was working and while I was home and when I thought I knew it, I went and took the tests. ... Tidewater always had a safety program that I can remember. We used to have a guy that was Safety and he would go around to boats and check 'em and write a report on boats. It wasn't as safety is today, but we have always been safety conscious as far as that goes and we have always had a Safety Director, just about as long as I can remember. The thing about safety back in the early days was a lot of the industry wasn't concerned about safety. They was worried about getting the job done. So we had to take and try to figure out how to do the job and still be safe at the same time and not get run off the job because we refused to do something. We always had to try to figure out how we could do it safely and still get the job done. ... Back in the early days if you had to go out if it was foggy, it didn't matter, you went.

*TR Naquin:* [Workers] were getting scarce. That's when I think when the drugs started getting a hold of these guys, because a lot of them we would set up for a physical, couldn't pass it. ... The Coast Guard stepped in there and everybody had to start getting licensed. You had to license your engineers. Your able bodied seamen had to have their credentials and your navigators had to have [them] and some of these bigger work boats they are building today, you had to have a 500 ton license in order to run them. ... Engineers had to have licenses. ... The cook, he was the only one [who didn't need a license]. He just had to be a cook, if you can keep him sober enough. Nine out of ten cooks had a hobby of drinking. I remember one time I had a cook on a boat and he didn't show up. So his brother come down there. His brother goes on the boat and starts looking in the closets for the food and so forth in the refrigerator and the freezer and they asked him what he was doing on the boat. He says, "I come to take my brother's place. He is sick today, so I am going to be the cook." He wasn't even on the payroll. I said, "Man, you can't be on this boat. You haven't even signed up to be on a payroll." He said, "Well, my brother's sick and I am going to cook for him." So I had to send him for a physical, get him to fill out an application to get him on the boat. ... I will never forget the time Old Big Daddy Breaux called me. He was another skipper that could handle a boat and he needed a cook. So this old boy come in really hot. He said, "I need a job. I need a job." I said, "Can you cook?" And he said, "Oh, yes sir, I can cook. I can cook." So I hired him and sent him to Big Daddy Breaux. He say, "You sent me a guy who is supposed to be a cook and that son of a bitch can't even boil water." He said, "I had to show him how to turn the stove on to boil water." And old Big Daddy got all over me for sending him a guy that couldn't even boil water. ... In fact he started out as a cook, but he ended up being a skipper. Came on the boat, applied himself and [they] got rid of him as a cook and put him as a deckhand and he ended up running a boat. I think if I am not mistaken he went to Africa on one of the boats after I left there, right after I left Tidex [in 1969]... I had to remember a lot of people's names because you had to crew these boats and you had four or five hands to the crew and you had to remember everybody's names and all that. ... We had ads in different papers and a lot of the time you would tell the skipper, "We need a deck hand." And he knew somebody that would make us a good hand, so he would bring him in. They would fill out an application and we'd look through the application. In those days, you had some skippers that could do more with a boat than a monkey could with a coconut... The skippers in those days, they could handle the boats... local guys, cutting teeth. They cut their teeth on the steering wheel most of them. I had an old boy, he had limited education and I had him as a skipper and I says, "Sterling, you need to

get your license. There's coming the day that you are going to have to have a license to work and you need to get your 100 ton license." He said, "I can't do that." And I said, "You can too." I got him the book. He took the book home and his wife read it with him back and forth, and he took the test for the 100 ton license and missed one answer.

## **6.5. Commercial Oilfield Diving**

*During the decade of the 1960's, oilfield diving companies became critical to successful offshore exploration and production. Divers were involved in platform installation, repair, inspection, installation of anodes for protection against corrosion, and salvage (Austin, 2003). Rapid technological innovation made it possible for divers to go deeper and deeper and to increase their time underwater, eventually reaching depths greater than one thousand feet and staying under pressure for several weeks at a time to complete a job. The offshore oil and gas industry thus became a major impetus for the development of commercial diving, and many of the new techniques and equipment were tested on oilfield divers.*

*From the perspective of the companies paying the bills, the primary need was to increase the time divers could stay on the bottom, which included minimizing the time spent in decompression (Austin, 2003). Divers faced the problem of the "bends." Pressure increases with water depth, and as the pressure increases, divers' bodies absorb more and more gas than would be absorbed at the surface. Then, if a diver ascends rapidly, the decreasing pressure releases expanding air bubbles into the bloodstream, causing the bends.. The diver rises in stages to allow the blood to circulate and air to escape slowly in a process known as decompression. Decompression tables established safe rates of ascent. The addition of decompression chambers allowed divers to be brought up quickly, repressurized, and decompressed slowly at the surface while other divers continued the work below. The use of gas mixtures, such as helium and nitrogen, allowed divers to achieve greater depths than when they dove with only compressed air, but they also withdrew the heat from the divers' bodies and made their speech unintelligible. Thus, the use of new gas mixtures required new masks and the development of hot water suits and new communication devices fitted with unscramblers. Pneumofathometers and decompression chambers and tables helped remove some of the uncertainty from the return to the surface and reduced injury and death so that underwater operations could continue and saturation diving could develop. In the following section, several diving pioneers talk about the diving business during this period.*

*Mike Hughes:* When I graduated at the University of Tennessee, I realized that diving and engineering were a great combination, and that there were literally no other divers in the country at that time that were also engineers. So, I felt I had a specialty to offer. And the work in the Tennessee Valley, other than this one contract, was extremely slim. So, I had a cousin who was graduating at the same time, and he interviewed with Texaco, who were interviewing several engineers for offshore engineering. And he told this Texaco man about me and so he asked my cousin to have me come by and see him. So, I went by and he showed me photographs of offshore drilling rigs and things, and that enticed me to move to Morgan City, Louisiana... 1962. That is where I started my diving career for the offshore oil industry... The problem was that much deeper was defined as sort of deep air diving, and it was getting into the ranges where the decompression tables were not as safe and certain as they were in shallower water, where you could get nitrogen narcosis, you could get severe carbon dioxide build up because of the



inadequacy of the breathing equipment we were using. So, there was a lot of risk associated with deep air diving that was beginning to come into play for the industry. This was slightly before the beginning of the first mixed gas dives.

*Johnny Johnson:* [In] 1964 [Mike Hughes and I started] Worldwide Divers, Incorporated... There was three other fellas that came in with us, but they left within about 24 hours or 48 hours... I wanted to be a professional baseball player, but my knees wouldn't hold up. They'd had surgery on 'em, on my knee, and then I wasn't able to make that.



**Figure 6.6. Diver Entering the Water While His Tender Stands on Deck Managing His Air Hose. Photo Courtesy of Lynda Miller, OOGHP.**

So, I wanted to be a professional, so the divin' was of extreme interest to me. And I also, bein' from the mountains where I didn't wear shoes, I wanted to be in a profession where I didn't wear shoes. So, down here, when you're a diver, you don't wear shoes. You wear flippers... I knew at the time that the oil industry was here, and they seemed to have a activity goin' on that attracted a lot of different service companies at the time, and I didn't know the depth or the magnitude of the service that was being done for them. It was an opportunity where it would be fun, it was gonna be adventurous. I mean, we got paid to do what people used to pay for. They still do today, they still pay to go divin', and we get paid to go diving... [I learned through] on-the-job trainin', seein' other people. At that time, the scuba tank was about the only thing I had any association with, and that was about the only thing that I was really familiar with, other than your sea and sponge divers. But when we got down here, it was a cross between those two. Scuba diving... sometimes you could do it cheap, didn't take a whole lot to do. On certain jobs, you needed to go look-touch-feel, come back. You could do it with scuba. But, the thing about it is, it was unsafe. It was not the safest application to use in this type of hazardous environment, where you needed an unlimited supply of air that would be provided from your topside air

compressors. Secondly, you have communications to the topside, which you needed, so that's the reason why a lot of companies tryin' to cut the corners just did not succeed. It was not the best thing to do. Sounds good, sometimes it can be done, but you just have to go over the minimum standards of safety... We had a volume tank, which was like a ninety-gallon aluminum volume tank that was actually taken out of the, I think it was a C1-30, which was the oxygen supply for the pilots. So we took those and put stands and wheels on 'em and then welded in fittings, pop-off valves. It was lightweight. Those two people could handle it pretty easily. 'Course you needed to have some type of a reservoir, whereas you store air with a non-return if the pressure went out. So, you had to have that. And then the communications would use a military type communications that was a kind of co-ax cable and the strength of it was tremendous, 'cause you could use that in addition to the divin' hose, you know, to pull, and it would carry a little separation on limits that was quite high, and it generally had about a four strand wire in there, sometimes there's two. And we would just hook it up to drill a hole, and put it in a mask, glue it in, and put your speaker up at the top of it, right at your forehead inside to keep it away from the water. And that's the way you'd communicate. A lot of times the radios were off-the-shelf components that some of our people would put together, and they'd operate in the shop. Sometimes you'd get offshore, and they may be erratic. You'd have to go back to the hand signals if your communications went down, you had to rely on that...Worldwide went into, probably '69, and then we went in and formed up Oceaneering, and then after that time, I continued to dive. I probably was on the diving payrolls for about nine years.

*Buddy Ayers:* There were companies in Morgan City under smaller companies. They had companies here in town (New Orleans) that Ben Russ started up, there's Paul Carry's company and they had inspection companies, they had James Dean, probably had maybe six or eight guys that worked for him and all they did was go behind and inspect what we did. They'd go down and [say], "Ok, that plant's tied." That's before video cameras and what people got now, all the divers wear video cameras and guys like myself that work for the oil companies, I sit up there and I watch them, yeah. There are very, very few jobs now where they use inspection divers. Then you had SubSea, which was a pretty good size company here in town. They had Packers Divers, which was started by one of those Green Bay Packers, Taylor; he was one of those money backers of that operation. That was down in Morgan City, but there was only two camps – that was Morgan City divers and then they called us New Orleans divers. And the two main players, Taylor and Dick Evans (which was later bought by) McDermott... A lot of the Morgan City diving companies back in the early days, you know about the early '60's or so, '70's, they did inspection work. They did a lot of inspection work 'cause they didn't have the equipment.

*Walter Daspit:* Dick [Evans] kept calling me. He said that he would put me to work in the morning... I went to work for Dick and I didn't get a day off for six weeks... It was for McDermott... We worked in Mexico and the Bahamas, Nigeria. I was offered several times to work in Alaska, but I didn't want to go. It was too frosty for me. Although they paid real good. It was all unions. They were making two or three times more than what we were making... When they went over to McDermott Diving, they bought Dick out... Dick Evans got the first gas job ever done in the Gulf. It was a derrick barge, drilling barge, by the name of Bluewater II that capsized by a hurricane. It was fairly deep water. Dick got the job but it required gas... because of the depth. You couldn't have done it with air. He hired a guy right out of the Navy named Roy Carroll who was familiar with gas because the Navy was the only ones to deal with that...

probably '67. That was the first gas job that I was ever on. It was also the first gas job ever done in the Gulf. They got Sanford Brothers, which is a diving company from Morgan City.

*Wayne Willet:* I was born in Quebec, in Canada. And I got into to diving in Canada in 1954, construction diving, and the guys that broke me in in Canada were two Germans, Max Rieher, and Rudy Paletta. And, during our diving years in Canada together we worked some pretty deep jobs and tunnels. One of our divers that we had working with us was Gunter Kinderman. He moved to the U.S., went to work for Al Warriner, and he talked Max Rieher into moving to the U.S. 'cause we just started needing the deep work out here in the Gulf in the early '60's. And, Max moved down, and he come back to Canada and talked me into making the move, so I applied for a visa for myself and my family, and I arrived here in Belle Chasse in May, 1964. And at that time, Gulf had had the big fire on a double-drill rig, double-drill platform in Block 117; [it] was 240 feet of water. And Deep Sea Divers Incorporated, the ones who hired me to come down here – that's who Max Rieher was working with at the time – got the job of doing the helium diving. It was one of the first major helium jobs, with quite a few dives made. And my first dive in the Gulf of Mexico was on helium. [Before coming to the Gulf I had] never heard of it... [It was] a little bit scary. We were using Desco masks at that time, with one job speaker, no earphones... You were clear-headed, but you damn near froze to death; it robs your body heat. And we didn't have as good o' suits in 1964 as we had in later years... It was another year before I dove helium again. We had a lot of air diving. But they wanted guys who had worked deep before that they knew, [who could] work that first job... They told me in the shop before we left [and I thought]. "[If] somebody else can do it, I can do it!"... . There had been helium dives made out here in the Gulf, bounce dives here and there, but no sustained work like we were doing... At that time, if you were on helium, you were working two hours bottom time. That's why, because you were using helium. What we had to do was clean up the whole bottom area. There had been two drill rigs, with their steel stacked on that platform. And when they caught fire, all that drill steel and everything else tumbled down the one side, tearing those braces on the side of the platform all the way down. So we had to go down and clear all that out, burn off the deeper braces. J & J Divers – that's who Willie Brown was with – had the air work on the [job]. They were doing the shallow work, and we were doing the deeper work. And after all that stuff was cleared out, then we put in new braces, all the way up on the platform... Good divers always could get a job, if there was jobs available. I went sometimes for months without a day's work. It gets the wife pretty well pissed off when that happens...

*Oilfield divers required their own specialized services and products, from helmets and compressors to cameras that could take pictures underwater. As the men describe below, local entrepreneurs developed much of what was needed.*



**Figure 6.7. Diver Entering the Water on a Salvage Job, 1960's.  
Photo Courtesy of Tom Hynson, OOGHP.**

*Walter Daspit:* I think the first guy that came out with a lightweight diving helmet was Joe Savoie... We were working on one of McDermott's barges with Chuck Gage and we saw Joe. Joe was explaining to us what he was going to build. He was going to use [what] was a sterile diving dress that was used at the time. It was a front entry and you would wrap up tight and you would stay dry. Joe was going to put a neck ring on it and he was going to build it. He wanted to build a helmet out of a race car crash helmet. Then he was going to the faceplate visor and a neck ring and tie it. He was explaining that to us and drawing it. I said, "Joe, you can't do that because, having that half opening of the dress, when you lean over air is going to go to the highest point. It is going to flip you upside down and you are going to come floating up to the surface upside down." That was one of the things about diving with heavy gear. You had to be careful. If you leaned over too far, the air went to your feet. You were out of control then. You couldn't exhaust it... I am trying to explain this to Joe who has never had any formal diving training. When you argued with Joe, all he did was talk louder. Once he gets something in his head, that is where it stayed. He was a hard-headed coonass and I was a hard-headed coonass. I tried explaining to him that he couldn't do that. He said that he was going to put valves on the feet and relieve the air through the feet. I told him he couldn't do that because it wasn't going to work. You have to have a seal around the neck. Joe just kept getting louder. Joe eventually found out that I was right, so he made a neck ring for his hats. He made a very good helmet, but it took him a while to evolve it into something. What he first had in mind just wasn't going to work... [I made] about seven or eight of them (diving hats). I didn't go into that business. My father-in-law was a machinist and had a machine shop with welding equipment and the whole bit. He and I got together and he built a few and decided that he didn't want to be bothered with it. Divers would come in there and say they wanted a hat. We were building these to fit the individual. You can only do so much without the diver being there to be fitted. They would come in and get started

and then go off on diving jobs and he wouldn't see them for a month or two. He said it wasn't important enough to them to have a decent piece of equipment that might save their lives, so it is not important for me to build them. So, he quit and that was it.

*Billye Grice:* And most of the people we hired [at the photography shop] were not local people. They were people who were coming in here, maybe the wives of some of the divers because by that time we had Oceaneering and Cal Dive and these other companies had come in here and started up. So we have the divers' business and my husband would have to help 'em work out their problems for underwater photography. And so we got to where we did a little bit of everything. Then they needed the safety film and good slide presentations, so they would need so many sets of slides. So we got into duplicating slides and setting up their programs for them. So we did just a variety of things.

*Tom Angel:* And then you get up and go out on the job, and it's sometimes the water was very turbid and a client would want to see what was down there. So I came up with the idea of taking pictures and I got clever ways of doing that in turbid water. And take it – whatever it is – and encapsulate the camera in a bag, like a big ziplock bag, but a big one, and just pump fresh water in it from the surface and it all cleared, and take pictures. So they LOVED that idea, so I put together like [a] sea chest where it's actually as big as a cedar chest. And it had everything that I could do. I could print eight by ten pictures black and white within a hour and they would be 85 percent dry after I got out of the water. And this created a bit of havoc for underwater photography and that's when Jill and I got together, 'cause I couldn't keep up with doing everything that I was doing by myself, without someone... I think it was '67, '68. It was a great sport; I mean it's a lot of fun. And, it's some interesting stories. You work basically on an average an hour a day. So, you'd have sixty-minutes to do your job, right? And somebody says, "Wait a minute. They have taken a lot of time off your bottom time." And you build your reputation on how good you are and how quick you are and how fast you get things accomplished. And, you have to be you own rigger, your own everything, so you don't have anybody to help you down there except maybe a crane or something like that. So, I can remember an instant we were out there on the McDermott barge and I said, "Pick it up an inch," and the crane operator – we had a microphone to the crane operator – and the crane operator said, "Pick it up an inch? I got 30 miles of cable on this drum up here and you're asking me to pick it up an inch."... I was the seventh employee of Joe Sanford. That included his brother-in-law and his father and the secretary there and his brother, Tom, and one janitor by the name of Joe. [I got on with them] probably a year or so after I got into the Gulf... I opened an office for him down in Venice, Louisiana... [The photos] wasn't the first job, but that's one of the jobs that I did a lot, which was to document what was going on underwater.

*Drew Michel:* Ocean Systems, at the time I got there in 1966, was still diving in heavy gear. In other words, the old John Wayne in the canvas suits and the big hard hat. And one of my first jobs was changing the speakers in the hard hats. To look back on it now, it just seems impossible. But it's in one man's career we've gone from there to where we are now. I stayed at Ocean Systems eighteen months, and one day a diver named Don Terry walked in to the coffee mess. We're all sitting around drinking coffee and he threw a Oceans Industry magazine in front of me. And it had an article that says, "Taylor Diving to build four million dollar research center." Halliburton had just bought Taylor Diving. So it says, "Halliburton buys Taylor Diving

to build four million dollar research center in Belle Chasse, Louisiana.” And he said, “Drew, you don’t need to be hanging around here in Morgan City with us old divers, you need to be at this place.” And I literally got in my car the next morning and drove to Taylor Diving, knocked on the front door at eight o’clock on Friday morning and said, “What are you guys going to do about your electronic stuff?” That was in June of 1968.

*Commercial diving was a hazardous occupation in its own right, and diving around rigs and platforms added even more danger. Mike Hughes talks about surviving an oil well blowout.*

*Mike Hughes:* I got blown to the surface from 135 feet in about seven seconds in the center of a blowout. It was in the Gulf of Mexico. I was looking for this platform that had been destroyed in a hurricane. It was bent over. One of the wells was blowing at a pretty high pressure, and mostly gas and salt water. It was down somewhere in the wreckage. And I made the first dive to try to locate it. When you are working near a blowout underwater, the noise is just incredible. The vibration and the energy that is being dissipated in the water is just indescribable. But I worked my way down through the wreckage and I was tracing out conductor pipes and I ran out of bottom time. So, my time was up. It was time for me to decompress and let another guy have a shot at it. I marked where I left off and he could start from there. And when I finished, I told my tender to pull my hose tight to be sure I was not entangled in any wreckage. And he pulled it tight and it felt good. I could tug on it and make sure it wasn't rubbing on anything. So, I told him to go ahead and pull me to the surface and I just sort of relaxed. He pulled me probably five or ten feet and suddenly I felt a great push on the back, like a giant fire hose, and what had happened, I had just drifted in front of the blowout. Of course, there was no visibility. Like I said, most of the time we didn't even bother to carry lights underwater because you just got used to working by feel. I mean, you just accepted that as a given. And so, I got caught in the stream and I didn't even have time to tell my tender what was happening over the radio, over the IV phone. I just exhaled as fast as I could because I knew the air in my lungs would expand and I might die from an embolism if it expanded faster than I could exhale. So, I just blew out for all it was worth and I was exhaling huge quantities of air as I went up all the way to the surface. And when I popped up on the surface, I looked over at the barge – I came up facing the barge, and a little out of the center of the bubbles. And I was still in the froth. I couldn't float so I immediately went back down. But as I popped up, I could see my tender, he was just pulling my hose in at the normal rate because [as far as] he knew nothing was wrong. And so, as I drifted back down and out of the bubbles, I cut my air off and said, "You may as well pull me in. I have already been to the surface once." So, he pulled me in and I got in the decompression chamber and recompressed and everything was fine, no bends or anything. It was an exciting ride!

*As the risks increased, accidents and injuries mounted. The large petroleum companies – and especially their insurers – took notice. In the early 1960's, some diving companies with insurance were able to establish a clientele and obtain work based on that factor alone. Soon most petroleum companies were requiring proof of insurance.*

*Mike Hughes:* One of the things that made the diving industry sort of coalesce into a business was the need for insurance – Worker's Compensation and liability insurance. Divers generally operated as independent contractors, as professionals, free agents that would sort of take the job wherever there was the most work, and the thing that caused us to organize in small groups was

the fact that you could not, as an individual, really provide that insurance coverage. And the oil companies had what they called their approved list of contractors, and you couldn't work for them unless you were on that list. So, we banded together as a small group to provide insurance coverage... Initially, the group that banded together were still acting as independent agents, but we all operated under one man's insurance coverage. That company was called Gulf Coast Diving Service, and the owner of it was a Scandinavian guy named Norman Knudson, who had actually been a diver in World War II, an amateur diver in World War II, and his father was a shrimper and came back and was in Morgan City when the oil industry actually first started going offshore. So, he had been around and knew the ropes, and we operated under his insurance for a couple of years. And then, in 1964, we had some disagreements with Norman and so several of us left and formed World Wide Divers.

*Joe Sanford:* When Mr. Tucker had a heart attack, he called us. I went to Houston and bought all his equipment and incorporated. We moved to Morgan City, Louisiana. [We moved here because] we heard there was a need for insurance in the oil field. No one had insurance. It was unheard of... Mr. Tucker had insurance. We had eight to nine months left on our policy.

*Susie Sanford:* Insurance was very expensive. Tucker was a multimillionaire. He could afford it.

*Joe Sanford:* [When I went to buy the company,] he asked me how much money we had. I told him we had three thousand dollars between us. He said I'll take twenty-seven hundred of that. And we came here... We went to a motel in town and got a room. Then we got a house on Belanger Street... We walked into the Bluebird Café the first night we were in town. There was this table with these big old piles of silver dollars on it. We saw these men sitting around gambling. The sheriff was just standing on the side and watching. I said, "Oh, god, what kind of a place have we come to?"... I went around and seen the oil companies and told them what we had. They said send us the insurance papers. We got on the approved list for three or four oil companies. Mobil became our biggest customer... Things fell overboard, and we went and recovered them. Underwater burning. We went down inside these 30-inch conductor pipes. We would burn them and then they would pull the piling off. We could only do two of them and then we would run out of time. We could only stay so long on the bottom. We were doing that mostly for McDermott... McDermott was doing it for the oil companies.

*The early years of offshore oil and gas development were blessed by the relative absence of major hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. In the 30-year period from 1934 to 1964, only Hurricanes Flossy in 1956 and Audrey in 1957 seriously affected the Louisiana coast and provided a glimpse into how hurricanes might affect the growing industry (Pratt, 2004). During the 1960's, however, a series of hurricanes caused major changes in the industry and forced technological change in platform construction. The hurricanes of the 1960's – Hilda in 1964, Betsy in 1965, and Camille in 1969 – were also a major boon for the commercial diving industry. Oilfield divers and their companies saw a huge increase in activity as divers were called upon to repair structures and pipelines and get the oil fields back into operation. Some of the small, independent diving companies expanded their operations by purchasing more equipment and hiring more divers, giving new divers the chance to "break out" as full-fledged divers in record time. By this time, the largest construction companies, Brown and Root and J. Ray McDermott, had already established close associations with particular diving companies.*

*They acquired those companies when jobs were plentiful. First, McDermott purchased Dick Evans Divers. Then, in 1968, Brown and Root's parent company, Halliburton, purchased Taylor Diving. The large companies had the capital to support new innovations, such as saturation diving, and to expand their operations overseas. As the divers discuss below, some divers made the transition to the larger companies and stayed with them throughout most of their careers while others continued to freelance or worked for a succession of smaller companies.*

*Joe Sanford:* In [the 1960's] we had hurricanes. It was bad. It blew down platforms offshore. We worked out there for months. We put our first barge and tug to work during that period. [The hurricanes] blew the platforms down in the Gulf. The gas would be coming out of the wells. We had to go down and cap them off. Some would blow stuff off the platform. They'd call me and say send somebody out. We had six to eight divers that were as strong as I was in finding out what was wrong.



**Figure 6.8. Salvaging a Platform after a Hurricane, 1966.  
Photo Courtesy of Jim Burgess, OOGHP.**

*Buddy Ayers:* Dick Evans was bought out by McDermott and he moved from his old shop over on Brown Avenue (in Harvey, Louisiana), couple blocks over and right off Peters Road. They built him a steel building and put some office space in it. In 1964 there was a storm that hit which gave us a little bit of work, which was Hilda. And then '65 they had Betsy, which was a really powerful storm that did a lot of damage and there was some more work. But Dick Evans, he was forced to sell out to McDermott. He didn't really want to sell his company, but he, in his words, one day said, "You know I didn't want to sell to them," he said, "They gave me no choice because if I didn't sell to them they were gonna start their own diving company." And since I guess probably about 80 percent of his work was from McDermott, he would have just been out in the cold. So they hired him on as the president of this subsidiary, which was called Dick Evans Professional Divers, a subsidiary of McDermott. He worked there for, I think, five years at a fixed salary and benefits and after his five years, he took off, went to another line of work.... Global Divers, that was something I left out of this story... I almost forgot this. Dick Evans started Global Divers. In fact, in those days you went out and you had your own gear and you were kind of like a separate company. You had a time book, ticket book that you wrote out each



day, put your tender there yourself, put location, description of work and you had it signed by whoever was in charge, McDermott, or he (Dick Evans) did work for other companies like Oilfield Maintenance, Ingram, and smaller companies. Well, when McDermott bought out Dick Evans, he (Dick) started Global Divers, so when you walked into that new facility that McDermott built for him, you walked in; that was the receptionist's desk that you faced and on the right, right on the right, was Dick Evans' door. And there was door over in the corner right past the receptionist's desk, you had to kind of squeeze by the desk. There was a little old sticker on there, one of those little plastic deals that had Global Divers. And we carried two time books with us, one of them had Global Divers on it and well, the other of course was Dick Evans.

*Paul Woodhall:* And after I come back [from the military in 1961], it was either go back to college or go to a trade school and my family was living in California at the time. So, I was afforded an opportunity to have the state pay for my retraining after my discharge and opted to go to a diving school rather than go back to college. So that started me down the road to commercial diving. In fact, the first little school of diving was on Jack London Square, just off Jack London Square in Oakland, [California]... Then after that training, we found the school had been notified by the Louisiana diving contractors that they would interview the top students from the school. So a number of us headed south to Louisiana, hitchhiked all the way and arrived in '64, and within a few months I had all my diving gear and a pick-up truck and all that kind of stuff. [I] was fortunate to break out kind of early, for a lot of guys spend a couple of years breaking out nowadays, which is a good thing, believe me. But in those days sometimes you could do it in three or six months. There were a couple of storms that came through with the resulting offshore damage, the biggest one being Betsy. So I was off and running and never went back to tending. So it makes it a little difficult when everything you learn is from the bottom up, but I survived it and I was a couple of years freelancing, freelance diver. In fact I worked for Global when the Dorés didn't own it. I worked for them along with Walter Daspit. And that's right when Dick Evans was bought out by J. Ray McDermott, and I went to work. In fact I was determined to go to work for Taylor Diving and Salvage or J. Ray McDermott because they were the big boys, and I thought there was more opportunity there for growth. And I was interested in overseas stuff as well so... I joined that organization (McDermott) in '67.

*Wayne Willet:* [I stayed] with McDermott 26 years... 'til I retired... [McDermott] had a lot more money, they built saturation systems. I got to do saturation diving with them and then they started hiring people from the Navy because the few civilians we had around running helium diving didn't know a hell of a lot about it. So they started getting retired people from the [Navy's] Experimental Diving Unit, and they did a hell of a good job. And us older guys in the oil patch had to teach them what we knew about the oil field and they taught us what they knew about the diving. Gas diving. Saturation diving... [We got trained to do saturation diving] by the company 'cause nobody had done it before except those Navy guys! Well, they had sat here in the Gulf before we did it with McDermott. The old Westinghouse rig, I don't know who owned it at that time, but I know it was built by Westinghouse, and Walt Daspit was one of the divers. I remember Carl Holder. They made saturation dives in I think '66. But we didn't have our first sat unit at McDermott until 1968... Saturation is made for working. You could go out and work four-hour shifts under the bell. Two divers go down and work four hours each, then come up and change out two more divers. Get more work done. A lot safer, more comfortable, you didn't have a stopwatch on your behind like you did with surface diving. That's the only way to go in deep

water. And then the Coast Guard regulations come out that 300 [feet] was the max surface diving depth allowed anyway, and that was only a half hour bottom time, so – bottom time started when you left surface – so if you had a bit of a job getting down there in the current or anything, you had no working time left.



**Figure 6.9. George Morrisey (left, back to camera) and Drew Michel of Taylor Diving on a Derrick Barge in the North Sea when the Entire Senior Management Was Sent on Location to Complete a Repair Job There, 1968. Photo Courtesy of Drew Michel, OOGHP.**

*Bill Fullerton:* I started in the diving industry around 1962. And I had been teaching and some friends of mine who I met in New Orleans who were divers got me a job as a tender, and one of the divers I tended was George “Dog” Taylor, who was an ex-Navy diver. And after that, I went to diving school in Oakland, California, and did a little diving on the coast—a little abalone diving—and came back here after about six months and got into the diving industry full-time. Fortunately, a hurricane—I forget the name of the hurricane—came through and they needed a lot of divers right away for inspection purposes, so that got me started. And, over the years I’ve done a lot of construction work offshore, a lot of salvage, in the Mississippi River at first, and then, then offshore pipelines. And I would say that 80 percent of the work of diving offshore has to do with pipelines – laying them and burying them under the mud line and bringing them to platforms – and production platforms... I had been working for, before that, for a different diving company: Sanford Brothers in Morgan City, and Norman Knudson Diving in Morgan City, and S & H Diving in Morgan City. S & H was run by Jack Smith, and a lot of companies, well, the Dick Evans [Divers], which they became McDermott Divers later on... I was working for some divers—some old Navy divers—from the Sanford Brothers in Morgan City. The first dive I made was kinda scary. It was really hard for me to clear my ears and this little guy told me how to get my mask practically off and clear my ears... and it was at night. I couldn’t see anything, no light, no nothing ... I worked very briefly as a tender and then a hurricane hit, and

so they were calling around and needed divers. Norman Knudson needed divers, and he asked me how long I'd been diving, and I lied. But I went out and got the job done, so then I was on my way. I told him I'd been diving two years. But I'd been around long enough and had done enough to know I could do, could've done that work... inspecting platforms for damage and taking measurements. And they sent those measurements to Houston, for their engineers, and I took pictures, too. 'Cause there were some cracks, I don't know whether they were from the hurricane or not, but there were cracks in this platform. Definitely had to be repaired or removed. That was a strange time, too. It's the first time I ever came face-to-face with a big shark. But the shark was sleeping or something. I'd pulled myself up on the platform on the cross-member and saw this shark, and it was just staying in one spot. Up until then, everybody said that sharks were on the move all the time.

## **6.6. Other Oilfield-Related Businesses and Operations**

*As the offshore oil field grew and developed, many types of specialized businesses were formed to meet the needs of the companies and their workers. For example, trucking companies were organized to handle large and irregular sized equipment, pipes, and machinery. Those who could quickly get spare parts to rigs were rewarded for their service since the rigs were charging thousands of dollars per day for downtime. A special owner-operator lease system was brought to the oil field by Sammy Broussard in nearby New Iberia and was quickly adopted throughout the region (Austin and McGuire, 2002; Gardner, 2002). Although the move offshore had eliminated the need to dredge canals to create passageways for rigs, oil and gas still had to be brought to shore via pipelines, and dredging companies were hired to cut pipeline canals through the wetlands. As the men describe below, the expansion of the offshore industry opened up new opportunities for those with ambition and ideas, aided of course by the social, economic, and political capital they could access.*

*Arthur Lee:* [I moved to Houma] in September of 1951... And then I was general manager of the [Patterson] Truck Line and the mud and chemical company in 1953. And, of course, we were in business to haul oilfield pipe and oilfield machinery. And then we had the drilling muds and chemicals in the mud and chemical business. And we served the land and inland water rigs. We never did get involved in the offshore... We maintained our pipeyards. As the pipe would come in, we'd store the pipe for the different customers and then they'd call us to haul it out of their yard to the drilling rigs or to another location. Wherever they wanted. So we had men operating the yards. And then in 1961, we ended up in Morgan City with the largest stock of oilfield pipe in the world. We had over 200 tons on 200 acres or more in Morgan City. And just handling that pipe on the barges, we had the docks on the water which we bulkheaded and we'd load the pipe on these big offshore barges, or inland barges. Wherever the pipe material was going from our dock. ... Eddie Kyle—see he was a competitor over there in the mud and chemical company, and his office was right next to ours on the Berwick Side – I guess he saw Patterson doing pretty well with the pipe yards, so he started that too. He was in competition with us when we bought him out... Just handling the stuff off of the Morgan City yard was over a half a million a month. ... We had a little yard in Morgan City before [1960], but all the steel mills came down and wanted us to handle their pipe, wanted to come on our yard. U.S. Steel and Bethlehem [Steel], all of them. We had every company that used oilfield pipe, and every mill that made oilfield pipe stored in our yard. We maintained the inventories coming in, maintained the inventories going

out. And we billed them every time we touched it. So we did real good in that. But it was really something. I mean, it was a lot of work. We worked long hours. I asked Patterson one time to put me on by the hour. He said, "You're on." I said, "Well, what's my hours?" He says. "They are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." Boy, we had some real good people working for us. So it wasn't all that bad, when you had good people working, handling a lot of the details and everything. We'd have those big cranes, and we had some good operators. And we had some good equipment. And we had a big spur on they yard where the pipe would come in by rail. We used to get it in those big cargo barges and also the big rail cars that used to come in the yard. We'd unload it and store it on the rigs. We had every rack on the pipe yards numbered. And we'd total the pipe by feet, with a tape. Every joint was measured so we knew how much footage we had so when they called they knew what he had on the yard and what they needed on the rig, and where they needed it. It [would] be either loaded out on offshore vessels or hauled to the inland rigs. And then loaded out on barges for the inland water rigs. ... U.S. Steel had 56 different types of pipe sizes, weights, and grades. Just that one company. So it was all sizes. Everything was. And, of course, everybody was trying to perfect the equipment that goes on the rig to drill. So it was ever changing all the time, of what we were hauling and everything. Of course, when you haul pipe – the longest piece of pipe that we hauled was around 140 to [1]45 feet. And the tubing which you would haul whenever they produced the well was about 30 feet length. They had regulated those because the sub-structures and stuff that they had on the rig when they pulled it up into the derrick, put it in the hole, they were limited. So the standard size of the oil field pipe was 30 feet on the tubing. ... We had some great guys working for us back in those days. And when we started out, back in this part of the country most of the drivers and the helpers, they couldn't read or write. So we had that to contend with. 'Course they all needed work just like we did. And we knew how to get along with them.



**Figure 6.10. Patterson Truck Line Operation in Morgan City, 1957. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Earl King:* [The oil companies] all had their own trucks at one time. My uncles worked at Texaco as truck drivers. And then, as more companies came in, originally in Houma, there was Superior Oil Company, Unocal, and Texaco... Texaco didn't get rid of absolutely all of their trucks until the late, late '50's. '58, '59, '60, up in there. They didn't own any more trucks and they contracted everything... Sammy Broussard out in New Iberia, his dad was Senator Sam

Broussard... That's who we started off with. We were there a couple of years and then we secured our own operating rights. But in those days operating rights were very hard to get. And you just didn't apply to the [Louisiana Public Service] Commission. You had to buy one already in existence because it was so much political influence up there from the 20 or 25 people in the state who had these authorities that you had to prove convenience or necessity. And when you got out there, there was just no proving, because you had 21, 25 guys saying, "Oh, we serve there. Oh, we serve there," of them serving up big political contributions to those public service commissioners. So when I went into business, I had to kind of apprentice with Sam Broussard... All the guys that were trucking, back then, it was an old boys network, and they were all people with influence and money, and senators, and this and that and the other. And in those days, there was a lot of politics with these oil companies. It isn't that way anymore. You enjoyed a great relationship with some of these oil companies... My father was on the State Mineral Board for a while... When I came to town, that was in '67, the oilfield trucking was dominated by three carriers. Patterson, who's no longer in business, sold out to J. H. Walker. But [when] they sold out, they were just a shadow of the company they used to be. Howard [is] no longer in business. But, Texaco germinated Howard in the New Iberia - Ivanhoe District. And I know that for a fact, in '67, it was dominated by Sam Broussard, Howard, and Patterson. And that's all you saw in the road in South Louisiana. Service Truckline was a small one compared to these. And Sam Broussard is the first one that originated the lease operator concept. He brought that to the oil patch. Because it was fought for a while. Everybody else owned their trucks. Patterson owned all their own trucks. Every one of them. And all the rest of them did. So, then, Howard did. But, Sam [Broussard] brought in the concept of operators. Now it was in place across the country in [some of the] other commodities and other areas of transportation. But that was the inception of it, or the germinating of it, the operator concept [here]. He's the first one that brought that to the oil patch, Sam Broussard Trucking in New Iberia, Louisiana.

*Wallace Carline:* I worked for my brother who was an oilfield contractor until 1961 and at that time I went into business for myself, oilfield construction. And I have been here ever since. Started from the mostly swamps, Atchafalaya Basin, mostly water-related, some high land work, but mostly water-related work. In I guess [1965] we started offshore work and offshore in shallow waters, laying pipe, shallow locations putting the foundations for the drill barges. And once the well was completed, they'd drill the well and then we'd lay the pipeline to it and build the production facilities, build the platform, drive the pilings. At that time, we were using pilings to set the rigs on because you didn't have the big floaters. You wasn't in the deep enough water. You were in intermediate, so we'd drive, then, woodpiles. Then we got to the point where the water was a little deeper, for production platforms we were using 54-inch concrete piling. And then it got a little deeper, then of course they went to the fabricated jackets and from there they moved on out to the deeper water. So as things progressed, we just went a little deeper with a little different type of equipment, from derrick barges to pipe lay barges.



**Figure 6.11. Intercoastal Shipyard Dredge Barge Digging Canal, 1956. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*Earl Hebert:* My mother ran a grocery store and my dad had a dry cleaning establishment and I was so busy delivering clothes and groceries, I didn't think about a career. I didn't start to think about that until my four years in the Marine Corps and I made up my mind I didn't want to work outside. I didn't care what I did, I didn't want to be a welder or I didn't want to work outside. I had spent enough time outside... I came home, worked at Tri-City Motors selling cars for about a year. I went to work for the town of Berwick... [for] Berwick Lumber Company... as the Division Manager for Prudential Insurance Company, and then joined this organization [Diamond Construction Company] in 1969. [At the time] it was primarily a dredging operation. Also did some pile-driving, some bulk-heading work, just a general oilfield contractor. [I was the] office manager [and had] accounting responsibilities, the safety responsibilities. In those days it wasn't departmentalized so an Office Manager did what nobody else wanted to do. You had to do those things to make it work... The big problem when I started here was the lack of transportation facilities, the limited infrastructure. I lived in Berwick, worked in Amelia and it would take me an hour to two hours to get home in the evening because that was before the second bridge was built... It was just the beginning of this type of work, the surge that developed. We had about three dredges and a couple of self-propelled utility vessels and we kept 'em working all the time... The oil companies in those days were exploring in the swamps and marshes and the dredge would dig an access canal to the site where the rig would be set, where it would be put in a firm location. We would dig a canal and we would dig a bigger box area, the canal, so that the thing could access it and then we would set it in a larger area so that you would have access on the perimeter of it... We drove pilings, we drove concrete piles; that was done in 1969. We drove concrete piles and we would set a concrete deck and we would put the production facilities on top of it. We also drove pilings in what they called at that time, clusters. We would drive eight or ten pilings together so we would have place to firmly fasten the barges that came to service the rigs.

*Billye Grice:* My husband and I went to Louisiana Tech, and he finished at Louisiana Tech and went to work for Phillips [Oil Company]... He had worked in a studio at Tech and had helped the photography professor with her classes and so forth, so he was interested in photography and did a lot of work for the yearbook. And so when he came down here, he still had his cameras, and after a few months he would take his camera offshore and make pictures and then he set up a little dark room – just black and white – and he would include photographs in his reports. So as the word got around, then the other companies would ask him, “On your time off, on the weekend, if I set up a boat,” – ‘cause at that time, they didn’t have that many planes or certainly no helicopters – “would you go out to such and such a rig and make some pictures for the company?” So he started just doing this on the side, ‘cause that’s what he liked to do, his hobby. And he often said it was really wonderful that he had a job that was his hobby also. So it really wasn’t work, it was his hobby. So then, after he did this for a while and there was more money coming in from the photography than there was from engineering, then he and Phillips parted company. So, he just decided, “Well, I guess this is it. I’ll stay here and make pictures.” And of course, with his engineering background, he knew what the companies needed and some of their rules and regulations and safety situations, that when he took pictures he knew what he was doing. And then there was no one in this area that would do this, that had this service. There were no other photographers at the time doing it. And so he would go offshore or if there were accidents [then] he would make pictures for them and, of course, have to go to court if he witnessed it and so forth. And then he decided, “Well, people need cameras. They keep asking me where can I get such and such a camera.” And they needed a place for them to pick up their pictures, and so we just found a little building downtown and rented a little building.

## **6.7. Company Loyalty**

*During the 1950’s and 1960’s, a distinguishing feature of the oil and gas industry was the fierce company loyalty of many of its employees. Workers were loyal to their companies, occupations, and the industry as a whole. Their loyalty was offered in exchange for job security, bonuses, and other incentives. It also was nurtured by a sense of gratitude and was enforced by company policies that discouraged purchasing products from or communicating with employees of other companies.*

*Jerry Cunningham:* In those days you were a company man through and through. My dad would not buy anything but Shell tires, Shell batteries, Shell gasoline. He would drive forty miles to buy a tank of Shell gasoline rather than put Texaco or something in his tank. Strictly Shell man. One hundred percent... They took care of their employees. Number one was this Providence fund. That was kind of a profit-sharing incentive. Number two was that if things slowed down, your major companies then, not the contractors like I’m talking about with the welders and all, but your major companies always gave you a job. Like, when I broke my hand, even though I was a cook’s helper, I was still working. Even though I couldn’t work on the back deck anymore tying up charges, I was still working. And they took care of you then. If you got injured, you knew you was going to be taken care of. With the major companies, and even some of the minors. So, there was a lot of loyalty to the companies then.

*Bill Wilson:* I had a good happy life with Texaco, and I accomplished way more than I ever thought I would. And I had some help, a lot of help. But I will say this, we had a win-win

situation. I worked hard every day I worked for Texaco and I never ran my company down even though I didn't always agree with what was going on. I had a devout loyalty. I would never even think about buying a gallon of gas from another. I never had more than but one credit card, a Texaco credit card, and after I got up into management for Texaco and I was flying on the Company airplanes from here to there and saw them putting fuel in at other...it nearly killed me. I even jumped on the pilot about pulling into Exxon at the airports when we would stop, 'cause we had an East Coast operation drilling off the East Coast. And I had an operation up there, and I used to fly up there occasionally to go check on my personnel up out of Davisville, Rhode Island and see them pull in. They had credit cards for every brand of fuel and they just stopped at the closest one, and here I wouldn't dare. [I would tell] my wife or kids, "You don't ever buy any gasoline, but Texaco gasoline. You don't put any oil in those cars but Texaco." And then, I guess I was naïve. You know, I call it loyalty, and that was not just me. I know many other people that were the same way. It was that way.

*Earl King:* I can remember in those days also, because we had a Texaco station back in Houma, a Texaco gasoline station. We had one here in Morgan City for a while, too. In those days, those Texaco people had to buy Texaco products. You could get turned in. If somebody saw that a Texaco employee bought – I'm telling you what I know now – in Houma, when my daddy had that Texaco station, if you were a Texaco employee, you could get turned in for buying gas somewhere else. I'm just telling you what I know. And I remember when we first came to town here, Texaco, the drilling department used to get a list from the sales clerk from the sales department every month showing who bought products and how much, how many dollars. So, they could use this as a tool, the drilling department could use it as a tool to help people that weren't buying the products. Yeah, I can remember that. That's in my time.



## 6.8. Workforce Changes

*The passage of federal Civil Rights legislation, together with the rapidly expanding demand for laborers, began to open the doors of many companies in the oil and gas industry to blacks and Native Americans. Although work on offshore platforms was still largely unavailable to non-whites well into the 1960's, as increasing numbers of white workers moved to lucrative offshore jobs they freed up positions in onshore fields, fabrication yards, and service companies. Resistance to integration was high; even blacks with college degrees were initially hired only as laborers. Also, even during these years of growth, workers still contended with downturns and layoffs. Nevertheless, the lure of good money and technological innovation kept many staying within or returning to the industry. In the paragraphs below, some of the black pioneers and their wives describe their entry into the industry.*

*Ira Robertson:* I started driving trucks for United ... Homes. We delivered a whole lotta houses all up in Vacherie, Gonzales, all in Thibodaux area, Houma, Gibson, all up in that Morgan City area... Nobody was makin' any money in Shreveport. We were only makin' about 75 cents an hour back in them days, back in the '50's, because it was hard for a black person [to] get a good job back in those days. So we decide we was gonna move to Morgan City to her family because her brother (Caleb Henderson) was the superintendent at McDermott. So, we called him on the phone and I talked to him. He told me just pack up and come on to Morgan City. So I did. So I came to Morgan City, was the last day in December. And I started to work at McDermott in 1960... Then I got laid off at McDermott because of some bad understanding with my supervisor because he had me to move him from Houston back to Thibodaux, so I left McDermott and went to work for Avondale Shipyard and their fabrication department that was in Bayou Black area. And I started to work for them in December of 1963. And I worked for them up until 1991, I believe, '91 or '92 I believe I retired. But the reason that I was so successful in getting good jobs down in this area on account of Caleb [Henderson]. Caleb was the rigging superintendent at McDermott. He did all of the loadin' and unloadin' all of the jackets and decks and all that kind of stuff like that. Pilings, you know, those big pilings, these big legs for the jackets that will drill out in the oilfield work. So he was the big man. They called him Yellow Hat... because he wore-well he had a yellow hard hat. He was the king pin out there in that area, during that time, because he worked under Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell was the CEO at that time over McDermott, that be the shipyard and fabricator side. So he was the big wheel, so he put Caleb in charge of the loadin' out of the jackets and the decks. Well, that was a high position for a black man during that time. And the only two black mans in this area was Fred Williams at Avondale in New Orleans. He was a big riggin' superintendent. So those [were the] only two big black people during that time in this position over a large company. Back in those days, I'm gonna be honest with you, they say that's been a white man's job. Well I figure if you're qualified to do the job, then, hey, you go for it. So Caleb, he went for it and he was successful in it until Mr. Campbell died.

*Dolores Henderson:* [With my husband, Caleb, working at McDermott], we were able to do things to elevate our economic status, and just do more things in the community. 'Cause one of things I can remember so well in particular, when he died, the number of people who came and called and said that he had helped 'em in getting jobs. And he was very helpful with a lot of the teachers – teachers didn't make very much money – and in the summers, different teachers

would come and he would hire them for those few months. Several of them have done VERY well.

*Roussell Ruffin:* The Federal Government had to make 'em hire black people, let black people operate the machinery and all that. After the Civil Rights Law passed. Like Patterson Truck Line, they used to have a driver trainee program, and so if I wanted to drive for Patterson Truck Line, I had to ride with a skilled truck driver for maybe 30 days, but they had all white drivers 'cause they said, "No nigger's going to ride this truck with me." Well, the Federal Government got on them so that's when they started. They had a couple of black fellows that were skilled, and they let them teach the black people. The white boys had it, they were something else. That's the way they was. They had it under control because they all said they were gonna walk off if they hired black, but after the Federal Government got on 'em and said, "You gotta hire 'em," McDermott had to hire some black people for 'em, on the crane and dozers and stuff like that. It was a hard pill to swallow, but they did it. The welders at McDermott, back in the '60's, "Okay, you hire a black packer," they said, "You can hire him, but we are not gonna weld it off." You have the fitter, you want to put something together. Okay, the fitter will cut the iron and then they'll throw a jacket together and then the head welder has got to come behind and finish the job for 'em. They said, "We are not gonna weld it off. If they are packing, we are not gonna weld it." And they all stuck together, too. That s--- went on for about 10 years, man, until they put the pressure on 'em... So they wouldn't hire you even though you were good, you knew what you were doing, you had gone to school for it, but that's the way they were... But I got [a job with] Brown and Root, and there were about six people from Mississippi worked out there and god darned, they were the best friends I ever had from around Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Tupelo, Mississippi. They were white people.



**Figure 6.12. McDermott Workers, Early 1960's. Photo Courtesy of Dolores Henderson, OOGHP.**

*Pierre Jackson:* I went into the oil patch for a major company, which was Texaco, in 1967, which I was kind-of old... I started right here at Bateman Lake Plant, which at that time it was a oil plant. And we had boilers, we had compressors, and then we went into the distillation area of it. In other words, you'd work your way from one to the other. You had to have seniority when

you went on. It was a union job ... These guys was union, part of them. Everybody wasn't union, but it was union recognized. And so I started off as a roustabout; roustabout does anything. It's just another title for laborer is a roustabout. I started off there and then I began to get my training as a boilerman, then I went to a compressor area and trained in that area, then I trained in distillation. ... I met some good guys, worked with a lot of fellas, a lot of old timers, that really showed me the ropes in the oil field. Because back then, like I said, they wasn't hiring blacks in the oil field. It was back in the '60's, like I said, '67, round then, they began to bring in a few... [I was] one of the first ones that I know of in this general vicinity that bust out out there. ... You know why I can't say I had difficulties? Because growing up in this area, I knew most everybody that worked out there. Except they had some guys that was from the Erath plant that was living down here and working out here. And those that wasn't, they were commuting back on the other side of New Iberia. ... But some of the old guys like old man Bill Williams, I worked under him. He was my supervisor, which was a good supervisor. ... As for me being slight handed or nobody wanted to show me, I could never say that. They all showed me. In other words, they would show me what I had to do, take numbers, take readings, what in particular would give me problems, and they all treated me good. When I hired out out there, I hired out underneath Mr. Andy Boudreaux, and I knew Mr. Andy Boudreaux. I was recommended to him through Ted Newport... So he told me, he said, "Pierre, fill this application, go to Dr. Broussard, take your physical." He said, "He's fair – he's a fair doctor." In other words, that was telling me right then that everything was – in other words, if I hadn't passed the physical, everything would have been – to me, that's the way I accepted it. It wouldn't have been the doctor's fault... So, like I say, when I got out there, I was surprised. I looked at all the water, and then the guys was telling me, we got some snakes out here. I said, "Oh, lord." Me and snakes don't get along even though I was born and raised in this area. And they gave me my orders that morning. I went on, [they] told me what time the whistles blow and what time we had a coffee break in the morning – nine o'clock. He said the first whistle blows at three o'clock in the afternoon. That means to pick up your tools, not just knock off. But I can understand. They looked for a day's work for an honest pay. I didn't go out there as a hothead that knew everything. ... See, I had left out of the appliance repairman. After I had come out of the service, I did appliance repairman work for seven years. Then I went to work in the shipyard after the appliance store shut down. ... [I worked for] Seward Seacraft, which is right up the road. It's an old Cameron Iron Works building. ... [I did] electrical work. I repaired welding machines. When a welder had trouble, then I repaired the machines so he wouldn't be laid up too long. When I told them I was leaving, I was making two thirty-five, I think, and Texaco was paying something like three dollars an hour ... They offered me another quarter more, but I told Wayne, I said, "Wayne, I can't turn down this. They told me the oil field you got good benefits, you got this." ... I went on out in the oil field. The oil field was good to me. I had some bad days, I had some good days...

*Bob Long:* 'Bout 1960, '61, I was an electrician. The most [I] went out there [and] stayed was five days. See we went out there and did contract work for the company and it wasn't bad. But they didn't have anywhere for us to stay. For me anyway. I tell you. There was a company named B.R. Barley Gas. It is still here. And one of their rigs caught on fire. And they brought it in and I worked on it while it was in, was going to put it back on the site. And it still had some work to be done. All white guys. My boss, Robert Dupre, he asked the superintendent on the yard to send me. He say, "I want you to send Bob out there." The guy told him, "No." I thought it was a horrible thing – because I was black. My boss said, "Look, I'll let him work for nothing.

You don't have to pay him." Still said, "No." Years later I realize why the man did it. It was because I was going to be the only black out there. He was protecting my life. Because anything could have happened. I heard stories about guys working offshore thrown overboard and all that. So, he just wouldn't let me go. And it was after that that I realized, I really became a fully developed man. I said, "You know what? The man was looking out for me." See, my boss wanted me to go to get this experience because he thought a lot of me. He knew I could do work. He said, "If the work don't come up to par, you don't have to do it."... Because I was hired by one of these rail companies. I went out there. I was on a Shell rig. White guy come back and he said, "Man, you finish high school?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You see, I wish I did." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I could get a better job. Hired on the lake." He said, "Now when I go back there I have got to go and work on the yard." But I had a high school education. And all I could do was go out there... [A lot of blacks were working on the mud barges.] When the well get ready to blow, see they put that mud in there. Carry a sack and put the mud man in. The guy would load barges of them, would go out there in the bad weather, rain. And they had no sleeping quarters. They had no way [to go inside]. They are gone for four or five days out there. And now if a storm hit, they still on one of them barges asleep at night... No sleeping quarters. They wouldn't let them on the boat... In the '60's, it got better. They started hiring the blacks. I had a friend, he's dead. There was two of them, the first black guys that worked on an oil rig. They were roughnecks, one of the first blacks who worked in the Gulf. He was working on what they call a graphing boat. They go out and find where the oil was. They'd survey it. They come back and let you know. And they were cooks.

*White men, too, recalled how the companies and workers responded to the workforce changes. These changes were only some of the many effects of significant growth in the industry at the time. They were highly visible, though, and became the target of the frustration and anger of some of the other workers.*

*Bill Williams:* We hired one black boy, was raised in Berwick, used to shine shoes. And everybody knew him around the barber shop... He was the first one. I guess we must have hired him 'bout the time we hired some more people on that cryogenic plant... He was a good hand. He was head operator. It was after I left, but they brought him on up, on the seniority. He got to be head operator and shift foreman... And he had built a home out there in Syracuseville, leaning out over Morgan City... I don't guess he got the big head after he moved up a little bit, stayed pretty humble and do anything in the world for you. Good worker.

*John Ryan:* Anyway, they called me in and said ... they wanted me to move back in this area here. And of course, the way it turned out, that's when I threatened to quit, after six months, because I was working seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and I wasn't getting no help ... and I was doing all the completion work. Oh, they were killing me, and I had a wife and two children... Well, they wanted me to take some time off, and of course, I had some other folks that was saying, "Don't quit a job until you've got a job," so I knew I had some work... Well, they wanted me to go West Delta 30, 'cause I was working 7 and 7. So that's where I ended up at West Delta 30, and they were in cahoots there with Humble. It was kinda a partnership deal. Humble operated a part-Shell and part-Humble. And we operated the 100 percent Shell part, which was a real good field. ... They were directional drilling those wells. ... I guess I went down there in '62, and I stayed down there in '63 and '64, and then they were having difficulties

out here, out of Morgan City, and they called me and asked me if I'd come back over here. They were having all kinds of personnel problems. They were starting to get minorities and all that. ... These New Orleans blacks wouldn't have anything to do with the New Iberia, Loreauville, Opelousas, back up there. If you wasn't from New Orleans, ... they made fun of them. ... There wasn't any blacks when I first come. We were having some problems there [before they started hiring blacks], between the people and the supervisor. ... One of the biggest problems we had was the guys working offshore, and their women was at home.

*Resistance to formalization of rules regarding hiring of workers reflected concerns that went beyond race. Especially in extremely dangerous sectors such as drilling and diving, workers had to rely on one another to ensure everyone's safety. Dickie Written talks about the importance of strong bonds of trust and familiarity among workers on the drilling rig and how changes in the workforce were opposed.*

*Dickie Written:* They had to be brothers of the blood because, I mean, you have to know the guy that you are working with. I have known people who were working on a rig and one member of the crew did not show up, for one reason or another, and they brought a new man in – they would not work with him. They would not work with him because the work that they were doing is so highly coordinated and so dangerous that if you get one guy out of the crew that is out of sync, he could cripple or kill somebody. Maybe more than one or two. So, everybody there, when you went to work on a drilling rig into a crew, you tended to stay with that crew, even if one of them quit, you all will quit and went to work at another rig. You did not change crews because it was too dangerous. The work was just too dangerous and too life threatening to change like that because the safeguards were not there that they have today. The equipment that they have today was not there then, and it was just pretty much up to the individual. You take care of yourself. You know, this is the job you have to do, now get it done the best way you know how. And if you did not have a coordinated crew to get it done, you had a problem.

*Many oilfield jobs required little formal education; in fact, having a college degree could be a hindrance to finding work. At the same time, because of the high pay rates, offshore work continued to provide lucrative summer employment for college students and some of the best paying jobs around. In the following paragraphs, both men and women discuss their experiences and other workers' attitudes toward college graduates.*

*Logan Fromenthal:* I do not have a degree. I attended USL on a football scholarship and after two years, I decided to go to work. So, I went to work. But back in those days, a degree really was not that necessary to find a good job, especially with an oil company, and Shell had the greatest reputation as far as what they were all about and so, it was an honor to work for them... As a laborer, you did all the work that everybody else did not want to do anyway, all the general maintenance type work and helping gaugers and that type thing... As a laborer, [it was] really overwhelming for a 19 year old kid to work away from home, and really [it was] the first time that I had been away from home. And you are working 7 days offshore in the Gulf. Then, at the end of the 7 days, you would come home. I think it was basically being associated with a lot of older people. You know, some people were very helpful, some people were not very helpful. What the reasons were, I really do not know, but it was nothing personal with me. That was their character and personality. If you worked offshore, the public perception was you were this big

tough guy. And so, that is what the offshore peoples' reputation was at one time. Big, tough, strong people – this type thing. And so, that was an environment that I was not used to. And so, I found that because I was at the USL – University of Southwestern Louisiana – and I was on a football scholarship, I was as big if not bigger than some of these guys out there and I was physically as tough as they were. Maybe not mentally as tough, but I found that they would work on you mentally. And so, that was an experience and so, it was a challenge, and I was determined to get along with everyone there – the guys who treated us kids, if you will, nicely, and even the ones that were kind of tough on you. So, I was determined to make those guys like me. And I was successful. I got along well with all of them, and I think one of the reasons I did is because whatever they asked me to do. Well, actually, not asked, but whatever they told me to do, I would do it and I would do it with a good attitude.

*Bill Fullerton:* I met a few people who were college graduates, but usually you would never admit it when you worked offshore. You'd never admit you had any education at all. They wouldn't let anybody know that, they might not hire you. Later, maybe, later after you got to know them, after they know you, it's okay. Suppose you can do the work, and they enjoy your company, maybe I'd have become friends with 'em. But at first you definitely don't act like you have graduated from high school, much less anywhere else. A lot of 'em didn't. You know, they quit and go to work and some of 'em go in the Navy and come out and if they were successful, then... I don't know why that is, but most people I became friends [with] that didn't matter to them... You do not mention that [college education]. I didn't put that on any of my applications whenever I made out an application. I didn't put that down. Well, I had learned—went out one time when I got out of the Army, I roughnecked. A guy told me he wasn't gonna hire me because I had too much education. And well, he was right in a way, because I was gonna go back and I'd only had one year of college at that point. But, he was right, I just wanted to work for a few months and then go back, and then an injury made me think about it even stronger.

*Peggy Michel:* So, I started looking for a job, and I had recently graduated from college. My degree was not one that was something that would be real marketable anyway. But I had a degree in art history. But I had a degree, so usually that was not something that was real common at the time for women, 'cause this was in – I graduated from college in '65 – and this was right, shortly after. And so I started looking for a job and I could not find a job. I went knocking on doors everywhere and finally I realized that the reason I couldn't find a job is because I was overqualified, not because I had experience but because I had education. And actually I was more educated than the people that were interviewing me. And, 'cause it just was not an engineering type of environment. So finally, I just changed my resume to indicate that I had kind off stopped off at college a day or two. But that was pretty much it. And I went to apply for a job and then I didn't really have any problem finding a job then. And basically, at that point, I was looking for a secretarial job. And my mother had the good sense to tell me when I was in high school that you never know what your future life is going to [bring]. But I was really excited because [in] my job the title that I had was personnel manager, and so I was really excited. I thought, "Well, you know, this is all right!" And the company that I went to work for was named Twenty Grand. And it was a boat company. It's since been bought, I think first by Zapata and then by Tidewater. But for anybody that's familiar with the industry at all, the vessels were tugboats, offshore tugs. And so the first day at work, I'm all excited and I get my first applicant in to interview and I find out what my job really is, is to fill out applications for people that can't

read and write it. And so needless to say, it broke my bubble, but I continued working there. Actually I worked there for quite awhile, until we moved to... we actually ended up moving to New Orleans. But I settled down. It was really a pretty exciting job, just that it was all new and everything about it was a little rough and tough. That wasn't me, but I must have been born for that because my edges roughened up real quickly. Upset my mom, but I was happy with it.

## 6.9. Community Impacts

*The offshore industry's impacts spread as it grew into a dominant feature of the landscape of Morgan City and the surrounding communities. Its impacts included both visible effects, such as traffic on roads, and invisible ones, such as the need for a specialized workforce. The petroleum and oilfield service companies required skilled workers, and Morgan City and St. Mary Parish developed training programs to meet those needs. In 1959, the Gulf Area Vocational-Technical School in Abbeville opened a branch in Morgan City. In 1961, the school acquired a surplus cargo vessel that had been built in 1943 for the U.S. Army to use for its nautical training program (American Vocational Journal, 1961). The school moved to several locations during its early years until it found a permanent home on property donated by the Young family in 1965. The curriculum of the school was directly tied to the petroleum industry, with specialized programs in welding, diesel mechanics, and nautical services being examples of training created to meet the needs of local businesses. Dewey Wilson was one of the first instructors.*



**Figure 6.13. Looking West on Brashear Avenue toward the Road to the Highway 90 Bridge, 1964. Photo Courtesy of the Daily Review, Morgan City Archives.**

*Dewey Wilson:* I got involved with the school in 1960 and we were teaching school in an old abandoned baker shop. I was teaching upgrade for 100 tons [mariner's licenses] and they had what they call a 300 ton license, masters, and also able [bodied] seaman.<sup>8</sup> The Surface Property Utilization Board, with the help of the Chamber of Commerce in Morgan City here, acquired a small freighter. I went with him and we brought it back with a tug, and McDermott dry docked it for us free of charge and everything. Then the city of Morgan City built us a little dock and furnished us with water and electricity, and there was a lot of community effort in it. The little ship was DC current and Morgan City has AC current, so Kerr McGee got the electrician to rig us up some diodes to transfer it to DC so we could operate everything on the ship with that. At that time the high school put in a class they could take, navigation two hours a day, and it would get industrial arts credit. ... And I had high school boys from Morgan City, Patterson, and Berwick, and Sacred Heart, and at night I'd teach the extension classes for adults. ... And the high school boys did all the maintenance and we even had one little guy was working after hours at school as a shop welder, did diesel injection repairs, and he took all of 'em up and his owner let him repair our and the ship's injectors. ... They used to come down weekends. They really got into it. And then we let the high school boys name the ship and they named it the Pelican State. And we did those classes, oh, from '60 to almost '64.

*Housing shortages continued to be a problem throughout this period of industry expansion. While the era when companies provided housing for their workers had passed, McDermott helped get a new subdivision started by financing the construction of several houses and then later selling them to company employees. Due to lack of available dry land, a wetland was filled to create a place for the housing development. The following women talk about population growth and about finding and providing housing, sharing their perspectives as long-time residents, newcomers, and as those responsible for addressing community problems.*

*Wilma Subra:* Morgan City had the water access to offshore, and the service companies grew up to service the offshore. Labor camps came in to bring in all these questionable characters to take advantage of being able to go offshore and make big bucks and not have anybody check on who you are or what you are. And it just became a really bad social community because of all the influx of this type of people and it sort of almost lost its character, because before it was a nice fishing community. The Italians ran the grocery stores on every corner. You bought your groceries locally, you know. The people fished and brought in the fish. You always had fresh seafood. And it's not a very big community because there wasn't very much land that was high. I mean we lived on 8<sup>th</sup> Street. We were the last street. That was it. There was no street past us. Now they have filled in the marsh and all, but it's become a rough town. So it's really degraded the social fabric of the town... Before, you knew everyone. My mother gets up every morning and can tell you everyone's birthday in Morgan City that day, you know. It was just, it was a small, close-knit community where everyone took care of everyone and it lost that.

*Peggy Michel:* I was raised in California, in San Diego, and when I was in college, Drew and I met and got married and lived in San Diego for several years, but Drew just really wanted to

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<sup>8</sup> People working on vessels begin with paperwork registering them as a seaman, known as a Z card. From there, advances in position require time on the water and licenses. Licenses are for Able-Bodied Seaman (AB), Mate, Engineer, and Master (Captain). Licenses are also issued according to the size of the ship for which they are valid: 100 Ton, 300 Ton, 1600 Ton, Unlimited.



come back to Louisiana. He liked California, but he just never was happy really there. So [in 1966] we just packed up our cars and took off, headed for Louisiana. And we drove across Texas. And I remember when we got to Louisiana, the road narrowed, got bumpy, got lots of potholes and just as we passed across Texas and the very first thing I saw was a bar with a drunk driver pulling out, and I thought, “Oh, man! This is going to be- What kind of cultural change am I stepping into here?” And it really was. Well, actually when we first came here, Drew worked outside the diving industry. He worked in Mississippi at the Mississippi Test Facility [for NASA]... He was working on third stage of the rockets. And after a few months, we decided this was not really where we wanted to live, so we headed back. We just packed up all our stuff again in a U-Haul and headed back to say goodbye to his parents in Morgan City... and while we’re there, one of his friends really strongly encouraged him to interview with a [diving] company... He interviewed there and my heart was in my throat, ‘cause I’m going, you know I’m so excited about going back to San Diego, and then he takes this job in Louisiana. And it was during a serious boom in Morgan City, and this quaint little town was turning into what I would presume that a gold rush town would look like. People of less than reputable values and intentions were coming to town and it was really just not a nice place to live. Furthermore, it’s not only not a nice place to live, but we couldn’t find any place to live. And so, we moved in, he took the job, and I’m just, oh, my heart is just sinking. I just cannot believe it. And Morgan City was just such an ugly- You could see that underneath there had been a really nice, like a little fishing village. But it had just been covered up with these horrible pipe yards and – I guess what you could call ‘em, well, the service industry to the oil companies – and they had literally taken it over. But he was happy. He was really excited because he got a job, and since it was his job to support the family – I mean we had determined that somebody had to be in charge of supporting the family and one of us was going to have to take a back seat and of course, at that time, that was going to be me because the opportunities were just not available for women – so he took his job and he loved it, but we couldn’t even find a place to live. So we stayed a couple of weeks with his mom and dad and of course, as much as I love his mom and dad, it’s not something I wanted to do. We tried and tried to find someplace to live and we ended up having to buy a trailer and park in a trailer park. And I’m just going, “Oh my god!” All the years I spent in school and this is where we end up? But he loved his job and he promptly went offshore and he was happy with it.

*Lisa Topham Williams:* Things were picking up in the late ’60’s and McDermott needed more employees, but one of the problems in this area was a housing shortage. McDermott looked into it and McDermott actually helped start Lakeside Subdivision in Morgan City. McDermott built the first few houses and then put ‘em up for sale. We are not into the business of being a homebuilder, but at the time we saw a need for employees. We worked with the technical schools, trained employees, made affordable housing available to employees so that you could draw them here.

*Marcelle Ordogne:* Then the Zoning and Planning Commission, I was on that before... they didn’t have any zoning... You know what the main thing was – trailers – because a town like this has so many trailers and that was our main problem, people wanting to put trailers in their backyards. And well, people were poor, but we had to look at hardship cases to determine where they could put ‘em... We were desperate. People were coming in here. They had no place to stay. They had no place to live. Oh, gosh we were so thrilled with Lakeside and they filled it in, it was just marsh and they filled it in... They realized the need for housing. They realized it. Oh

we needed it desperately. We had people living in the motel for months and months trying to find a place to live. See, that was the only motel in town at that time.

*In addition to the filling of wetlands for housing developments and commercial operations, the oil and gas industry contributed to other major environmental changes in the wetlands along Louisiana's coast (Louisiana Wetland Protection Panel, 1987; Morton et al., 2005; Shinkle and Dokka, 2004; Streever, 2001; Turner, 1997).<sup>9</sup> To dredge canals for access to pipelines, specialty companies were formed to provide dredging services to the petroleum and service companies. Wallace Carline described how his company operated.*

*Wallace Carline:* I worked for my brother, who was an oilfield contractor, until 1961 and at that time I went into business for myself – oilfield construction – and I have been here ever since. Started from the mostly swamps, Atchafalaya Basin, water, mostly water related, some high land work, but mostly water related work... We had all departments. We had a pipeline department, we had a pile driving department and a dredging department. We would dredge your canal, build your platform, and lay your pipeline. We did everything but drill the oil for you... We'd dredge the canal, move your rig for you, set your rig up, and you drill the well, and we take you up and tow you wherever you want to go, and we build your pipe arm and get your production equipment on top, lay the pipeline to it, get a sales line wherever you are going to sell the product. We take you. You just put a stake out there, that's all we need.

*The work of many types of professionals was affected by the offshore industry; individuals such as doctors, social workers, and lawyers were forced to gain new knowledge and skills to respond to the needs of a specialized and ever-changing clientele. Dr. Walter Daniels describes in the following paragraphs how he ended up out in the Gulf of Mexico to treat a patient.*

*Walter Daniels:* When I completed medical school, I was looking for a place to practice and wanted to stay in southwest Louisiana. Morgan City was a boom town and the word was that they needed doctors, so I came here one day and spoke to the administrator of the hospital and asked him if any of the doctors here needed an associate. He gave me the name of two of them. And the one closest to the hospital was off that day, and I ended up going to see Dr. Brownell, who was the mayor of Morgan City at that time and whose family had been here for many, many years. He and I hit it off and so I came to Morgan City as his associate in 1961. ... His father came here from somewhere – I'm not sure where – and ended up purchasing a lot of swamp lands and was in the lumbering business for a while. Then he became a state representative and when he died, Dr. Brownell took over his tenure and then became the mayor of Morgan City for twenty something years and was very, very influential in the city and the surrounding areas during that time. When I first came to practice here, the oil field was a very important part of the economy of the area.... The practice, at that time, was remarkable in that the fees were so low when I got here. Dr. Brownell was independently wealthy and he was a very generous man, and when I got here, finding out what his fees were was quite a revelation. This was in 1961 and if you were a new patient, you came in to see the doctor for the first visit, it was three dollars and

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<sup>9</sup> Louisiana's coastal erosion has been attributed to many factors, including lack of new sediments due to levees on the Mississippi River, canal dredging in the wetlands, loss of marsh vegetation, and deep underground faulting. Petroleum exploration and production activities with the most direct impact on coastal land loss are dredging of pipelines for canals and pipelines and subsidence due to pumping of oil, gas, and produced water.

for every visit after that for the rest of your life it was two dollars. He delivered babies; it was seventy-five dollars to deliver a baby and fifteen dollars to do a circumcision if it was a male. We made a lot of house calls back then and that was part of the practice and every day we'd make house calls. I remember I made house calls to little boats that were on the bayou and to people all over town, but that was just part of the practice then. The other thing about the oil-related part of the practice is that the oil business back then, and still to a certain extent, was a good ol' boy network and so you patted the guy on the back and he patted you on the back. So the people in the oil business that were responsible for sending you the physicals and the industrial accidents, they had access to your ear and could call and say, "Well, I need you to see so-and-so or can I come in and see you today?" and of course, they got to come in fairly easily...



**Figure 6.14. Saturation Diving Spread on the Back of a Barge; Decompression Chamber in Center, Control Van on Top, Bell on Left, 1969. Photo Courtesy of Drew Michel, OOGHP.**

The offshore business at that time was just really a booming business and I had heard, when I first got here, about some of the doctors having to go offshore to take care of injured people who were on the rigs that couldn't be brought in or the untrained people out there were afraid to move them. And it was very shortly after I got here that Dr. Brownell told me one day, he said, "We need to go offshore. There's a guy who's been hurt in a diving accident and I'm going to be busy with the city today, so why don't you go?" And I said, "Ok, that sounds fine." We were to fly out in a helicopter. I had never been in a helicopter before and the guy that was injured offshore had been injured in a diving accident, and the small amount of history that I received at that time sounded like he may have had the bends or something like that. So, I was trying to recall the diving medicine I had learned in four years of medical school – it was about 30 minutes. And so I secured what material I thought we might need and met the company man at the helicopter. We flew out into the middle of the Gulf of Mexico where there was this barge sitting there. The 'copter landed on it and I got out and met the guy there who was in charge of the divers. Fortunately, he was very intelligent, [a] very well-versed individual who knew more diving medicine than I did, and I got off the helicopter and he led me over to a tank that they used to bring guys back up to atmospheric levels after they had been in diving. It was a long cylindrical tank that had portholes on each end of it where you could peek inside. He brought me over to it, and I looked in there and there was one guy who was sitting there, awake and alert-looking, and

the other guy was unconscious. He told me that the guy had something happen in 120 feet of water and he threw off his diving belt and surfaced; well, didn't surface but got up to about 60 feet where the second guy was working and second guy grabbed him and probably saved his life by holding him there for a little while until they surfaced slowly and then put him in the diving tank.

*Walter Daniels:* So I see these two guys in there and I'm thinking to myself, "How am I going to take care of that guy inside that bell? I don't want to go in there." And so the supervisor of divers asked me, he said, "Well, are you ready to go inside?" and I said "Well, no. I've never done that before." He said, "Well, you can't take care of him out here then, can you?" and I said, "Well, no, I guess not." So we went into the tank and the cylinder could be divided in two. There was a door in the center where they would shut off and keep one side compressed and decompress the other side and then compress it to make it equal and you'd go in. Well, I had a problem with clearing my middle ear and so when we got ready to go in the tank, I was thinking of this and one of the workers there handed me his knife. He said, "Now, we're going to be going down. It's going to be quite loud. You may feel some pressure in your ears, so if it's too bad, tap on the side of the tank and we'll stop and we'll talk to you." So, we got in there and they started compressing this thing. And the noise was horrendous, and the pressure on my ears was awful, and, after what seemed like an eternity, I tapped on the side of the bell and they stopped. And the guy says, "Well, doc, what's the matter?" I said, "Man, ya'll are going down too fast, this is killing me," and he said "Well, doc, we've only gone down 16 feet. We have another 70 feet to go!" So, by the time we got down to the depth, my hearing had been impaired tremendously. I had my stethoscope, my blood pressure cuff, and I needed my hearing. So, we got down there and the door opened and we went into the area where the two divers were and fortunately the diver who was awake had been a medic in the service. He knew how to take blood pressure and could listen to the heart in the chest and tell me what he heard. So, using him as my ears, we evaluated the guy. It was an interesting 48 hours that I spent out there following that because I used the expertise of a physician in Georgia, who we spoke to on the telephone maybe six or seven times a day, who was a diving expert. So I learned a lot of diving medicine, and we were very fortunate. We got the guy up to the surface conscious. He walked out of the diving chamber and I followed him up here to Morgan City, and things was well and happy ever after, I think.

*As jobs became more plentiful, some workers began to exercise greater autonomy in their decisions about where and when to work. Oil-related jobs were generally desired; they paid well, and people who stayed on frequently developed positive working relationships with their co-workers. However, many jobs took men away from their families and forced workers to make difficult decisions as they tried to balance their responsibilities to their companies with those to their families. Some women were working outside the home – in the oil industry they were generally confined to office and clerical work – but in many 1960's households men were still perceived to be the primary breadwinners. In the following paragraphs men and women describe the circumstances of oilfield work and how their decisions about work affected their families and communities.*

*Dickie Written:* I had been offered several promotions but the promotions that I had been offered, I was afraid that I would have to move and moving as I did when I was a youngster, I had had my fill of it and when I put down my roots, I said, I do not want to go anywhere

anymore. I am home. And I turned down a lot of promotions to go different places because of the moving thing. And then, they came along and they offered me the promotion to production foreman to take over the Weeks Island unit. And the only stipulation was that I would take the job if I did not have to move and they said, 'No, you do not have to move. You can stay right here at 301 Lagonda. You can live here and work in Weeks Island.' So, I said, "You've got yourself a deal."

*TR Naquin:* When I went to Tidex, when Pure sold out to Unocal, Union Oil, they moved everything to Houma. They told us one day we were going to be operating the office here and the next breath, they said, "Well, you are going to Houma." I said, "Well, that's not what you told us last week." "Well, that was last week. You are going to Houma if you want your job." So I went to Houma for about a week driving back and forth and whatever and I decided that it wasn't for me. I had my youngest daughter in school. She applied herself to be a cheerleader and so forth and she won out being a cheerleader. She would have had to start all over again over there and she said she wasn't about to do it. So to keep family in prospect, I just said I would change jobs and I found out that Tidex was looking for a hand. In fact I told this friend of mine that worked for Tidex, I said, "I am looking for a job." He said, "You have got to be kidding." I said, "No, I am not kidding." He said, "Well, you have nine years at Pure Oil." I said, "Yeah, I know. That don't mean nothing when your family is not happy." He said, "Well, don't look any further. I'll let you know tomorrow." So he talked to the man, Mr. Bill Bright, who was running, heading up for Tidex and he told Bill, he says, "T.R. is looking for a job." He said, "Tell him not to look any further." That's how I got to work for Tidex... After about three years with Tidex, a new transportation company started up, Offshore Logistics. And I resigned and went to work with Offshore Logistics to improve my salary.

*Doris Mullendore:* I graduated from high school here, Morgan City High School [in the early 1950's], and my first career job was a bookkeeper for a Buick Agency and about midway in my employment, he went and he purchased a [ ] boat, so that was my first start in getting involved in the offshore business. I was livin' in Amelia at the time. When he moved the business out there, my mama had just died and I just didn't feel like I wanted to spend 24 hours a day out there, so I went to work for some pipe and supply. Then after that I went to work for [ ] hardware. From there I got into the diving business with a friend of ours that had moved from Florida and moved from Houma in a rent house we had next door.

*Burt Ross:* Maybe this is up into the '60's, early '60's, mid '60's. [I was a] pumper and I was bumped back to roustabout and gettin' another job and just switching back and forth. I enjoyed it. I mean, we were working for the pay, but as far as the enjoyment of the job, [it] was good. I say I worked as a roustabout, but most of my time was working with the wireline. I had an old driller, Chester Arceneaux, that came into the production group. And he had a lot of seniority, and so he bidded on a wireline job and got it. And asked me to make sure that I would be his helper if he would get it. And so I told him, "Get it Chester, and I'll, I'll help you, show you what I know about that wireline." And then he did it, and we did it. And he was a good man... Your wells make paraffin and you have to periodically what they call scrape that paraffin out for it to flow. Also you have storm chokes. You have to go down there and pull these storm chokes out, clean your well, reset your storm choke, and go from there... But wireline is a big part of the oil field, period... [I worked as a production technician] two years, say, then I was an assistant

foreman. I enjoyed [the responsibility]. You know, when you are working in a group there will be always people that stay on the fringe, you know? We are doing this. Go get that. But I was one that would always [ask], “Hey, what are we doing? What’s next?” And then once I got the picture what we were doing then I could contribute. Someone had to tell me what to do. That’s just a...that started a work philosophy... In ’72, I can remember this well because my wife died at the time, I was transferred from Eugene Island to Main Pass Block 6 and I was working out of Buras and this was when my wife died in June of ’72. But I still worked there ‘till sometime in ’73. This was whenever I came back into the Marine Group. Working with Ed Dilsaver.

*In the 1950’s, 1960’s, and into the 1970’s, oilfield jobs generally meant higher incomes and greater financial security than many other jobs in the area. Some whites resented it when blacks began to move into those positions. Even when blacks obtained the good jobs, however, they were not able to secure business loans or capital. Caleb Henderson held a good job with McDermott and his wife, Dolores, worked for the school system. Nevertheless, they still struggled to acquire land for a house in the heart of Morgan City. Pierre Jackson and Dolores Henderson reflect on how the changing status of blacks in the oilfield affected social relations within the community.*

*Pierre Jackson:* [The oil field really affected the black community.] They were able to come in [and] at least make some of the good money. You see, then you got the younger generation [of whites] that claims that if the companies hadn’t had to hire blacks, then they might have had a chance. “I might have had that job,” or what have you. I began to hear that later on when I was in the oil field. You’d get some young guys, and they’d want to sit there and argue with you and argue with you. Whereas I would just pass it off... I enjoyed my work out there. I’m not going to lie. It wasn’t a whole lot of pressure. As time progressed along, they began to send us to different types of schools and stuff like that, bring us up to date... In the ’60’s, I can’t say it was bad for me when I busted out in there, ‘cause like I say, I knew all the guys that were out there. They all treated me ... just they might slip and say nigger, but they didn’t call me that. They were talking in general, and I didn’t take it as offensive, you know.

*Dolores Henderson:* When we built here, hardly anybody was selling any black people any land other than in the old part that had already been developed. Well, Mr. Finklestein decided to let some of this land go to black people who were then making a little bit more money and could do so, but even that end, with that, I feel that there was a little bit of introspection there that you were getting ready to build subdivisions on that side of the street and you had camp boats further back towards the levee and you had camp boats in some of the little houses still on this end. So I kind of feel that he had enough vision ahead that he wanted to see something that was built decent that could be across the street from him. Now that is just my thought, but even at that, it was to our advantage because nobody would let the land go... [Caleb] started [building this house] on Easter Sunday in 1961 and you notice he did have vision because it doesn’t seem like that old a house, the way it’s built. .. After he started at McDermott and our family was beginning to grow, we saved enough and we did this house and we were able to do it because he was building it. Then we took only seven years to pay for it. That was something else. We always set goals that we worked toward and we just didn’t want to always have a whole lot of debt.

*Maturation of the industry was marked by the establishment of social organizations for both men and women. Ed Kyle helped organize the Petroleum Club as a place for oilmen to socialize and conduct business. A group of women joined together to establish a local chapter of Desk and Derrick, a women's club organized in New Orleans in 1949 to help educate women employees about the oil and gas industry.*



**Figure 6.15. Officers of Morgan City Chapter of Desk and Derrick Club, 1980-81. Back Row (l to r) Unidentified, Doris Mullendore, Inez Michel, Jackie Croppell; Front row (l to r): Carol Benois, Pam Fonterot, Ann Dowdy, Shirley Legaux, Fannie Hobbs. Photo Courtesy of Fannie Hobbs, OOGHP.**

*Doris Mullendore:* Really we started the Desk and Derrick Club here in 1966 in an effort to try to educate the females. At that time, it was strictly a female club. Educate them into what the industry was, what made it work, how maybe just better knowledge of the people that they do business with all the time would actually better them in their jobs . [There were] let's see 43 [members]... At that time, it was [easy to get members], 'cause in the '60's you had a large, large variety of companies in the area and they were all very supportive of us. They thought it was a good idea to have their people know what was goin' on offshore. When they took the drilling reports and stuff like that that they would at least know what they were talking about... Kitty Bowdin, which was with Shell Oil at the time, she moved from Texas here. I think possibly she might have been a member [of Desk and Derrick] somewhere along her years over there, and they contacted the New Orleans Club and ask them to send a representative down and start talkin' to us and see if we would be interested. We've seen the thick years and the thin years, believe me. ... I guess one of the best things that I have learned out of all of it is the fact of, the members that you meet, especially if you happen to be in the collection part of your company,

you learn you've got a girl to call at this company and she can get you to where you need to go if she is not the person. So the contact has meant a lot. And like I said, you form some lasting friendships, but also you have got people that's in different positions with companies. They also have seminars that will teach you maybe a better way to do you job, a different way of getting the same thing done with a minimum amount of effort, especially now that everybody's downsized. Everybody's doing two or three jobs and the more you know about a job, the easier it is to do.

*Fannie Hobbs:* When I had gone to Desk and Derrick in 1970, then I really met a lot of women because Desk and Derrick is for women that are employed in the oil industry or related industries, and that's where I met many, many friends... I had heard about it and I wanted to join, and when I started working, then I knew I was eligible. And I called the president at that time [who] was working for Diamond M Drilling Company, and she encouraged me to join 'cause she was president... Not only did I meet a lot of women who were employed in the oil industry, but I learned a lot from our guest speakers. And I started out as the Corresponding Secretary and I was the Program Chairman and that was fun because I got to contact all of these different men for guest speakers.

*Gail Davis:* Everything was just so simple back then. I mean, all the men worked so hard, so hard, and they were always on call. Gosh knows, he (husband Haggai) was, they were. The engineers, drillers, all of that. Everybody worked, but they played hard. They worked hard and they played hard. [They played at] the country club up there. The Petroleum Club and the St. Mary Golf Club. They all played golf. We used to have a lot of dances out there and a lot of parties out there. I said we entertained in our home. Everybody was here. Sat their feet under this table. And we just had so many good friends over the years.

*Harvey Scott:* The main reason for being a member of the Petroleum Club, the majority of all the companies that were working out of here, they had a membership at the Petroleum Club. And when they came here from offshore, they would all come to the Petroleum Club. So, that is where a lot of us met, at the Petroleum Club, and visit, have supper and whatever... It was strictly entertainment. All they did, part of it, was all about interoffice contact. "I am going to come by your office and visit with you. We will talk about it then or I will get back with you then." It was all just a big happy family. We just all got together and everybody worked together.

*Even with good salaries, benefits, and the social networks engendered in the oil field, the work took its toll on families and their communities.*

*Pierre Jackson:* When you go in the oil field, you're giving up something. You're giving up some family life. You've got kids. You don't get a chance to be around – say if you're working offshore – you don't get a chance to be around them for seven days. They might have a game here, a game there, do the family things. If you're working shift work, you work from 12 to 7 in the mornings. You gotta sleep during the day. And trying to sleep during the day, it's no good. Then if you work the 4 to 12 shift, you can't be with your family, when you get off they're asleep! So it's a give and take, but at that particular time, you wanted to make a dollar. And the oil field was the place to make a good decent living. They were paying the best salaries around here, so you went to work and you just made the substitution.



*Houston LeJeune:* My marriage was not blessed with kids. We could not have kids. We tried adopting, but with moving around, they would not even talk to me. They would not let you adopt children as long as you were moving around. So, another move was just another experience for us, and we loved every place we have lived because we had our attitude set to where we knew we were going to love the next place we were going to live, and we did. A lot depended on your attitude, your frame of mind, as to how you coped moving around... Most of the married people moved their kids as long as they were in elementary grades. When they got in high school, they figured they had better not try to move the kids as long as they were in high school. So, they would send the families back home. Well, that might last a year or two. A married man does not function very well or work well without his family. Sometimes, we was away from the families. They did not get to go home but maybe once a month. So, we have lost a lot of good people saying, "We can't live away from our families and we can't move our kids. They are in high school."

*The 1960's set the stage for the rapid acceleration of petroleum-related activity that was to follow during the 1970's. Increasing demands for boats, platforms, and workers led to more changes in the physical and social environment of Morgan City and in the communities surrounding it.*

## 7. THE OIL EMBARGO AND ITS IMPACTS: THE 1970's

*The 1960's had witnessed a ramping up of the offshore oil and gas industry in the Gulf of Mexico, but the 1973 Arab oil embargo spurred on exploration and production activities to even greater levels. The rapid industry expansion, coupled with a spate of national environmental, health and safety regulations, brought increasing regimentation to the industry (Baxter, 1997). Many companies began favoring formal education over experience. This decade also marked the expansion of opportunities for non-whites and of the entry of women into offshore positions.*

### 7.1. Profiles

**Ken Perry** began working on planes during high school when he would spend his time at the airport in Houma. His father was an educator and went into business selling textbooks, but had retained a love of airplanes that he had held since his days in the military. Ken began working toward his pilot's license before leaving school, and got his first job as a salesman for a company selling chemicals in the oil field. Ken worked as a flying salesman for several companies and then was hired as a company pilot, flying executives all around the country. He went through a couple of layoffs during the downturn of the 1980's. He and his father purchased land and a facility and developed Perry Flying Center in 1983. They adapted their services and diversified throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's. Ken bought the company from his father in 1998.

**EJ Richardelle** was born in February 1933 in Larose, Louisiana, and worked for Chevron from 1955-1990. He started at the company working on boats and was transferred to platforms in 1971 when Chevron sold its marine fleet. EJ worked as an oiler and gauger. He began working in production at Ship Shoal 107 in 1975 and worked in the Morgan City area for about 15 years. During that time he worked as a safety man and was responsible for installing and maintaining safety equipment.

**Bob Merriman** was born in Tennessee. He joined the Navy in 1956 and spent 20 years as a Navy Master Diver. He was recruited from the Navy by J. Ray McDermott in 1975 and worked for the company as offshore diving supervisor until 1981. Bob then went to work for Santa Fe Offshore Construction and remained in the same job through the company's merger with Global Industries. During his diving career, Bob was involved in the development of saturation diving, the modification of decompression tables, and development of gas reclamation systems.

**Lillian Miller** began working offshore in November 1973 as a galley hand for Offshore Foods and Services, a position that her father, a pipeline welder for McDermott, had helped her obtain. She was sent out on her first job with several other women and was the only one to survive the entire rotation. She overcame the challenges of working in a male-dominated environment and, led by her interest in drilling and mud engineering, entered the petroleum technology program at Nicholls, working 7 days offshore and going to school during her 7 days at home. In 1974, after a few weeks in the class, she was hired by ODECO as their first female production roustabout. Lillian graduated in 1977 with an associate's degree in petroleum technology. She

advanced to gauger. Her career in the oil field ended in 1981 when she suffered a serious fall while attempting to bring production back online at Ship Shoal 224.

**Scott Naughton** began diving through a SCUBA diving class he took in high school in 1968. After finishing high school in a suburban school outside of Chicago, he entered the Coastal School of Diving in 1972. He moved to Morgan City and got his first job in the oil and gas industry, but left after a few months and returned to California to try gold prospecting and abalone diving. He returned to the Gulf in 1974 and began working for J&J Diving. He remained with the company until it was purchased by CalDive, Inc. in the 1980's, and has stayed with CalDive since that time.

**Don Murphy** left the Navy in the late 1960's and went into a civil service job. He decided to change careers and entered diving school in 1973. He worked for several companies across the Gulf of Mexico, including Ocean Systems and J&J Diving and then took a job with Stolt Offshore.

**Roland Mitchell** was born in Cameron, Texas in 1936. He began working for Dow Chemical as a day laborer and, in 1954, joined the Army. He was a Green Beret and did three tours of duty in Vietnam, becoming a helicopter pilot in 1966. After retiring from the Army in 1976, he worked for Petroleum Helicopters for 22 years as a pilot in the oil and gas industry, operating out of the Morgan City base. He retired in 1999, never having "broken" a helicopter or been in an accident.

**Terry Mayon** was born and raised in Morgan City. His grandfather went to work for The Texas Company in 1925. His father

went to work for Texaco in 1945 and then left to work for Kerr-McGee. Terry worked for Kerr McGee for 22 years and specialized in safety for the company. He was also an air-traffic controller for many years.

**Julie Prestenbach Barrilleaux** was born and raised in Morgan City. When she graduated from high school in 1977, her parents could not afford to send her to college, so she began looking for a job. At the employment office, she learned that King Trucking was looking for help, so she applied for the job. She was hired and worked for the company for more than 25 years. She enjoyed working for a smaller company where she was given many different responsibilities and could earn enough to raise her son. In 1996, while still working for King Trucking, Julie returned to college; she was awarded her baccalaureate degree in 2001.

**Karen Gray** is third generation oilfield. Her grandfather moved his family to Plaquemines Parish from Texas in the early days of the oil industry in Louisiana. Her mother, Moye Boudreaux, and father both worked for oil companies. Karen grew up in Houma, Louisiana and started college majoring in geology, but she left college to take a job with the phone company. After oil companies were forced to allow women and minorities equal access to offshore jobs in the late 1970's, Karen applied. She was hired by Exxon in January 1981 and worked offshore for two and a half years until she injured her ankles and was moved onshore into a secretarial position. She remained with Exxon for 19 and a half years, until the company's merger with Mobil. During that time she finished her baccalaureate degree.

## 7.2. The Arab Oil Embargo

*Industry expansion of the 1960's continued into the 1970's. Then, the 1973 Arab oil embargo gave offshore activity in the Gulf of Mexico a huge boost. A mad rush to start up new service and oil-related companies and expand existing ones served to accelerate activity and to attract new people to the area. Even with new recruits and an expanding labor force, many workers found themselves working long hours and extended shifts. Money was flowing through the industry and the communities from which it operated, not all of it in legitimate channels. Employees, company managers, and residents recalled the payoffs that were made to petroleum company employees to ensure that service companies would receive lucrative contracts and the illicit drug trade that was supported by workers who were paid as they left rigs, platforms, and boats at the end of a shift.*

*Fabrication, commercial diving, and transportation remained critical elements of the economies of Morgan City and surrounding communities. Below, several men and women talk about new deals and arrangements that were being made during this period. These comments convey some of the frenzy and excitement that characterized this period.*



**Figure 7.1. Chester Pipsair (red shirt) on the Beach during an Overseas Job in Nigeria. Photo Courtesy of Chester Pipsair, OOGHP.**

*Vince Guzzetta:* The oil business in the 1970's, it was great. You could rent anything you had. It did not have to be fancy. The oil companies would rent anything. You build it, they would rent it. These were good days in the oil. Right around in this area, the 1970's, was great. I mean, they were just going crazy drilling for oil offshore here. The seismic work was good, which we liked seismic. We liked the seismic end of it. Because the seismic business, your boat would not get torn up. The drilling rigs, they want you to go and tie up and you would get beat up and knock holes in your boat and all that stuff. But in seismic work, you are carrying like about 18 seismic personnel, scientists and people that are educated, they do not want to go out there in bad weather. There is a little more of a calm operation. They eat good. The food is always top notch. They have good cooks. It is a well-kept operation when you are fooling with the seismic

business and that is why we liked it. We liked the seismic work better... We had another boat come out that was called the Midnight Coast. I think it was our third boat, the Midnight Coast, and we worked for a company called Petty Ray Geophysical. They were on the Southwest Freeway in Houston. They are owned by a company called Western Geophysical now, I think, if I am not mistaken. And they were a pretty big company, too. We worked for them. We went all over the world with them also. Worked out of here a lot. We worked here but if they got a job to go to Nigeria or whatever, well, they would go. They would get the job and they would take off. They might be here to get a better job over in Nigeria or east Africa. They would take off and go because business was booming, especially in the 1970's. It really was... Everybody in the oil industry had a lot of fun in the 1970's. It was good days, good times. Everybody was working. Jobs were all over the place. It was just a productive time and sort of, everybody was getting a foothold into the oil industry.

*TR Naquin:* I would say Offshore Logistics started about '69 or '70. ... They started out in the boat business and then all of a sudden the head honcho of the Offshore Logistics decided that he wanted to go into competition with the PHI helicopters and that's when they started the Offshore Logistics helicopters. ... At the time [PHI] were the only ones. They had the whole nine yards sewed up from here to Houston, Texas, Galveston. ... The skippers that were working for Tidex would resign and go to work for [Offshore Logistics], back and forth. They get the same help more or less like the rest of them... I guess you could say they had about maybe 50 boats and they had some that they built to go overseas. And they had a bunch of crew boats. ... They had work boats, crew boats, helicopters, stand-by boats. ... The boat company and the helicopter company was two separate deals. We had nothing to do as far as hiring or firing and anything to do with the helicopters. That was strictly run out of Lafayette. The main office was at Lafayette. They had a copter base there at McDermott's, well in Amelia because they was flying for McDermott, but their main base was Patterson Airport. That's where all the operation was. ... It got to the point where these rigs were getting so far out in the Gulf that it would take you three hours or so by boat to get to one of them and when it comes to changing crews, that's when they would bring in the helicopters to change crews. And at the time, some of these crew boats wasn't built for that type of mileage. And as time went by, they started making 180, 120 foot, 130 foot, 140 foot crew boats. The crew boats are getting bigger and bigger, but at some points and another, you couldn't change by boat. You had to change by 'copter due to rough weather and all that. ... They'd give you incentive loans and some kind of credit that the government would give you. The trouble was, I mean in those days what happened, there was so many guys that was eager to get into the boat business that GMAC would finance them. A lot of your banks would finance them... Some of these doctors would get together and form a corporation and get in the boat business. That's when everybody was building their boats, building their boats, building their boats and when the bottom fell out, a lot of them had to eat 'em. ... In its heyday, when they were at the peak,... I know some of them would rent for 5,000 dollars a day. That's 30 days a month. And they all had big eyes, you know. We are gonna go in the boat business, we are going to go in the boat business!

*Parker Conrad:* Mostly in the 1970's is when there really was a real big push. It was really going crazy. Everybody and his brother got into the business, you know, bankers, doctors, everybody. I was building barges for people who had never been on any kind of floating equipment. For maybe ten, twelve, thirteen years it was great. Everybody got to be wealthy.

*Wallace Carline:* [In 1967 we were bought by] a public company. We stayed with them until '77. We stayed 10 years. I wanted out ... so I bought my company back in 1977 and we've been private ever since. ... You know, people are a creature of habit, I guess, and we follow each other. "Well, old so and so over there, he got 15 or 20 million dollars dough, and man that sounds good." So everybody wants to get on the bandwagon. They had companies and all these people were starting these conglomerates and all they were doing was buying these entrepreneurs, which you can't control them. You get a hundred entrepreneurs and I promise you, there is nothing that you can do with them, because they all have their own mentality on how to do things. You can't change them. And I became part of conglomerates, Board of Directors. We had 135 companies. They were uncontrollable guys, I mean, there was no way. These people, they had been doing things all of their lives and they won't change, even though you have bought them out and paid for them. It doesn't make any difference. ... They had to [keep running their companies] 'cause they can do it better than anybody else, but it's hard for them to live under the rules of a publicly traded company. You just operate totally differently, that's all. ... I was in what was called the Energy Division, I was head of this division and they bought different companies in which [there were] people not to my liking. Here you are trying to manage all of these guys, the entrepreneurs; they have been this way all of their lives. It's tough, so the conglomerates went down the tube, too, you know, because it split up all these companies and it just doesn't work. It just doesn't work. ... [Oil and gas] was a good market. ... It was something they could build on, but it's like everything else. It's people. If you can't manage 'em, it's hard to manage a hundred companies scattered from Puerto Rico to all the states... It was a different change, sitting right here in Morgan City running the oil business. It was a different ball game. ... Some [companies bought themselves back]. A lot of them just walked away. Companies just disappeared, just shut it down, but my people had been here. I didn't want to walk away. I could have started over something good. My non-compete was up. I could have gotten out, but I wouldn't do it. I wanted to come back where I was and all my people had been here with me. ... I'd say it [was] the traumatic phase. It's one I would never go through again, I can tell you. I spent 10 years of that and I said, "You know, guys, I have had enough. I want out."... So we came to a good agreement and I [got out]. We have been a full circle in the oil field. Private back to private.

*Earl King:* If you had a product or service, you got into one of these oil companies, and you served them. But, it was better to have a multiple customer base. But, all you only needed was one good one. And you kept your nose clean and did a good job, you were going to have money. If you took care of what you, if you take care of your dollars that they helped you make, you provided that service, you provided that product, and you were going to have money. You was going to be a wealthy person. If you worked hard and took care of your business.

*Billye Grice:* There were a few of the supply people, see, who were entertaining shall we say, the Phillips people, because that's the way they got their jobs and their business. So the women of course got all mixed up in this, too. So some of the women who had the coffees and we went to visit were wives of the supply companies. See, this is the way it worked. So when you got the company houses, well, the women – not me 'cause I was [the wife of an engineer and] lowly on the totem pole, I couldn't say anything about what I wanted for my house – but these two next door would. So I could look out my window and look over here at these two houses, and so I

could see all this activity going over there. They decided that they needed – this hard packed ground was not for them – they needed some topsoil. So for days and weeks you would see these trucks pull up that would fill this yard, and then you would see these supply companies, well one man that built the houses had a lumber company, and he would hire all these people, “Oh, go out there and spread all that dirt,” except when it got down to below the engineer and they expected Jesse (my husband) to spread his own dirt.

*Ken Perry:* My first flying job in 1976 was a float plane, and I was a salesman. I flew out to production facilities and drilling facilities inshore along the Mississippi River down to the mouth of the river and the bays along the coastline and sold chemicals, treating chemicals for wells and cleaning chemicals, and we did compressor valve repairs and starter repairs on these big compressors that compressed the gas that move it ashore, that push it through the pipelines that go up to the North to keep ‘em warm. And that was a way to get into flying for a lot of guys back then, was you became a salesman. So you became a flying salesman, you used your seaplane like a pickup truck. The first three flying jobs I had, that was my duties where I sold chemicals, I sold drilling pipe, I sold bits, and not coming from a family who understood how oil got to the beach, I had to become familiar with that because that’s what I was selling. Then as the industry kept growing in the late ‘70’s to early ‘80’s, I switched to become a full-time professional pilot as opposed to a pilot and a salesman... My first job flying chemicals and selling chemicals lasted a year. The company was a very small company and it was in kind of disarray at times, but those were back in the days when you already had other job offers. And the second job offer, I went to Frank’s Casing Crew to sell the pipe that you drill the well with and then you produce the well. I moved back to Houma and lived there. I did that for six months and then, I’ll never forget, I was there maybe a week when we had our first sales meeting. We used to have a meeting in Lafayette the first Monday of every month and all the salesmen would drive in, all the land salesmen, and we would fly in and what you would do is you would pick up your supplies for the month, which was caps and hats and ink pens and just giveaway stuff and you’d have a sales meeting and everybody tells about where the rigs are going to be and where they are moving to. I remember Mr. Mosing, old man Frank, was old east Texas, I remember him getting up and telling us pilots, “We are all now working seven days a week until I say so.” We did. I worked six months without a day off. And you just flew and flew and flew and I mean, to take off before dawn, be over a rig so you could wait ‘til light comes up and then land and then your last takeoff at night was right at dusk so you could see where you were leaving and you could come back and land.

*Bob Merriman:* [In the Navy Experimental Diving Unit] the main thing was saturation diving, when I first got involved. And we were working on a saturation on the decompression tables, what have you. That...that was all part of the Sea Lab Man in the Sea Program, Sea Lab 1, 2, and 3. And Mark V Deep Dive System. That was all the Man in the Sea Program, just to establish that you could, in fact, work on the bottom, stay and live there. Like they did in the lab... I made a 850 foot dive and what year was it, might have been ‘69. But this 850 foot dive and I think the total time to dive was 22 days, from the time you go in [to] the time you go out. But that’s by no means a real long dive. I mean I’ve known guys that stay in there 60 days. They generally, after 60 days, now they don’t want to turn around and make another one right away, but... That’s a six-man chamber... six people in each chamber. That’s a 12-man system. Can you imagine what [it’s like], sixty days in there with five other guys? Got to like the other guys... If you are working it’s great because you get in the bell, you go down. It is usually two guys. So one guy

will go out for four hours and work. Put together a pipeline or whatever the job requires and then he comes back into the bell. And the other one goes out. Works four hours. Then you seal the bell, close the inner-hatch and pressure over bottom so you got a seal. Then you come up, set the same pressure all the time. Pick them up. And they stab onto the system and then you equalize the trunk and then you can open the hatches. And they drop back down into the system. Now, these two guys [get] pretty tired, so they go and get something to eat. And we feed them good, generally do. Come out of the bell and you want steak. We get you steak, whatever you want. It's good. And they'll eat, take a shower, get all cleaned up, and they'll sleep probably 8 or 10 or 12 hours, depending. And then by that time, we get up and it's time for you to make a bell run again... It's an eight-hour bell run, but there's swap out, so usually it ends up being about nine. So 18 hours after you come back up, it was time for you to go back down again. Eighteen, 19 hours. Almost a day. So to me, I always liked that because that's something [to do]. That's good. What killed me was like if you went down for weather. Now you got nothing. You don't sleep some nights... You really can't get out much. I mean, you got one round [out of the chamber] but not very far. So it's really pretty boring. You read, of course. I read thousands of books. And but basically I like it much, much better when we were working. Because the time passed faster. You are working, eating, or sleeping. And that makes several days click by.



**Figure 7.2. Tom Hynson Reading a Book in the Decompression Chamber on the Vessel, “Hare,” 1960’s. Photo Courtesy of Tom Hynson, OOGHP.**

*New technologies meant a different set of skills were required by the oil and gas industry workforce. Many companies developed their own training programs to keep their workforce up-to-date and to meet new governmental regulations. Diving companies were fortunate to have a fairly steady supply of new recruits from west coast diving schools who were enamored by the prospects of an underwater career. Computers and automated devices replaced humans in some jobs.*

*Harry LeBoeuf:* [In] '74 I moved into the office here as a Production Supervisor. As a Production Foreman before, I would be in charge of an area, maybe two or three platforms or



four or five platforms, and somebody else would be in charge of four or five platforms. See, in '74 I moved into the office as a Production Supervisor and I was in charge of all of Texaco's offshore production. One of the main responsibilities was, we were building platforms right and left. We were building them pretty fast and it was getting the platforms put together in a way that we could operate 'em. We had to abide by the MMS regulations about that time, that was when the regulations were multiplying, they were stacking 'em up. And we was trying to get those platforms built to where we could operate them. So my main [job] and what I enjoy doing was administer, not the building of them, but the 'okaying' the platform so we could operate it, sort of an inspection. And I was still doing or still operating all the platforms offshore for producing purposes... Up to a point, there wasn't any regulations... I went to several pollution control schools. I went to several fire fighting schools. Matter of fact, I started a fire fighting school myself at the warehouse and I started a pollution control school at the warehouse up here in Morgan City. Some things we had to do ourselves. Everyone that worked on offshore equipment had to be certified by T2 and T2 is a program where people are educated in all the rules and regulations and how the equipment works, actually hands on control and working of the equipment. Everybody that works on offshore equipment has to have this... [I] didn't have any [training] except self-training for producing oil, getting it out of the ground and separating it, measuring it, putting it in a pipeline... [I] started [the school] from scratch. I built the tables...[The crew] was normally off. Couldn't spare 'em when they was on, so we'd generally give 'em about three days at a time, two days or three days at a time. We'd give 'em time to go home and change their socks... In a given year, there was continuous school. Everybody went to 'em and if there was anything new come up, the ones that went the first time had to go back through it. It was a continuous thing.

*Lloyd Charpentier:* It was about '74 I think it was, they started building aluminum crew boats and when they built the aluminum crew boats, then the speed became greater because they were so much lighter and still able to use the diesel engines to power 'em because it was safe. And they went from 35 to 40 foot, 50 foot crew boats, to 65 to 85 foot... In the early stages, we had a lot of the offshore supply vessels wasn't required to have licensed masters and engineers because of the tonnage and when they [did have to have licenses], we started a program at Tidewater. It was back in the early '70's, mid '70's, we started a kind of experimental program because we started seeing the trend where you had to have certain boats had to have licensed masters and engineers so we started sending people to school. We had an in-house school, which was the first. Tidewater had the first school to teach the employees and help them get their licenses. And that worked out okay over the years and we extended that from Masters to Engineers to ABs and today we do the same thing... I guess the first change that Tidewater had that really affected us greatly – I was on staff at the time – that was in '73, '74 when we started building our first 180 footers which was very large vessels at the time. And all of them were certificated; they had to have licensed captains and engineers and ABs, so it was a very difficult time for us to get people in school. This is one of the reasons why we started school up, because we didn't have enough people to go around. As the vessels was coming out, we needed to keep up with the times so we put 'em in school. It was captains we had that had been working for us, that wasn't required to have a license [for the] vessel they were on and now some of them started having vessels that required the licensed captain, so we took those people in. And they were very good seamen. They were good boat handlers and I guess that was the first done in '82. It started I think in '79, but it ended in '82 where they grandfathered all of the vessels and all of the people in, everything

had to be certificated. We had to take and go through our people and get them licensed, make sure that everybody had licenses and all the vessels had to be inspected under subchapter I.

*Scott Naughton:* Now I would've graduated high school in '72, but in '71 I had gone through a lot in a year, and I realized that I'm not going to do anything in college but waste a whole bunch of my time. In a blinding moment of inspiration I remembered this commercial, this brochure that I got from Coastal School of Diving, and in the age of liberal education, my high school allowed us to take off early our senior year if we had all the college credits, which I easily did. So, I actually started dive school in January of '72, I graduated in April of '72 and I was working in Morgan City the first week of May '72. I missed my graduation because I was offshore, which was like the coolest thing that anyone at my high school had done... I was born in England to American parents. When I was three they moved back to north Illinois, and I grew up and went to school in the southernmost suburbs of Chicago. Park Forest. But then I was actually 17 when I went to dive school and worked the first year in the Gulf. I lied about my age by one year, until I was 21, just to play it safe.



**Figure 7.3. Drew Michel (l) Taking Delivery of Three RCV225s (remotely controlled vehicles) from Chuck Strickland, President of Hydro Products at the Time. Photo Courtesy of Drew Michel, OOGHP.**

*Drew Michel :* I think it was 1975, I was in San Diego at their factory and a guy brought me into another building, into a back room, and he said, "Drew, I've got permission to show you this from the U.S. Navy." And he showed me a 26-inch diameter deliberately flying eyeball. It's just a small sphere with a TV camera with small propellers on it. And he said, "This is an RCV, a remote control vehicle," and he said, "We are going to offer it as a commercial product." And that was my first introduction to ROVs (remotely operated vehicles). I went back quickly and told my boss about it. We procrastinated probably for about a year or year and a half, as big companies do. Meanwhile, one of the smaller companies... Martech International, actually had contracted to buy two of 'em. A company called Seaway in the North Sea got the first two that were not military, but it really wasn't a sale. It wasn't really a commercial sale, it was some sort of an exchange program between the Norwegian government, the U.S. government and military

money. I'm not sure how it worked, but it wasn't like a normal sale where a bunch of guys decide to buy one and put it to work. Anyway, Seaway got a couple of 'em, Martech got a couple of 'em, I got serial number four, five and six. And then I skipped serial number eight, I think I got nine and ten. I wound up buying about ten of 'em in the beginning. And I lost seven of the first ten so...I lost the first two I ever took offshore in the first weekend... One went away and we have no idea where it went and the other one went through the screws on the vessel. So they were both gone. One of them was found sixteen days later by a Brown and Root welder, and we had to pay him a five thousand dollar reward to get it back. That was fun. In fact it was interesting. He actually found it on the beach in Grand Isle. And he called and told us he had it, and we said, "Okay great, just give it to the guys at our office and we'll mail you a check." And he said, "Not on your life." He said, "You get the check written and I'm going to come to your office with it and I'll give it to you when you give me the check." And so we did... In those days they cost 500,000 dollars and they were not insured. There wasn't any facility, I mean no one had thought about how to insure them. I guess the insurance never crossed our minds. You know, the diving equipment was all insured and everything, but there's no facility to insure a ROV. But fortunately Ken Wallace, who I worked for at the time, after being mad at me for two days and not talking to me finally said, "Okay go upstairs and get another million dollars from accounting and go back to work." So we went back to work. The first major project that ROVs were ever used on was the Cognac platform, the Shell Cognac platform which was set in a thousand and thirty feet of water. The actual work was done by divers. We had two saturation diving systems on board a barge. And the RCV225 at the time, we had two of those on board and they were used as back up to the divers just to photo doc and sort of a safety diver to the divers, that sort of thing. The interesting thing is that in the course of the project the divers were saturated to nine hundred feet or a thousand feet. And of course if the divers had to do any work shallower than that, well say seven hundred feet, six hundred feet, you would have had to decompress 'em roughly one day per hundred feet. So if something got tangled at the seven hundred foot level you're talking about two days of spread time, of barge time to decompress the divers at that level just to untangle a line. That did happen on several occasions in the project and the RCV225 was able to go and untangle three of those lines. Even though it's just a little 26 inch diameter sphere, it was able to – we fashioned a little hooks on the front of it on the welding rods, those kind of things and it actually went up and picked and pulled apart various hoses and lines in the water till it got 'em untangled saving us days, literally days of barge time.

### **7.3. Rapid Growth, Turnover, and Concerns about Safety**

*The offshore oil and gas industry expansion during the late 1960's and early 1970's meant that hiring and turnover were occurring at extraordinarily rapid rates. Often, screening of new hires was lax. Despite licensing requirements in such sectors as offshore vessels, workers with insufficient skills and experience were promoted into positions for which they were not properly prepared. Accidents and injuries were not unusual, especially in sectors such as drilling and diving. Despite new technologies, plenty of jobs existed that required little formal education and success in on-the-job training often depended on developing relationships with willing mentors. In this section, several men share their experiences and perspectives on the industry during this period.*

*Haggai Davis:* Another booming business that thrived was companies that hired laborers to work offshore. When the boom was on, people from all over the United States were here. We had lots of unsavory- All they wanted was bodies, live bodies. They did not ask what your name used to be, what is your name going to be tomorrow, but whether you sign up here and go to work. They would send them off on these jobs on boats or offshore or whatever. They needed labor... And the oil companies damned sure do not care. They had a meal ticket. All they had to do was call and say, "Send me some bodies." And they had a legitimate right because the old boy that had these bodies over here had the insurance, and just send them on. We were labeled as a boom town. Morgan City had been a boom town I think five times. It was the timber industry. I do not know whether it was timber or shrimp was first, but I think it was the timber that was first and then the shrimping and then the bootlegging. This was at port of entry for prohibition. And then the oil field. Then the fabrication, which was related to the oil field.

*Vince Guzzetta:* Most of [my employees] would be local people right here out of Morgan City. I tried to keep a lot of local people. As the license requirements by the Coast Guard got tougher, you would have to go out and search other areas for license personnel. A lot of these local people over here, the Cajuns, they do not really care about licenses. They could probably run a boat better than these big high license people. I used to go as far as Miami. I tried to find people in Florida. You would get these captains that had unlimited licenses. They could run ships but they did not know how to run these boats. I would rather have one of these local Cajuns running a boat than half of these licensed captains who cannot really turn a boat around. These local people over here, they could make boats walk! In the lingo of boat . . . they could make it go sideways. Some of these big captains with the big licenses, they could not do it. But we were forced, like everybody, to go out and look for licensed personnel because of the Coast Guard regulations... That is about the mid 1970's, I think, that the licensing regulations came into effect.

*Don Murphy:* This was '73, or...or early '74... I went to Morgan City and I got hired on by S&H, which was the diving company there... but they didn't have any jobs for three weeks. So I stopped at Ocean Systems, which is now a welding company on Highway 90, and I just stopped on the way going back to San Antonio to be with my wife, and they said, "Yeah, we'll hire you today". So I went to work for them. About a week later, I wound up on Sting Ray and I was offshore for about 97 days. I called my wife... In those days we didn't have cell phones, we had radio, the Marine band radio. Everybody in the Gulf could hear it. You would call in, and an operator on shore would – my wife provided plenty of entertainment... You start hearing the clicks on all the shrimp boats, the work boats, everything around, because everyone would click whenever there was something good and juicy going on. I had to remind her that this was not a telephone, in spite of what she obviously thought... On that first boat out, I had Tom... Tom was famous at Systems because he was the guy that was cutting rope, and he cut through the rope with a knife, on an upstroke, and stuck the knife in his head, in his forehead, and was walking around the boat. Nobody knew what to do, because he had this knife sticking out of his forehead. He didn't know what to do. Glen Taylor who was supervising walks over to him and says, "Hey you got a knife in your forehead" reaches up and pulls it out. Everybody stood there and it quit bleeding. The most amazing thing I ever seen was this guy with a knife in the middle of his forehead walking around the boat... Now they won't let tenders have knives offshore. They have cutting devices.

*Walter Daspit:* [In the early 1970's] I was diving in about 200 feet of water. There was a pulling head on the inner pipeline. They welded it. On this particular pulling head, there was also like two handrails. The pulling heads were like 10 feet long with a pad at the end of it. My job was to give slack and go down and unshackle a huge block. It was a single block, but it was about seven or eight feet tall. It was a pretty big chunk of steel. The barge was surging. It was going up and down. The water was picking up. They wanted me to go down and cut the pulling head loose. When I went down, the barge surged down and I had my hand on the top of the handrail. A huge block, about seven or eight feet tall, came down and side-swiped my hand. My hand just went numb. I unshackled the block and I was going back up to the surface. They had a basket in the water and I got in the basket. The weather was picking up pretty good. My hand was numb and I grabbed my finger and I could twirl it like that. I told the supervisor on the radio that I might have cut my finger off. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I don't see any blood coming out of the glove," and it didn't hurt. When I got to the surface, I pulled the glove off and my finger was just hanging by a string. I was right. ... They had a medic on board and he just asked if I wanted him to sew it back on. I asked him if it was going to work. He said he didn't know but he would try. You can't do that because you have to use microsurgery or whatever and reattach the – all he did was put the finger and put stitches around it... I went back the next morning. He said they could send a chopper right away, but it would be risky because of the weather. I said, well, since it didn't hurt I could wait until daybreak. The medic said that he could keep the thing dead so that I wouldn't feel it. Bright and early the next morning, the chopper showed up... I got back in and the doctor said that it was getting gangrenous. He said it had to go, so he whacked it off... I went back to work again about a month or two later.

*Paul Woodhall:* I also sort of held the unique position, probably the only diver that lost the tender due to a diving accident. Yeah, most fatalities are due to diving-related incidents and this guy was working for me and he was doing something that he shouldn't have done, had he had proper supervision, wouldn't have done. And we had a ladder that was being mounted on the side of the barge and it was too heavy to swing into place... The industry practice was to never stop, just keep on going, so we went out to dive through the turbulence on a downline and these big airlifts would be boiling at the back of the barge and the equipment and the ladder was so heavy they had to set it with a crane. Well, due to the turbulence, it was not setting right, so [my tender] got on it, no life preserver, tennis shoes, shorts and used his body weight to try to swing it back into where it was going to be mounted, and he made some progress on the first jump. The second jump, an air pocket hit the ladder and it fell away which it was supposed to go and slipped down, he slipped down the back of ... and (claps hands) hit his head and died (claps hands), 22 years old. So that was early on when we didn't have to wear hard hats, we didn't have to wear life preservers, life jackets, no steel toed shoes, that was sort of a lesson that was a bitter pill to take... I think that was about '69, I guess. And I guess the more experienced I got and sort of moved up to what I would consider a journeyman diver, the depth got deeper and we were using techniques, we didn't use bail out bottles. So we used to dive a lot with what they call bounce gas diving, didn't have bail out bottles. You'd be outside [the] valve, they shut your gas off and you would have to run back to the bell in order to get a breath of breathing medium. But that's the way the industry was. It wasn't just where I was working, but it was across the industry. It was just growing in such leaps and bounds that we outran ourselves in regard to safety. But eventually, because of the growth of the industry, rapid expansion and stuff, we were not only sort of outgrowing the basic safety stuff, but also related to the decompression tables

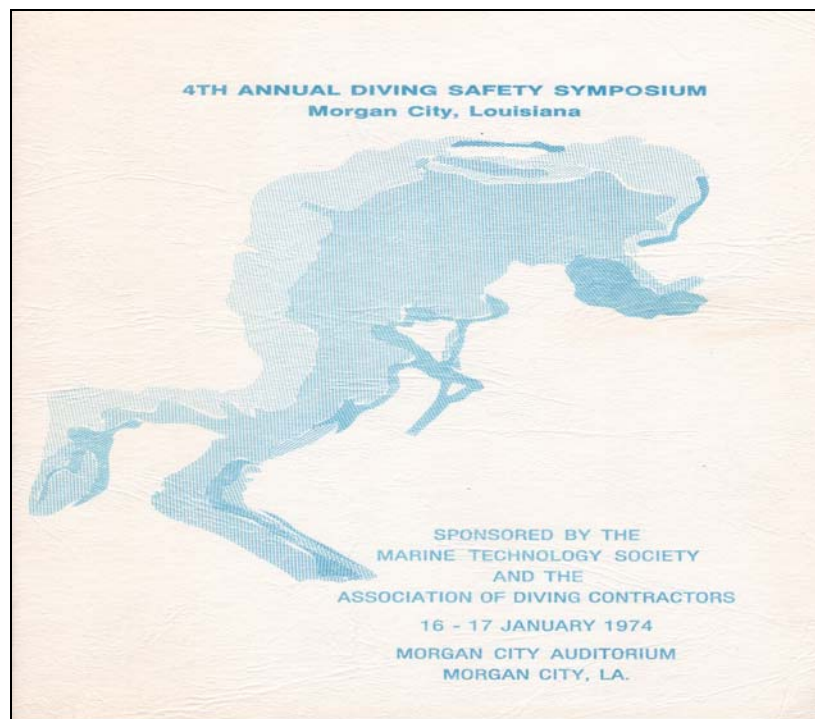
and stuff like that that, I guess a lot of us felt that we were being human guinea pigs or whatever. I am sure you have heard that expression before now. Well, whether all of that is real or some of it imagined, a lot of us did survive undoubtedly but there were some that didn't. You know, like I say, the further I got up in the ranks, the more apparent that there was some improvements that could be made and when we arrived at what we considered a journeyman status, the contractors did not necessarily want to listen to what we had to say. But then I had a good friend that had been using my equipment and suffered a severe decompression problem, they had to pull him 30 feet past his first water stop and he was hemorrhaging. He come out of it, but he was permanently out of the industry. And that and several other incidents sort of got me deeply involved in the safety aspect of it. Obviously, self-preservation played a role in it as well. And then I guess, the strange thing is that we consider, we dove for one of the best companies in the world, but they still didn't want to listen to us.

*Walter Daniels:* Another time I had to go offshore... the guy had been injured on a tugboat, and I went out on another boat and we met this boat offshore, and unfortunately, the young man was dead upon my arrival. He had been standing in the back of the tugboat and the tug had a long line pulling a barge along a fabric line and the line broke and struck him in the center of the chest and ruptured his heart. So there were many horrendous accidents in the oil field back in those days. There's still a lot today, but not nearly as bad because the safety measures back then were just not quite as good as they are today... Being a doctor in a oilfield, industrial area was quite eventful. There were numerous accidents of all types that we took care of 24 hours a day.

*Bill Fullerton:* One time I was out on a diving job by myself with my tender, and a piece of equipment—I think it was a welding machine—fell on a deckhand, or a man down on the barge, and he was dying, and my friend came over and got me. I was waiting to be called so that I could dive, and when they got into place, and I think I was taking a nap or something. At any rate, he woke me up and he said, "There's a man been hurt on deck." So I ran up there, and people were kinda walking away, and no one was trying to help the guy. He was dying. And I was in the medics in the Army, so I tried to treat him for shock, and we did have an oxygen mask that we put on his face and tried to make him, put a blanket on him and elevate his legs. But the barge captain and the other people were saying, "Man, you better let that go or you'll get in trouble." I said, "Hey, here's a guy dying, and I'm trying to help him, save his life." And they told me I'd get in trouble. You know, I didn't care. I would hope someone would do the same for me. And well, I took a picture of the wire rope that broke, and it was all rusted. You could tell it should never've been used. It was all old, and obviously rusted, in bad shape. 'Cause the cable just simply broke. 'Course he shouldn'ta been standing under it anyway. That's one thing you learn. That's the first thing you learn when you go offshore: never stand under anything. And sometimes you can't [help it], you get caught in a situation where you have no choice, but it's out on deck and they're moving things around. Don't get under it. Ever. I took pictures of it, and I was pretty naïve at the time. I gave the roll of film to the barge captain. And they relieved me not long after that. I didn't even make a dive on that route. And I'm sure that film never saw the light of day. I thought everybody would be interested in getting the truth. But I quickly learned that it was not just the company, insurance companies and all that, they don't wanna know.

*Though none were successful for any length of time, several efforts to organize workers in sectors related to the "upstream" activities of exploration, development, and production of oil*

and gas were attempted during this period. Unlike the “downstream” enterprises such as refineries, where many workers were employed for long periods of time at the same locations, many of the upstream worksites were mobile and accommodated fewer workers at any one time. When “upstream” workers did organize, companies responded with various strategies, from addressing worker complaints, to laying them off, to shutting down entire divisions. In the diving sector, for example, rapidly rising insurance costs and fear of government intervention and of unionization among the divers led companies to organize the Association for Diving Contractors to develop industry standards and address safety concerns. The Association held its first Diving Safety Symposium in Morgan City in 1971. The following four individuals, a former union president, company owner, office manager, and founding member of the Association for Diving Contractors, respectively, offer their perspectives on the efforts to organize the commercial oilfield diving sector.



**Figure 7.4. Cover of the Program for the 4th Annual Diving Safety Symposium, Morgan City, 1974.**  
Courtesy of Tom Angel, OOGHP.

*Paul Woodhall:* I was [with McDermott] there until '74. And that's the end of the water part of my commercial life, that's the period. That's when I as a diver had a few friends get killed and a few others that were permanently injured. So it led me to join IAPD (International Association of Professional Divers) which at that time, by most definitions, was a social club. We had divers, and contractors, supervision, all, a mix, and we put on a few picnics, a couple per year, and that was the extent of it... And then using the IAPD as a forum for expressing ourselves, we made an approach to see if we could get some formal, formalized diving standards and at that point, the, as I recollect, the Association of Diving Contractors did not sit well with it. "We'll tell you how to dive. Just do it as you have been doing it." And as a group, we decided that that was not going to be the situation. And that was right when OSHA came into being. You know, there was a

labor bill and obviously the Democrats were in power at that point, so that particular piece of legislation we knew about. And we didn't really know how we were going to do this, so we, a bunch of divers who knew nothing about either legislation or organization or unionism or any of that, we decided that we were going to have to have help in order to achieve it, but we had no funds with the IAPD. We had our 13 dollars a year or something for dues, so that wouldn't go very far, but as one of the – I eventually moved into the Board of Directors of that organization – I would lend whatever I could to the effort. I am sure you may also be aware that there is about half of the diving population lives in New Orleans, the greater New Orleans area and the other half lives in the Morgan City area. Well it was obviously challenging sometimes in a friendly way and sometimes not so friendly, but anyway when we made the decision, when the Board of Directors decided to take it to the membership, that we were going to approach a labor organization to help in this effort, we were told that the contractor representation that was within our ranks would have to go away, that they could no longer be members of our organization, which made sense obviously. But you know, just another part of our learning curve as we did, we realized what we were about to do. And the other thing that came to pass was that we knew traditionally in other parts of the country that the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners were representing divers through their pile-driving locals. All up the West Coast, all into Alaska and on the East Coast as well, but I guess being the way we were, we sort of took offense that they never made any effort to do that in New Orleans, which we should have been aware of that we were part of the last stronghold of non-union. We were 50,000 workers out there at that point and none of them were organized, but we didn't really publicize that too much. But I guess we took personal offense that they didn't come looking for us. You know, here is a large body of skilled labor that they didn't bother to try to organize us. So we pointedly ignored them and went with what we considered as an organization that was on a par with our earning potential, the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association and they flew us to Florida and they wined and dined [us]. And they give us what we had asked for. We went from like 87 members to 509 or 500 in 3 months. I mean we had the momentum going.

*Wallace Carline:* We had some divers at one time. We had bought a company that was a diving company. We got out of that business a long time ago. ... At the time we got out, they were trying to unionize them and we didn't want to be no part of a union. The diving company we owned, we had an election and we lost it so we just shut it down. But it wasn't something that we wanted to do anyhow, because you have to be real careful of divers. When you get down in deep waters, you have to be real strict, safety is a tough situation and insurance is such... Now, unless you are strictly in that business and that's all you do, you need to stay out of it. You really have to, that has to be your main line, because a diver gets the bends real easy if he stays too long, you know, decompression time. ... We acquired S&H Divers I think in 1967. We became part of a fad here; the conglomerates came and picked everybody up and we went through that. We were picked up by a company in Hartford, Connecticut. So then they wanted us to go into diving, so we bought a diving company to put in with us. We were trying to expand.

*Doris Mullendore:* There was an S&H in 1957, long years ago and then through events or whatever, they just shut it down. Well, actually what happened, the divers decided they were going to go union and the guy that owned it said, "I will not do union, because, first of all I can't work you offshore, because the oil field, I mean the contractors, oil companies, will not have union people on the rig." So they just shut it down. ... [Jack Smith, Sr.] was the S&H, Smith and



Hamacker. ... After the labor union thing and everything, Charlie [Hamacker] dropped out and then when they started, [Jack] just kept the S&H because that was a registered corporation. ... I guess we lost three people in 20 years. ... It really does [have an effect on everyone]. Especially when you get the young divers. You had young divers that you were breaking out from a tender to a diver, a lot of times you gave them what they call "wheel jobs." They would go down and just change the wheel on a boat and on a couple of times, well one of them got lost underneath the boat and panicked and tore off his hood, his helmet and when he did, that was it, you know. He just got disoriented – lack of experience and he didn't know what to do. Then you have got to find the parents and bring 'em down here and find out what arrangements they want to make for him. It's just, it's not a happy time.

*Tom Angel:* The unions' attempt to try to come to the Gulf of Mexico, that was an era that was a bad, bad time... [The AFLCIO] was pushing the divers to get into the unions. And the regulations that we saw – the proposed regulations that we saw at ADC (Association for Diving Contractors) – would make diving more hazardous than it was. Or, would put all diving companies out of business, you couldn't dive... And that's when we went to Washington and testified in front of Congress and held a bunch of hearings and finally got the regulations to stop-get thrown out. And got the ADC involved. And we fought hard, you know... I was one of the founding members of ADC. There was Mike Hughes, myself, Buster Hughes- they weren't kin. Dick Evans, he's McDermott. Jack [Smith], he had S&H Diving. Danny Wilson, with Sub Sea International, Ken Wallace with Taylor Diving. And John Galletti, with the J&J out of Pasadena, Texas. Now, if you can imagine a bunch of entrepreneurs trying to get them into one room together. When, if I was on a sales call in New Orleans and I saw John Galletti walking down the same side of the street, he would go to the other side or I would go to the other side. We would not even go into the same restaurant, we wouldn't go into the same waiting room together. And the guys, they literally didn't hate each other, but they didn't know each other, but they knew who they were. And they didn't want to be anywhere around or near them. The hardest task was to gather all these guys in one room and sit and talk about safety. And that was very difficult to do. But we did it, it took a while... If you look at the ADC's thing... that's Education, Safety, Communications. If you can't communicate, you can't have education, you can't have safety.

#### 7.4. The Environmental Movement and Its Impacts on the Louisiana Oil Industry

*Along with national attention to safety and the development of policies to help protect workers, the 1970s era saw increased attention to environmental protection. The people from southern Louisiana did not widely embrace the popular environmentalism that took hold across the United States. Trappers were angered by the decrease in fur demand related to environmental campaigning, and commercial fishermen opposed efforts to impose environmental regulations in the Gulf. Within both the fishing and the booming oil industries, the environmental consequences of dredging pipeline canals and disposing of oilfield waste were not necessarily recognized. Also, to the extent that they were recognized, they were generally accepted as externalities of the business. Still, despite a generally negative reaction to regulations, policies and practices that reduced environmental impacts were noticed and appreciated. The following individuals illustrate some of the range of perspectives and understandings of the environmental issues associated with oil and gas development.*

*Joe Young:* I can think back, when I first went offshore, things that were going on out then. Well, pollution, for one thing. Oh, listen. It used to be something how the Gulf was polluted by – you would throw everything over the side. It did not make any difference what it was. I do not think it is a big shock . . . that is not new. I can tell you, just to give you an example . . . the mud system, number one, I will not go into all the [details, but] it had to be changed because we went into different formations and you had to weight your mud and all that kind of stuff. For various reasons, you had to convert the mud system to something else. Or you just started off with essentially just clay and water. And then, you would add chemicals to it and all this kind of stuff – weighted material. But anyhow, you would get to a point where you would have to change the mud system over. So, it took a lot of, mainly, chemicals to convert. So, we used to have cans, 50-pound cans, of caustic soda. Well, it is highly corrosive. In other words, it will dissolve. Aluminum will just dissolve in it. It is corrosive on anything. But anyhow, it has a pH of the top of the scale. . . . It will burn you. I mean, you would use rubber gloves and goggles and everything. But anyhow, that derrick man that was down in the mud pit on the mud pit, he had a hatchet and he just chopped holes in that caustic can and take a water hose and wash it into the mud system just with water. Lye. That is what caustic soda is, in its purest form. But anyhow, they just washed that 50 pounds. And we would have as many as 100 cans. One hundred 50-pound cans, 100 of them, and do that in a couple of hours' time. Put them all in that mud system. And guess where those cans went? Right over the side. You would take sack after sack after sack of chemicals – I mean hundreds, when you were converting that mud system on it. Dump them in there. All those sacks went over the side. And not only that, do you know what you did with that mud that you did not want? You just opened a valve and it went right into the Gulf. Chemicals, oil, anything else that was in that mud system – it went right into the Gulf. Everybody did it. I mean, you were not breaking any rules. There were not any of them. . . . All those cuttings that it would shake out of the mud, it would go right into the Gulf. It did not have anything down there to catch them. You had a great big thing – what they called a possum belly – that would collect it for a while and then you would just go down and open – you had a butterfly valve and you just opened the butterfly valve and dump it all out. That was just the way it was. It was believed that the Gulf was completely recoverable, you know, that anything that happened to it, it would just heal itself. You didn't have to worry about . . . the main thing was the shrimpers would holler about getting that net snagged on all that junk you were throwing in there. All kinds of iron like

those cans and that stuff... Then, they came out with rules and laws and everything else that you could not put anything in.

*Jake Giroir:* Sometimes you did pollute a little, but you had tanks on your platform that you could put your oil into, your water. The only time that- Let's put it this way. When we're bringing a well in, the saltwater that we had in it, well we'd throw that overboard. But, when we got to the oil, we'd shut that off and put it into a tank. So, we'd see we had enough, we'd shut it in, and put a- a back pressure valve in it. And that was it. After we'd put our tree and leave it like it was. And we'd go to the next one. Drill another well. And, after we got to THAT job, then we'd start producing those wells... At West Lake Verret, well we had, you know, canals. That's how you get your rig in. There was no problem there. Best fishing in the world. Now, in the marshes, it- they dug their canals, and they say that's- But, I believe, I don't think that hurt the marshes at all.



**Figure 7.5. Aerial Photo of Petroleum Activity in the Southern Louisiana Wetlands Showing Dredged Canals, Platform, and Barge. Photo Courtesy of Jesse Grice Collection, Morgan City Archives.**

*RD Pitre:* We destroyed everything we put our hands on! We absolutely destroyed all marshes. Guys would come out to stake a location in the marsh. I would get a dredge out, I would dredge a canal, seven feet wide, six feet deep in there and notch out to fit a rig in there... The rig would move out. You would go in and make a well. Build a platform around it. Lay a line to it and whenever. The wells are still there and I imagine it is all washed out now. The bay has taken it all. There was no provision made for... I used to think how terrible it was but there was nothing I could do about it... I knew we were screwing everything up. Oh, yes. And I knew that if we . . . I have often thought about it . . . when we were producing all that gas and oil and condensate, if everybody just got up and just left there, left the whole thing going, and came back in 100 years, you would never know we were there. And things would be blowing up, catching fire, burning maybe for years, but in 100 years, you would never know we were there. We used to say, "We are cutting the big fat hog in the behind." That is oil field stuff. That is oil field language... Oh, we were doing great. We were producing oil and gas and condensate – we are doing great. How

great it was. Nobody thought about what we were destroying. We destroyed the marshes... [The companies] did not care. As a marsh, what are you going to do with a marsh? Dredge into it, produce an oil well. They did not know that shrimp come in there and spawn in those marshes. They did not know that trappers took out muskrat and coon and otters. People up the line, they do not care about that.

*Wilma Subra:* When I finished college, got my master's, I went to work for Gulf South Research here in New Iberia and I worked for them for 14 years, and as part of the work there we did a lot of environmental impact statements. We did a lot of cancer studies for the National Cancer Institute, testing specific chemicals and compounds and we did a lot of evaluation of the impacts of the oil and gas industry and we did some of those with different universities on a consortium basis. We did a lot of 'em. Tamalier Bay and Offshore Barataria Bay and offshore from there and we were trying to get a handle on what were the impacts of the drilling and production... And then when the regulations started for environmental issues, when on the inshore stuff, when they started making them quit discharging salt water in North Louisiana, then you started capturing this and you suddenly had these wastes to deal with. And before the late '60's the waste was just wholesale discharged onto the ground or dumped on the ground. You went in and drilled a well and if it produced, you put on a well head and walked away and it didn't matter what you left behind. And in the early '70's agriculture was in real desperation. You weren't making enough money for your crops, so you were more than happy to have the oil and gas industry come in and drill wells and you got the royalty. And it didn't matter that they damaged or destroyed all this huge amount of agricultural land... When the regulations started changing in the '70's and the waste issues started being looked at, there was more waste and more sites than anybody had any amount of money in the world to address. The best thing that we could accomplish was to get new regulations on the books so that new drilling and production didn't create these problems and get the old facilities just shut down, not cleaned up. And in the late, mid to late '70's we were able to get a lot of these old facilities just shut down and to this day, most of them have not been cleaned up. New ones went in and as the new regulations started offshore, all this waste started coming in from offshore and getting dumped in Louisiana. It either came in by boat, by containers on the boats, or they would ship the produced oil and the produced gas onshore to these plants that then separated the waste components from the oil and the gas and then supplied the oil and gas to refineries and all over the United States to consumers. And Louisiana was the recipient of all the waste... And even after regulations were put in place, a lot of the material was land formed from offshore and it still caused huge environmental damages, illegal discharges, overtopping of levees where it contributed to the destruction of large quantities of wetlands.

*Wallace Carline:* Back in the '70's and the '80's our main business was dredging, dredging out a canal, but as time went on, you know, the environmentalists [made it harder to do this work]... plus most of the stuff just kept moving out into the Gulf. Back then, dredging was the big thing. You had to dredge a canal for everything. You didn't have the equipment you have today. Let's say you wanted to lay a pipeline across the New Orleans River or the Mississippi or Atchafalaya or any river, you'd have to dredge, you'd have to have a dredge that dredged the approaches and buried the line, and it was a pretty big job. About 1977, I guess, somewhere along there, '75 to '77, this guy from California came out here and he bored across the river and we assisted him and Dow Chemical furnished the money for the research and he bored the first river crossing.

And since then you don't dredge the rivers anymore, you sit on one side and bore across horizontally just like a drilling rig. So that was a big change and it was good for the environment and it was good for everyone. It's a much cheaper way to do it. And that's what you do nowadays. If you want to go across the Mississippi River, you sit on one side and bore across to the other... We helped the first people do it, but this guy was from California and he really didn't like Louisiana. He said the mosquitoes were too bad and he sold it to somebody else. He wanted out and he had a gold mine. He really had. He is still in business in California, but he wasn't in Louisiana. He had a good idea and it worked. See, out there they had a lot of freeways and he was drilling across those freeways, which made sense because if you can drill across a freeway, why not drill across a river. So now, that's all we do is sit here and even on the Gulf when you reached the edge of the Gulf at the shoreline, you would have to dredge in 'til you get to the shallow water and then you'd have to backfill and put some kind of material in to protect your coastline. It's the same thing. You sit on the beach and you bore underneath the coast from the shoreline out to whatever depth of water you want to go to 15 to 20 feet and you don't disturb the top of the ground out there. That was a big, big change, 'cause there are so many pipelines laid in south Louisiana, miles and miles of pipeline. So that's some of the big changes I've seen in my lifetime.

*Harry LeBoeuf:* Well, most of [the regulations] were good. Most of 'em were needed, 'cause I can recall in the early days before the regs, we wanted to bring in an oil well that didn't have any pressure and we would just flow it to the side of the Gulf into the open water. We didn't know that this oil would hurt something. We didn't know it would hurt an organism that we couldn't see. They had to show us or tell us that they did have an organism that it would hurt. We'd always say that oysters used to grow on the old creosote pilings and they were just as good as the oysters that grew on the reef out there, which they were. That oil just didn't really hurt that oyster, but I guess it hurt some of the organisms.

## **7.5. Expanding the Workforce**

*The huge demand for jobs, coupled with national policies to increase occupational opportunities for women and members of racial minority groups, led to further changes in the workforce. During the late 1970's, when the industry was at its peak and workers were scarce, the prohibitions based on race and gender were lowered. Yet, as Terry Mayon comments, even though overt discrimination was reduced, whole-hearted acceptance was rare.*

*Terry Mayon:* It is just like any other business. People learn to know each other and once you get to know each other and you find out, hell, he is not any different than I am as far as what do they want. They are out there busting their butts trying to make a nickel because they have got wives and children and they want the same things that anybody wants – whether he is Hispanic or whether he is black or whether he is Chinese or Asian... and even though there is still some prejudice offshore – don't get me wrong – there is still a lot of it – it is a big difference of what it was in the 1960's and the 1970's offshore when it first happened... To me, the hardest thing was being left out, I guess... Let's say there is only one black guy on the whole platform, I think the hardest thing for that person is the fact of not being part of the group. It took a long time to become part of the group. Guys working offshore get very, very close. They are there 7 days on and 7 off. In some cases, 14 and 14. And you live with those people every day. I mean, you have

got to put up with how they snore, how they sneeze, how they laugh, how they dress. It is close. I mean, you are there with them every day – as close as you can be with anybody. And I guess the hardest thing..., was the loneliness because you are exploited... To me, that is the worst part of the discrimination. There was no overt that I was around, never any overt thing done to hurt someone physically, but just not being part of the group, I think, was pretty hard. A lot of guys could not handle that and left, of course. But those that hung in there and finally became part of the group are now some of our superintendents and production foremen and those offshore. They had a rough go. They had a real rough go. The old saying, you know you have got to do twice as much to be equal. Well, a lot of that was true. I know a lot of guys that I always thought should have been promoted long before, say, some white guy in the same job, [but that] did not happen because they have to do damned near twice as much. They have to put in that 150 percent, in other words, constantly, just to be given the same opportunity.

*In the United States, the women who had entered the workforce in significant numbers during WWII had been displaced from high-paying industrial jobs when men returned from the war. Then, women had steadily increased their labor force participation rates through the 1970's and 1980's. In the oil field, many women who initially entered the workforce filled clerical and secretarial positions for oil companies and for the oil-related service companies. As the onshore infrastructure for the offshore industry grew and developed, many small businesses were formed, and women played a critical role in creating and maintaining many of these as well. However, women were not hired in offshore positions; companies cited women's lack of ability to do the work, their lack of ability to handle the stresses of being offshore, and the lack of living quarters for women. Not until a decade after federal civil rights laws were enacted that required companies to employ women in all positions for which they could perform the work, did women begin to get jobs offshore.*

*Although many southern Louisiana women worked primarily as homemakers during this period, many others found work outside the home. Though some women fit the earlier stereotype of the young woman working only until she would marry and have children, many looked at their jobs as opportunities to learn new skills and advance in their careers. Some who thought they would work only until marriage never left the workforce or found themselves back following a divorce or the death, injury, or layoff of their working spouse. In the following paragraphs women share their experiences and perspectives on working in the industry during this period.*

*Valine Mullen:* The age I grew up in, a lot of times women were just being encouraged more to start going to college. So that was becoming a little more prevalent then, but most of them it was getting married or having a job locally. A lot of them—beauty school, that was a big thing, go to beauty school and all like that, but I have a lot of the women I graduated with [in the late 1960's] doing different things. Some of them went to work in the insurance field, selling insurance. I have one girl we graduated with is now a professor of English at LSU. So we kind of all did different little things. A lot of them never did go to work. They stayed home and were hard-working mothers, taking care of their households and things like that. I think it was a good time because there was a lot of freein' up of what women could and couldn't do. I think that more and more women were startin' to get out in the fields that were used to be taboo, and I think that kind of started to open up at about that time more, for the females in my area, age group, whatever you want to call it. Sometimes you know you are surprised by what we can do and so it was good

to see a lot of them break out of that. Most of them though, I think kind of maybe went to college for a year or two. Some of them went on and became teachers. Some of them finished school just recently, as far as getting degrees in anything and worked hard doing a lot of other things 'til they could free up their time from raisin' their children to go back to college and everything, and I think that was admirable of them. I've seen several of those like that. So I think it was an interesting time. Of course, we had the Vietnam War about the time we graduated, so that kind of put a kink in a lot of things for people, delayed things I guess, somewhat... We had the draft then, so we had quite a few of the [young men] had to go.



**Figure 7.6. Lillian Miller Working as Galley Hand on Marlin III, 1974. Photo Courtesy of Lillian Miller, OOGHP.**

*Lillian Miller:* I started with Offshore Foods and Services in 1973, probably late November, '73. I had moved back from college in Texas to try to make some money to go back to college. I was trying to find a job as a waitress, applied for the post office, as a nurse's aide, but it was a really hard time to get a job. Finally my dad came home from McDermott one night and he said, "You know, they ARE going to start hiring women offshore." I said, "What kind of woman would do that?" And he said, "Well, it depends on what kind of women-women go out there." And I was so devastated, well, I said, "Well, I could do that," cause I wanted Mom and Dad to know I was really trying. But I cried myself to sleep that night because I couldn't believe my life had come to such a point where my dad would send me offshore. However, the next day, I dressed up in a skirted suit and jacket-like a business executive-and went out there to Offshore Foods and Services. And I said, "I came for a job." They said, "You're not the right type, leave." I went every day for a month, they wouldn't even let me fill out the application. So finally the superintendent had a heart attack, and he was a Deacon with Dad, and so Dad went to the hospital and said, "Could you ask them to give Lillian a one-hitch chance?" And so, I got this phone call and they said, "Get out here right now." And I went out there and they said, "Ok, we're sending you out there, but you won't even [last] two days. Go buy some blue jeans, some tennis shoes, a duffle bag."... There was a Capital Welder, and he came up to me and he said, "Uh, isn't your father Snake, doesn't he work for McDermott?" And I says, "Yeah." And he said, "Look, I'm going to make you a cheater bar so you can open these valves." Anyway, he

just started at that point teaching me how to use cheater bars and handle the things that were too hard for me to do physically. Oh, another test I had that hitch... they said they had some hundred pound sacks of chemicals that had fallen off the pallet on a boat. And they said I had to reset the pallets. Man, I had never lifted a hundred pounds in my life. And I only weighed about a hundred and thirty pounds. I didn't know how I was going to do this. But I went down there, and the boat skipper looked at me, and he said, "You know what?" It was pretty rough. He called me up to where he was at the wheel, he said, "All you've got to do is wait till the wave hits and then push the sack." So, I went back down, and every time the wave hit, I pushed a sack. Well, I restacked the entire pallet. Let me tell you, when I went back, they took me up in the personnel basket, there was a lot more respect for me then. I don't know if any of those guys ever guessed that the boat skipper had given me the secret, but he had. So there were these people that started looking out for me, like that, right from the beginning. Had it not been for the welders that had worked with my dad...



**Figure 7.7. Worker Being Transferred to the Crew Boat during Crew Change, 1973. Photo Courtesy of Lynda Miller, OOGHP.**

*Fannie Hobbs:* In 1963 I came to Louisiana because my husband had a new job as Port Steward for a catering company and we moved, we were required to live in Louisiana... A Port Steward is in charge of all the catering for the offshore rig. They furnish the food, the linens and the groceries, of course, and then the personnel like the stewards and the galley hands that clean and everything. At the time I think that Barney was in charge of about seven rigs, but then the company grew and at one time he was in charge of 53 drilling rigs. And for all of those rigs, he had to furnish the help, the groceries and see to it that all the major oil companies were happy. And that was when he suffered a massive heart attack which no wonder. I realized then that sooner or later I was going to have to go to work and I waited until my youngest child was in school and then I couldn't put it off any longer because in the meantime he had had four surgeries and so I went to work and he was very much against it... I really didn't want to, but I could see what was coming. So I went to work for Avondale Shipyards and I was the first woman that they hired in Purchasing because the Purchasing Department was different from the



main office. It was out in a field kind of and they told me that I would be replacing a man. I would be paid like a man, but I would have no more privileges other than my own rest room. So and they were very strict. They said if you were late three times in a row, you were automatically fired. Okay. So, I made it a point not to be late... By the time that I went to work, there were only three children at home. The two oldest ones had left home. They were married, but I had one daughter in high school, one in elementary school and Ellen had just started school... I don't think anyone in my family ever worked besides me. My sisters really didn't have to work. And you know, during that time in the '60's a lot of women went to work because they were bored, but I went to work as a necessity. When my husband was declared totally disabled, at that time, you had to wait six months to draw Social Security. There was a six month waiting period. Fortunately, we had savings that we could bank on because my salary at Avondale I think was 500 dollars a month. Well, I had a daughter in high school that was fixing to graduate and two more at home, so it was hard, but we survived.

*Verdie Laws:* I went back to work in 1976 and worked full time until the end of 1999. And during that time I worked at Oceaneering International for nine and a half years... [My husband and I] divorced and I went back to school when I was 40 years old. He was always very generous with the child support, but I never knew when that might end because he then moved to Saudi Arabia. And so I needed to know that I could make the living for my children. So I went back to school and while I was at school, I was almost finished with my course and someone I knew personally called and said they had an opening in their office and would I be interested... I started out as the... Secretary to the Bell and Saturation Manager. His territory included all of North America and all of South America. From that, I was promoted to Secretary to the Vice President of the Division which was the Gulf Coast Division which I think is still in existence. Then I became Executive Secretary to the General Manager and then I became the Personnel Manager for the whole Division. And in an industry that is 99.9 percent male, I was very much the odd duck, but I was always accepted. I would go to staff meetings and there were 23 men and me... There were at one point – and I don't remember which year this was – we employed about 500 people and there were 23 women in the company roster. So the accounting staff was all female and there were various secretaries throughout the Division... It was very interesting. My children were very interested. My children learned from my job because, as I said, my boss was the head of the Bell and Sat for North and South America. Well, at one point, I was crew changing 52 people in and out of Brazil every month from places like Kalispell, Wyoming, Bluefield, West Virginia, Israel, Vancouver, and we had two offices in Brazil and one in Trinidad that were directly under him. Now Oceaneering had offices in Norway, in Singapore, in Scotland and of course on the West Coast and everyday I would come home and, "Who did you talk to today?" They wanted to know. And so we would look it up on the map and we had a very interesting geography lesson... I was responsible for the logistics of the crew changes. Of course, behind the scenes, I was kind of responsible for the crew changes because each contractor on each rig was different. This rig called for five people at all times. You had to maintain it in order to maintain the terms of your contract. You had to be sure there were five people on board at all times. This one called for seven and so forth and so forth. It was by far the most interesting job I have ever had... [The divers] were already on the Company payroll... They are assigned to a specific rig, but most of them's contract called for 28 and 28... I had a wonderful travel agent in Morgan City. Can you believe in a town the size of Morgan City? I can remember in one instance we were going to man a new, it was a new contract on a new rig for us

and she got, those places that I told you, she got 'em all there within 52 minutes of each other. I was constantly amazed... We all worked like Trojans all the time, but we had a good time doing it.

*Julie Prestenbach Barrilleaux:* I got out of school in December '77. I just started beatin' the bushes, looking for a job like anybody else in high school. I was raised in a big family of 9 kids so my parents couldn't afford to put us through college which is what I really wanted to do, but I wanted to be able to get a job and support myself before getting married and all that good stuff. So I went to the unemployment office. And King Trucking was advertising, so I came out here and was hired and have been here ever since. I started in January of '78, you know. I was out of school for two weeks and then got a job, but back then in '78 the oil field was booming and there was just jobs everywhere, you know. This was a small company and I didn't really want to work for a big company where you were just a number, and it was a hands on kind of business, so it looked like something that I could grow with and I did. It was something that I was able to stick with. [The job] was for a secretary, invoicing, filing, typing invoices, filing, accounts payables and receivables... Twenty years ago people were more job-oriented. People had to work. You didn't have all these young kids running around in brand new Suburbans and Escalades and you know, there weren't as many, I guess upper class kids out there. The families back then were larger so the job market was smaller so it made it that much harder for people back then to get jobs, so people back then respected work more because they had to work more to get where they wanted to get to their goals... The oil field industry was something that kept everybody busy and back then you didn't need a college degree to work in the oil field.

*During these turbulent times, even women in "traditional" clerical roles were able to assert themselves at their workplaces.*

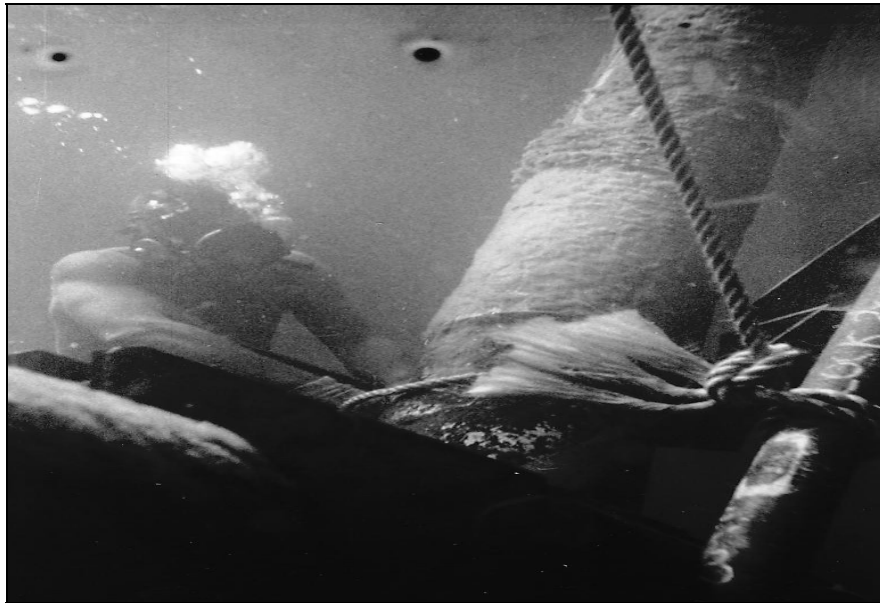
*Fannie Hobbs:* A friend of mine called and wanted me to go to Lafayette and help them open up an office... He called me one night and asked me would I go and I said, "Well, I'll have to talk to my husband." And he said, "But your husband doesn't work." And I said, "Well, he is still the head of the household." So we discussed it and [my husband] said, yes, he'd like to move to Lafayette. I called my friend back and I said, "Bob, I have 3 stipulations." He said, "All right." I said, "Of course, first of all, you know that I'll need more money." "I know. We'll pay you at least 200 dollars more than what you are getting." And I said, "All right. Second, I want myself and my family insured, the minute I start work, the day I start work." And he said, "All right, no problem." And I said, "And third, how do I get to Lafayette?" He said, "Well, you move." And I said, "But who is going to move me?" "Well, we have never moved a secretary before." I said, "Oh, that's what I am?" I said, "Well, you don't really need me then Bob." "But I do, I do. I really want you to help me open this office." I said, "Well, Bob, I just processed envelopes for Diamond M and they moved an engineer from Florida here for 3,000 dollars." I said, "It won't cost you 3,000 dollars to move to Lafayette."... "You drive a hard bargain. I will have to call Houston and see if they will okay it." And I said, "All right." So he called me back the next night and said, "Okay, you win. They'll pay for moving you." I said, "All right." So I moved to Lafayette and I helped set up the office there and I hired two girls, one as the receptionist and one to help me with the invoicing. And I was there for a year and they also sent me to school and I took a course in the Fundamentals of Petroleum. And I had started a course in business administration and my boss got sick and we had a new boss and he was fixing to lay me off

because I was the highest paid in the office and they were cutting expenses. So I moved back to Morgan City. Incidentally, the Company moved me back because, I didn't tell him this, but the man who was over him in Houston, Texas was also my friend from Diamond M So I called him up and I said, "Raymond, if you transplant somebody from one place to another, when you get through with them, don't you have to transplant them back?" And he laughed, he said, "Okay Fannie, just send me the bill." I said, "Fine." So I did and of course, when I moved back, well I had a month's severance pay plus my vacation pay and they moved me back, so I didn't do too bad.

*Doris Mullendore:* I started out with Martech and then, when all of us left there, we opened S and H Diving again. And then S and H sold out to Sonet Offshore Diving. And Sonet sold out to American Oilfield Divers, which is where I traveled back and forth to Lafayette. And I just find that [being on] the road just is not my cup of tea. Salesman that can spend five days a week away from home, living out of a suitcase, that's just not me. And everybody kept telling me, why don't you move to Lafayette. I said, I haven't lost anything in Lafayette that I have to go find. I'll go shopping when I want to go shopping, but I want to be home. ... We had a payroll, I guess at that time, of about 180 divers. We would increase to 200-250 and then come back down and you know, it's kind of like a farmer's. It is a seasonal business. [The divers came from ] various places – Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Washington, California, Texas, Oklahoma just all over everywhere. ... [I knew] nothing at all [about the diving business when I started.] It was a learning curve, believe me. ... [It was] all guys. It was fun. Like I say, you know when you're the payroll clerk you get a lot of perks. ... As long as you had their paycheck right, you could just about get them to do anything in the world you wanted them to do. ... But you know, I never did get a lack of respect. They were always gentlemen. Some of the language you heard was not very nice. I always used to say, "As long as it's not directed at me, I don't care. Do your thing." Of course, don't get me wrong, we had some rotten eggs in the barrel too, but I mean, overall, it was a good atmosphere. ... I did the accounting, the bids, answered the phones, payroll, everything. ... If it was what they call a gas job, you had to have a supervisor, a rack operator and three diver tender groups. If it was just a regular diving crew, you usually, depending on how deep it was, you would have a supervisor, and two dive crews. A dive crew is a diver and a tender. The depth of the water and the type of job depended on who you sent. People who had the experience. You usually had a certain package gear that went with each job, too. Like I said, it wasn't as hard as it seemed to get a crew offshore and get them home. ... I worked a long time, seven days a week, just doing bookkeeping with the diving companies. You know, diving payroll is not just so many hours straight time, so many hours over time. I mean you have to pay them depth pay and you have to figure your overtime on the depth pay and mileage and all of this kind of stuff. I mean it's a detailed... and all this is done by hand. This was before computers did it. You just took time to do it. If it took seven days to do it, it took seven days to do it. You have got to get them paid. ... You absorb it as you go... And you just never knew when the phone rang, whether or not somebody had had an accident or somebody had got to hotshotting it out there. Of course, you had to tell them to go home and get somebody else to replace them. Like I say, "There was never a dull moment." ... [When I started in this industry,] I had no more idea than the man in the moon, but it has been fun. It's been challenging and it's been fun. All of it has been like you just don't know what's going to happen today. I've always been one of these people, I like to plan at least seven hours worth of work every day and that extra hour, that's for whatever happens. ... [The ups and downs were] not that bad until ...

about '78 was when it started yo-yoing. So I mean, it wasn't anything just a big gush of everything, but everybody was busy. Everybody was making good money. Everybody had a job.... The companies would transfer them in. At one time I guess we had Mobil, Texaco, Shell, Marathon, Conoco. I guess we had about eight or ten major oil companies that were in this area at that time. Which meant that we also brought the supply stores and the pipe companies, the trucking companies and everything else that goes along with it. ... At that time there was a lot of trailer parks and the majority of the people came in with house trailers. They were just kind of like the nomads of the cornfields and a lot of them came in from Texas and Oklahoma.

*During the 1970's, demand for oil and gas workers was extraordinary, and the expansion of the workforce to include local women and minorities was not sufficient to meet it. Companies recruited employees from all over the United States. Even prisons were eyed as sources of labor. Several divers recalled working with men who had been released from Chino prison.*



**Figure 7.8. Diver Working Underwater in the Gulf of Mexico.  
Photo Courtesy of Walter Daspit, OOGHP.**

*Wayne Willet:* There was a lot of turnover in the younger divers. We had 72 divers at one time, at McDermott, on the roster. And some of them would come and go, and we had one of the best diving crews in the world as far as I'm concerned, guys that stayed. And we had Chino [prison] hands, the whole gang of them, for a few years. Most of them weeded themselves out with dope and stuff. The good ones hung on, some of them are still around... I would say from '72, '73, somewhere around there was the earliest we got any of them... The outfit in California, Kirby Morgan, the ones that make the helmets, they were the ones that put the class on in Chino to try to rehabilitate these young guys out there, and then, in order to make that kind of deal work, they had to find employers that would use them after they got out of prison. So McDermott send out a couple of our big bosses, Skinny Brown and Bob Maguire, and they looked the situation over, and found out they were being taught fairly well, and agreed to take on so many for trial period. I don't know if we got any government subsidy for it or not... Most of [the divers] didn't mind too much, but [it] made a lot of the younger guys jealous 'cause it took them a year or two years to

save up enough money to go to dive school, and then they had to look for their own jobs, and here's these punks, kill somebody, go to prison, and get one of the best diving courses in the world for free and then their jobs found for them. So it made a little bit of jealousy in that direction.

*Bob Merriman:* The first ones that came out here, first groups, were pretty good. Fact, they were very good. They come from varied backgrounds... I am going to have to get a little politically incorrect because the reason they were good: is 'cause they were hand selected by the people there, some of them were ex-Navy divers. They knew what it took to be a diver. They knew what kind of personality they were looking for and all that stuff. And they hand selected these divers. So the first bunts that came out is really good because they were picked by people who knew what they were doing. They were well-trained and they came out there rehabilitated and good shape and ready to go. And then the politicians, political people started getting involved. Well, you got to put this guy in here because he's been here as long as this guy and the fact that this guy was a piece of trash had nothing to do with it. They couldn't do that anymore. So then they had to start taking [anyone into the program]. They no longer could just say, "No, we are not training you."... The quality of divers deteriorated badly. Then all of a sudden, we started getting criminals. Before we had rehabilitated guys that had made some kind of mistake and ended up in prison. Generally it was smoking a cigarette, a marijuana cigarette, or getting in a fight in a bar, something like that. Nothing serious. Although we did have a couple with some pretty colorful backgrounds, but they had impressed the people out there... and they wanted to start a new life, learn a trade. And they went in there and busted their butt and did it. But then the ones we started getting, they weren't that. And we quit hiring because we started getting criminals... Things were getting stolen. Guys were – I knew a couple of them that got busted for drugs. Here's a guy working offshore making more money than a President of a bank and he's going on a base and stealing drugs out of a drugstore, at night. You know, it's stupid... [They came in] 'bout '74, '73-'74. Somewhere around there. A little bit before I came to McDermott... We had a few. I had heard about the program, but I hadn't actually bumped into it. The first job I was on with McDermott, I bumped into a couple of them. And then, in fact, I [saw one wearing] a jacket that said, "Chino State Prison." Started talking to them... We had several working there. All good, all good divers. Maybe because they were all tenders then. None had broke out to be divers, but they were good tenders. And they became good divers. And worked hard, never caused any problems. [Then about] '78, I am just guessing here, '79, sometime around in that period we started getting the other ones... I finally... I just told the boss. I says, "You know I don't want these guys, I don't. Don't send them out here because if you do, I am just going to send them back." It's just – you are a diving superintendent out there and trying to get a job done.

*As elsewhere in the United States, a rise in drug use, coupled with liability concerns, meant that companies developed stricter drug policies. Many in the oil and gas industry blamed the expanding use of contract laborers for the growing problems they experienced. Though drug-free workforce policies were put in place during the 1970's, both managers and workers argued that it was during the downturn of the 1980's, when companies needed to get rid of workers, that the policies were enforced. Harry LeBoeuf was put in charge of drug enforcement for Texaco and shares his experiences.*

*Harry LeBoeuf:* I did all of the drug and contraband searches for Texaco, I did all of them. So that kind of put me on the bad side with a lot of the people... [The searches] sort of steamrolled from a little bit, you done a little, to where we'd do more and more. If I'd get a report that somebody suspected something offshore, well I had to do one. I couldn't ignore it. Any time I would get a report that something wasn't right, something was wrong, well, I had to have one, 'cause if I'd ignore it, I'd be derelict of duty... It was real strong in the '70's and '80's. Mostly the '80's and it was mostly contract hands. We had on one occasion I had a problem [on] one platform and I went to have an inspection. I'd use a third party inspector out of Franklin that had the dogs and everything and I went to have an inspection. Come to find out it was the helicopter mechanic that was the problem and he was the one working on this helicopter that we was all riding in. So it kind of scared us... I had one inspection, the inspections progressively got more intense where at one time we'd inspect just the bags of the people coming in off the helicopter, going out. Then they wanted us to inspect the automobiles when somebody'd drive up to the dock to go out, to inspect their cars, and we had one inspection in Venice and I wound up with a truckload of guns and ammunition. I had a fellow with a pick-up truck, he had a tool box in the back of his pick-up truck and he had all kind of shells, shotgun shells, bullets, and everything. He didn't have no gun, but the shells were contraband. The truckload full, we gave it all back to them. We couldn't keep it, but I had to take it off the premises. And the only thing that we'd do to contractors was just cart 'em off the premises, off the property. If we had any narcotics, we would turn it over to the sheriff, to the Sheriff's Department. [We did] not [have lots of problems] with our own people, we did have a lot of problems with the contractors.

## **7.6. Vietnam War and Its Impacts**

*The Vietnam War affected St. Mary Parish and the offshore oil and gas industry in two principal ways. First, returning veterans, particularly helicopter pilots, came to be an important part of the Gulf of Mexico workforce. Second, Vietnamese refugees moved into communities such as Amelia and became a dominant force there. These Vietnamese newcomers followed the occupational patterns of their Cajun neighbors, working on shrimp and fishing vessels until they understood enough English to work in the oil fields.*

*Roland Mitchell:* When I first went in the Army, I was in the Airborne infantry, like paratroopers. And I did that for about eight years. And then I became interested in going to Special Forces, or the Green Berets, so I went from Fort Campbell, trained, became Green Beret or Special Forces. And I was in the Special Forces for four years. And I did one tour in Vietnam in Special Forces, and we moved around quite a bit there by helicopter. I became fairly interested. I always been interested in aviation but could never afford to take flying lessons. But when the war came along, every time you'd pick up the Army Times, which is like the Army's little hometown newspaper, it was always stating that they needed people to go to flight school, and so one day I went into the order room with this [fella]... and I asked the company clerk to look up this certain regulation which stated all the requirements to go to flight school. And lo and behold, I had met all the requirements, so went and took the test. And did quite well on that, and then ah, was accepted to go the Army helicopter flight training. In 1966.... And graduated June of 1967, and was finished at Fort Knox, Kentucky, from Fort Rucker, Alabama. And there we formed up a air cavalry squadron, and I flew back to Vietnam in February of 1968 for my second tour... It was very intense, it really was. That was the worst of the war. We go there in

'68, right as Tet offensive was going on. And then after that, went back to Fort Walters, Texas, which was one of the Army's flight schools, the formative, primary helicopter school. And I was there for about a year and a half, and they sent me back to Vietnam. My third tour... And in '76 I had a friend who had retired and came down here, and was flying out here in the Gulf... I decided that we'd get out [of the Army] and go ahead and take my retirement, come down here and start working on my second career, 'cause I knew I had these two kids that would be going to school, to college soon, and I had to make the money... My first job was contracted to the Gulf Oil Company. They leased the aircraft from Petroleum Helicopters... Well, [my first day we] went out there and the aircraft stayed in the field all the time, so they took us out there on a larger helicopter, and they dropped us off from place to place, drop us off, pick up our people we were relieving, sort of waiting around for the trip. I got there and never been on one of those platforms like that before, and so they introduced you to it... You're going to stay here, and this is the field foreman, and that area and then [they] take you out and show you all the different fields you were going to. And in those days when they'd get a brand new pilot out there, they would be a little bit leery of you. And, not knowing how you were going to work out for them, and sometimes you'd have to... weed these people and see what they really wanted from you. Some of 'em would tell you exactly what they wanted, and some would let you sink or swim. So, fortunately I had a rough old guy, he took a liking to me and we got along great then, and spent one tour out there and I came back to the base in Morgan City, and they told me, well next week you're going to be going out with to a different pier. I said, "Well, okay. And is there any particular reason for that? Did I do something wrong or something?" They said, "Oh no, no. It's this other fella, they don't want him, so they want someone new."

Of course, now, your helicopter pilots that's something else. I think a lot of those helicopter pilots was from Vietnam when they got out of the service looking for jobs. Most of your helicopter pilots are from out around. - *TR Naquin*

*Karen Gray:* My particular gang pusher, the supervisor of the gang or whatever, was a big black guy that had been in Viet Nam and took almost kind of a fatherly role and stuck up for me. I think you just kind of made sure you were never found alone with some people that you didn't think much of. Would they play jokes on you? Yeah. One time, because I was small, they were having to overhaul one of the big compressors, and the crankshaft had kind of fallen apart, metal shavings all on the inside of it. So the doors on the thing are probably two feet by three feet for each cylinder, so they actually sent me to crawl up in there to get the shavings and stuff out and then left me. I couldn't get out alone. I had to be pulled out by my feet, so they like left, for a few hours. Was it a joke or was it mean? No. But the gang pusher noticed I wasn't at dinner, went looking for me and there were my feet sticking out. What do you do? I was kind of game for practical jokes as long as they weren't dangerous or off color or that sort of thing. A lot of the stuff that they did was pretty... their idea of a joke, some of the people's idea of a joke would be to take the raunchiest pictures they could find in Hustler and various type magazines and if they knew you were going to be operating a particular platform that week, leave them all over the office, what we call the doghouse. The raunchier the better as far as they were concerned.

*Garver Watkins:* The Vietnamese, they started bringing those in. I had the first Vietnamese that McDermott had, I had to put him to work... And boy that was one working fool. That old man worked... We was running the hand rail shop and we used to have two men grinding the hand

rails that the whole crew built. And he would keep up the thing by himself, all the grinding and stacking, by himself. He was a working machine. And he had about ten kids.

*Clyde Dyerson:* I think the biggest problem I had with a race relationship was when the Vietnamese came to town and they went to work. And fortunately for them, they were very industrious people and they didn't know how to weld, they didn't know how to burn, they didn't know how to do this and that, but it didn't take 'em long to learn and they did good at it. And we had quite a few Vietnam vets working for us and they didn't cotton to the Vietnamese too well either because they said, "You don't know whether this guy was on our side or on that side when he left Vietnam to come over here and now he is taking jobs" and so forth and so on. And every once in a while we had some fisticuffs and so forth and so on and I had to get involved and settle that. In fact, I had to bust one of my foremen back for derogatory remarks he was making to a Vietnamese in his crew. And he was a fellow that I had known ever since I went to work at McDermott and had recommended him for his job. It was a tough thing to do, but I had to get it done. We had a pay scale and when you got into that pay scale, that's what you made and it didn't make any difference whether you were black, white, yellow, Vietnamese or not. Like I say, it was probably more difficult for them to move ahead than it was otherwise.

## **7.7. Community Impacts**

*Due to the rapid growth and development of the industry during the 1970s, some long-standing problems such as housing shortages continued at the same time that new problems emerged. Robert Shivers and Gladys LeBoeuf talk about Morgan City's responses to the lack of homes and schoolteachers during this period.*

*Robert Shivers:* It was a tight go here up until the early '70's. See, Morgan City literally just doesn't have the land. You go out two more lots and you're knee deep in swamps... What happened in the early '70's, particularly here in Patterson, [one] family had eleven hundred acres across the track. And I think there was about 10 kids in the estate, and it got to where you couldn't make any money out of sugarcane. And they decided to divide up their eleven hundred acres, each one got close to a hundred acres. That put several hundred lots across the track.

*Gladys LeBoeuf:* I am a teacher, over 40 years in that business. I moved to Morgan City in 1975 during the boom. I moved from a little country town called Montegut, Louisiana to here, and at that time, the housing shortage was drastic here. There were only two houses up for sale. You didn't have much choice. You either took one or the other. We couldn't find a place to rent. There were no places to rent... I had taught 25 years when I came here... The schools were overcrowded. I left a school of 23 to come here and teach a school, a room of 38, and the discipline was pretty rough. Where I never had discipline problems before, 'cause they knew me and I knew them from the day they were born and I knew their dad and mama... and I didn't know these children. [There was a lot of turnover] because usually when the husbands came to work for the oil companies, the wives, a lot of them were teachers so they taught here for a while, while they were here.

*Nationwide advertising for workers at a time when much of the United States was suffering from economic recession brought many people to the region, often without families. The following*



*women who were working in offices of local companies describe how they tried to support the new workers.*

*Doris Mullendore:* I did a lot of their banking for [the divers] and everything. I said, “As long as they’re single, I’ll do it. The married ones, they’ve got a wife.” I drew the line. “Cause you see what happens, you might have say six tenders living in one house, three of them would be offshore, three would be in and when you would just get mail put in a box, paychecks would get lost, then you would have to void them and you know, stop payment and all that. I says, “I’ll take your checks to the bank rather than have to go through all this other stuff that it’s going to take if something happens to them.”

*Verdie Laws:* [The divers] would come in and tell me their problems. You know, they worked everywhere. One went to Italy one time and brought us some wonderful chocolates that had liqueur in the middle. I got a little donkey from Aruba one time, made out of bone and I had read how they were cannibals there and I was hoping it wasn’t human bone... I knew their marital problems, especially when I went into personnel, because I had to kind of be “Mother Confessor” there... You have got to have PR with the community, ‘cause some of your divers don’t behave all of the time... You have got to take good care of your families, because if the wife’s not happy, your diver is not going to be happy... I used to arrange periodic socials for the wives, just for the wives. We rented the Petroleum Club. They were fed a nice meal. There was a program. I had flown to Houston one day for the day and on the way home I got to chatting with the guy next to me and he was with the St. Mary Parish Sheriff’s Office, the Neighborhood Watch Program. So I said, “You would be just the guy I need for my next...” So he came and gave a very interesting talk on safety in the home. They had to feel that they could come to somebody with a real problem, to somebody in the Company. Their husbands might be offshore for six weeks at a time. I remember one instance this little couple had been married maybe a couple of months. They moved here and he promptly went offshore until she came in crying one day. She hadn’t seen her husband and she knew no one. They brought him in... And then they introduced her to some of the other wives and they kind of took her under their wing and it helped... One of the reasons for this periodic get-together was to get the wives to know each other and support each other.

*Fannie Hobbs:* [In 1976] I went to work for Cactus International and they wanted me to be the Insurance Administrator, so they sent me to Dallas to train for that. And I came back and I was with Cactus nearly ten years and not only was I the Insurance Administrator, but I was also assistant to the Personnel Manager. I was also assistant to the Safety Director and so I really had my hands full, but it was fun and we were one big family. In the oil patch, when one person is in trouble, we all pitch in to help. One of the girls there had a fire that completely destroyed her trailer and all the Cactus employees had a special fund just for her and the other companies heard about it that we did business with and that girl came out with enough to buy her another trailer and but that’s how it is in the oil field. I mean, we stick together and we are family.

*The rapid influx of newcomers, along with a general rise in drug use and specific industry practices such as the development of labor camps, raised concerns among many local residents. Local fears of the were heightened by large numbers of single male workers who had come into the region looking for work and were living in motel rooms, parks, or their vehicles. These were*

*exacerbated by increased activity at the bars located in the downtown areas and along the highways and by a string of murders that took place during this period. Labor camps were established to recruit and deploy workers to fulfill the manual labor needs of a wide variety of petroleum and service companies, and these caused special concern (Higgins, 2005). The men living in the camps were provided a bed and meals and, in exchange, were contracted out as low-skilled laborers in shipyards, fabrication yards, and other locations that required such workers. Though their labor was much needed by the industry, they were not accepted as members of the communities in which the labor camps were located. Families took various steps to protect themselves from what they perceived to be the principal dangers they faced, as the following mothers and fathers indicate.*

*Judy Wilson:* It was a pretty raucous area, you know. It got to where I could hardly go out in the yard without a drunk being on the porch or something. You would get once or twice I was doing yard work, I was maybe on the street side and Bill was in the side yard which was behind the fence working, and I know one time I got mooned by a man out there. And he and I decided enough was enough. And we had taken a little trip up to Arkansas just to get away 'cause his work was very hectic and my work was very hectic. And the kids were just about grown at this point. Ken was an older teenager... and we told Ken, "Now son, it's okay to call us." This was before the cell phones and all this, but "You'll have to call and the park police will have to come get us."... So one day here comes the park police, knock knock, and I say, "Oh no it's an emergency." Well what it was, somebody drunk had gotten on the front porch and Ken had got a rifle, a shotgun or something to scare him, and the gun had discharged from the living room and out into the foyer of the house and the bullet had gone into the baseboard. It had a hare trigger on it and his daddy had told him, "Do not mess with that gun." Well there was no harm done. This is one of those things where you could have had a tragedy or you could – you know, it turned out to be a funny thing. But anyway... we just decided that enough was enough and so we started working on trying to get a closing on the bars and we got out, we had some pamphlets printed up. We got out and went house to house and got people to come to the council meetings and we were trying to get it closed at midnight and we compromised for 2 o'clock, but they had to be cleared out by 2 o'clock in the morning. And so we got that through and it was kind of cleaned up a little bit and some of the drifters had left town because the chamber of commerce had advertised and they just did not ask for skilled workers, they just asked for workers. So we had bums and workers and everything else. They were sleeping in culverts, they were under the bridge, anywhere they could find a place to curl up. That's where they were. And it was not a really good situation, not a really good situation at all... That was back in the '70's... There was that period where there was so much work and the chamber of commerce says, "Oh, we are going to advertise." And they did and this was the result of it. And word spread, too. I guess that they were looking for some decently skilled workers, but there was a tremendous influx at the beginning. It was just really bad.

*Fannie Hobbs:* I was strict in a way. I mean, I wanted to know who they were going with, where they were going, and when I could expect them back, you know that sort of thing, but no I wasn't too worried. The only time I was really worried was when they had a series of murders here in Morgan City. And I was still working at the time and I only had one daughter here at home and a lot of times when she would come home, her daddy would be out fishing on the river. And I cautioned her, I said, "Now Helen, the minute you get in from school, you come in,

lock the door and call me at work. Phone me immediately and you stay with that door locked until your daddy or I come. You are not to go anywhere.” Because at that time there were five people that were murdered... There were lots of drunks and things like that, but that was the only really bad case that I could think of.

*The turbulent era of the 1970's lured many into the false belief that the good times in the industry were going to last. One chapter of a 1977 report, entitled Outer Continental Shelf Impacts, Morgan City, Louisiana and prepared by researchers at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, concluded, "Given the need for domestic petroleum, the relatively inelastic demand for petroleum and natural gas, the many alternative uses for crude oil, and the dependence on petroleum for transportation, it is unlikely that the Morgan City economy will suffer in the near-to-medium term" (Gramling and Joubert, 1977). Though anyone who had been associated with the oil and gas industry for any significant period of time expected up- and downturns, none were prepared for the devastation in the economy and community that lay ahead.*

## 8. REFLECTIONS ON THE INDUSTRY, ITS PEOPLE, AND ITS IMPACTS

*As the 1980's began, the industry was strong and there were few signs of the devastating downturn that lay ahead. As the "bust" began, different sectors were affected at different times. However, although the "bust" took several years to play out, by the mid-1980's it was clear to all those involved that the industry was experiencing more than a typical down cycle (McKenzie et al., 1993; Seydlitz and Laska, 1994). Despite the bust, the oil fields in the Gulf did not shut down completely. Some companies that survived did so by finding contracts outside the oil field. The 1980's were characterized by changes in individual company practices, the organization of the sectors, and of the industry. The massive restructuring and reorganization of the 1990's would result in a very different looking industry, with far fewer players. Many of the earliest pioneers who had built their careers with the major petroleum companies, had already retired by the 1980's or did so during the bust, with handsome benefits packages. Others were not so fortunate. Here the pioneers reflect on the industry, its impacts on their families and communities, and the future.*

### 8.1. Surviving the Bust

*Parker Conrad:* Then, of course, in the 1980's all of the sudden the bottom dropped out, and it was some sad days then. We managed to hang on here by diversifying, and by building floating dry docks, for example, for people on the east coast and the West Indies islands, and Venezuela and Africa, and so we were able to build barges and dry docks – as their floating equipment – for customers around the world, you might say. And that's what kept us going through the bad times because the oil patch had just gotten down to where it was pretty slow. However, on the plus side of things, it was not all bad, because there was still a lot of producing wells offshore, and they had to have boats to service those wells. And even though competition was keen, we were able to manage to get enough repair work to keep our dry docks fairly busy. That, of course, helped out, because Conrad Industries, we're pretty well equally divided between new construction and repairs, and so when new construction dropped off to almost nothing, the repairs kept us going.

*TR Naquin:* I don't know who was able to sell [those boats], but some of the companies did sell one or two of them up to Alaska and made fishing boats out of 'em. Put in these big, blast freezers and made fishing boats out of 'em. A lot of these crew boats, they were sold and made salvage boats out of them, going to Cozamel, and Puerto Rico and all the beaches over there. They would take these crew boats and fancy them up for diving deals and party deals, made party boats out of them/ Sold a lot of them for that, and there are still a lot available. ... They predicted [that] in '83 when the bottom fell out, they predicted it would take at least three years for it to come back, but it never did. It came back to a certain extent. ... I imagine [things fell in] a matter of about six months. ... You just hope we could find somebody to sell the boats to. ... After that I went to work for my son-in-law with the pipe-laying barge. He had a pipe-laying barge that was laying pipelines for Chevron Oil, whoever he could contract with. And we just had a barge crew of about 20 people. And that was a piece of cake finding those because usually the barge superintendent, he knew who would work and he knew their capabilities so we really didn't have to worry about finding the hands. He'd bring his own hands there because if it didn't work, he would send them to the house.

*Earl Hebert:* [We survived because of the] versatility of the people. And the reason I say that is because we have been, are, and probably always will be an oil field service company, but when things slowed down, we went out and got a sidewalk paving project and we paved sidewalks for about a year or so. We didn't make any money, but we probably paid for our equipment that we had to purchase. But it kept our core people and I think that's one of the moves that management made that was really good. We would do like the saying says, what it takes to keep going.

*Elaine Naquin:* That was quite a while after I retired, was asked to retire for the simple reason that I didn't have quite 25 years in. But at that time they came in and asked us to take our retirement and they told us what we would get for the retirement and so on and so forth. And so I said, "Well, I have 23 and a half years here and I wanted to take and make 25 years out of it," but I asked them, I said, "Well, if I work 'til February will I still have a job?" And they gave me a look, so I said I guess I better take this retirement. So I took the retirement. ... Myself and there was another lady who worked in Houma that's the same age with the same amount of time in. What they did was cutting, downsizing I guess you would call it, downsizing on the company and they were getting rid of the ones who cost them the most, if you know what I mean. Who were making the bigger salaries and all. But it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed my job very much...

*Arthur Lee:* Over the years I kept a record of all of our revenues in all of the companies. And during the year, I mean it was up and down. But by the end of the year, from year to year, that thing just kept going up. Until it really hit the downgrade back in the early part of the '80's. That changed the whole history of the oil field. 'Cause the drilling contractors got to where they couldn't pay for the services. And then, too, it got to where wherever they wanted a pipe job or something they'd tell you how much they were gonna pay. So a lot of time you couldn't even do the work. So it was justified... The service companies like us was taking advantage of the situation. We'd do whatever we could to get by, to get by with, you know? But I didn't get involved in the price of any of those. Of course the Public Service Commission. The Louisiana chapter and also the federal controlled our rates in the oil field in the trucking. And then the rental tools. It was just how much you could get by with.

*Lloyd Charpentier:* Well, the first downturn that I really got affected by was in '82 during the Reagan administration. The oil industry went from a boom industry in '83-'84 to nothing. We went from a booming economy in the oil field to survival. A lot of things went bankrupt and stuff. In Tidewater, we were able to work enough boats to keep enough cash flow. We lost money. Everybody lost money, but to survive the one thing we always did was do our maintenance and stuff, so when things started turning around... From '82 it started, end of '82, '83 and into '84 and in '85 it started back a little bit, but then they were having to cut oil prices and in late '85, '86 was really the worst we had ever seen. And in '87 it started coming back a little bit. It crept up and in '92 we had a little downturn, but that wasn't much. That was the year that we acquired Zapata, '92. And by having a bigger stake, we were able to control more of our destiny. And it just slowly kept getting bigger and bigger until we had some of the best times that we have ever had, '97, '98 here in the Gulf of Mexico and worldwide. And of course, '99 it started back down again. We thought it would be over with by now, but I guess when it decides to go south, it don't want to come back. ... When I first started, it was 7 and 7, 7 days on, 7 days off. That was our basic schedule for a lot of years. In fact that was our basic schedule until the

Zapata merger. Our people either worked 7 and 7 or 14 and 14 and they had a choice. Now we had a lot of people worked more time than 7 and 7 or 14 and 14, but it was a choice. That wasn't a schedule that we were required to work. For the Zapata merger, Zapata had been working 28 and 14, so they kind of pushed for that schedule and we went to a 28 and 14 schedule. We had a lot of people that still worked 7 and 7, 14 and 14, just refused to work any more time. They didn't want to work so we just let 'em work that way. And today we are back to a 14 and 14 schedule because we are trying to keep as many people working as we can with a short schedule, and when things pick up we will go back to a 28 and 14 schedule. 28 and 14 for the guys on boats seems like a good schedule for 'em because they like the schedule because they get a chance to make some serious money, but they get some serious time off. So they seem to like it... I guess probably the time I really enjoyed was when we had the drug interdiction program from '84-'93. I was in charge of that. We did it all out of Key West, Florida and Panama City, Panama. And I used to go down and do the search for arms. We were under contract first with the Coast Guard and then to the Army and it was exciting because I got to fool with stuff that ... nobody ever saw...

*Doris Mullendore:* When so many people got laid off, there was not jobs for the young people that was graduating from college and wanted to come home and make a livin' and couldn't 'cause there was nothing here for them. [People moved] or either at that time they were skilled enough in something to open their own business, you know, and still be able to stay... It depended on what phase of the oil industry was down with at the time. The people that serviced them moved on or just went out of business and then as that phase would come back again, they would come back into the area again. We are a transient area. It just, you know, everybody was down. The outlook on life, like, "What's gonna happen 'cause now this is gone, this is gone." But a lot of them even in the oil industry left and went to Lafayette and Houston. They still had equipment working here which wasn't as bad. What was bad was the executives that ended up having to move. I mean it would be nothing at all to see 25 to 30 families having to leave. [You would just] do what you have to do to stay in business. Keep the people workin'... With the diving industry it is not like say Mobil Oil or something. Diving, you work the whole Gulf coast, so really it didn't make a whole lot of difference where you are, 'cause you had to either truck the gear or you load it on boats and they go. So it wasn't that they had to be exactly where the work was... I consider myself real fortunate for the fact that I have always been able to hold a good job, got paid good money for it, had good people to work for and have been able to stay right here.

*Ken Perry:* When the bottom started to fall out, it started to fall out fast. I was one of the first bunch in Lafayette let go and I was shocked. I had turned down other jobs. I thought I'd be there forever. I loved my boss. He was a good man and he was caught by surprise, too. They sold all the airplanes in one day and I was told – I remember it was a Friday afternoon – I landed and they told me to get my stuff out of the plane and I drove my company car, which was the only one I had, to the office and I was told to clear out my desk. They drove me home and about an hour later, I was sitting in my apartment, "What the hell am I going to do now?" That story was repeated hundreds of times over the next three or four years in aviation down here. I found out a job opening here, a marine company that was building boats and had dry docks, Hudson Marine, needed a pilot on a Cessna 441, which was a turbo prop Cessna. So I actually called the guy, Mr. Huddleston, and he was going to be in New Orleans on a Saturday. So I drove to New Orleans

and he interviewed me at the bar at the Monteleone Hotel, it was called. I think it's called the Carousel. You kind of go around in a circle... And so I got the job and went back to Lafayette and got a U-haul and moved all my crap to my grandfather and dad's house in Houma, 'cause I didn't have anywhere else to live. And I came over here and jumped in the airplane and flew to Wichita for two weeks of school and that's how I got to be here. And that was in early '82 and I flew for him just a few weeks and then I got back and he calls me into the office and says they have got to lay me off. I had to become the co-pilot and the co-pilot got mad and he was mad because he had been here before I was and he didn't have the flight time to be a captain. And he thought he should be upgraded and so when Mr. Huddleston said he was about to lay us off and he would like us to fly contract, you know, keep paying us as we fly, the co-pilot raised hell and left. So I flew that airplane for a few more months until I got it sold for 'em out in California. I delivered it to a fellow out there.



**Figure 8.1. Ken Perry's Piper-Navajo, Twin Engine Cabin Class, Which Carried 7 Passengers and a Pilot, 1979. Photo Courtesy of Ken Perry, OOGHP.**

*Verdie Laws:* We had the first big layoff, I think, about in 1987 and at that time there were five of us that reported directly to the General Manager and we must have agonized for two weeks about who we were gonna let go because we didn't... First of all he said that everybody that reported directly to him was gonna take a ten percent cut in pay, including himself, which I thought was admirable. And then we agonized, because then you are looking at people's livelihoods. And that's when the first cut was made and then there were future cuts and then finally I became a victim of the... and then I don't know after that... They got to where they called Atlanta, "Ville Platte East." Ville Platte is north of Lafayette and so many people moved out that they called Atlanta "Ville Platte East." [I stayed because] my children had had enough turmoil in their lives already and economically, I have a house here. I couldn't rent a comparable house anywhere else. I finished paying my mortgage while I worked at McDermott and you know, that's a big plus. And my children were in high school and so forth, so...because of the economics I stayed... [There were] a lot of boarded up stores. It was reflected in places like your church, less attendance, less revenue for the church. The school programs. It was very scary because you didn't know if maybe next year you might not have to move whether you wanted to or not. It might get to that point you know?

*Lisa Topham Williams:* Now unfortunately, in the mid '80's when the oil and gas industry basically went bust, a lot of people moved out of the community because they had families to support. They had to go where they could find work... We have had some ups and downs in the oil and gas industry and like I said, it's all based on the price of oil and gas. That is what drives how much work any companies like McDermott have, is the price of oil and gas. And in this, south Louisiana, you do tend to have a lot of shipyards and so forth. So there is a competitiveness for labor. We no longer have a shipyard, but we compete with the shipyards in our area for their labor pool. So we are all kind of drawing from the same labor pool and in the '80's people got a bad taste in their mouths for working in the oil and gas industry because of the ups and downs and a lot of people left and you can't draw them back.

## **8.2. Reflections on the Changes Wrought by the Industry**

*The offshore oil and gas industry created significant and lasting changes in Morgan City and the surrounding communities. More than fifty years after the first successful well was drilled offshore out of sight of land, current and former residents of the area reflect upon the industry and how it affected them, their families, and their communities. The industry brought more than money, jobs, and new people to southern Louisiana; it also brought new technologies, some of which could be adapted for purposes other than drilling for and producing oil and gas. It caused significant environmental impacts and sped up social changes such as the shift away from the French language and the integration of blacks into the local economy. In this final section, residents and people involved in all aspects of the industry reflect on its impacts. Their diverse perspectives reflect the complex ways in which the industry and the communities grew alongside and adapted to one another.*

*Houston LeJeune:* The oil companies brought in lots of money in circulation. You see, I grew up during the tail end of the Great Depression. Times were hard. You could not buy a job. But most of the people lived on small farms out in the country. Usually, we did not have two nickels to rub together but we never did go hungry because we raised everything we had. The only thing we sold was the cotton to buy clothes, to buy sugar, coffee, and tobacco if you used tobacco. The rest of it, we raised. We canned vegetables. We had our own chickens to slaughter. We had our own hogs to slaughter. We had our own milk house. We lived very well. We were poor but we did not know we were poor because everybody was poor. There were very few rich people in the countryside. I lived on the farm until I was about 12 years old... [The oil companies brought] much prosperity, yes. Seismograph was going full bloom. Production was coming on. Lease money brought a lot of money for the land owners... Also, in the later years, the land owner would charge you to shoot on that property. They would charge you maybe 10 dollars to 25 dollars for every hole that you drilled on the property to shoot... It had a definite change. A lot of the people moved to town, got off the farms, got jobs working. During the war, a lot of people moved to town and got defense jobs, maybe moved to town in Morgan City to work in the shipyards. In my part of the country, they might move out of the country and essentially locate the families, maybe in Opelousas, and maybe they drove to Baton Rouge to fabricate the gasoline plants. They might board a week in New Orleans to work on Higgins boats, and stuff like that. Now, that was the big change from World War II... That was the great big change in Louisiana. A big, big change. The Great Depression did not ease up, in my part of central



Louisiana, until World War II. Everybody lived on a farm and we were all poor but we did not know we were poor, like I said... Working for Sun Oil, life was much easier. Standard of living came way up. People could afford cars, afford better homes, higher wages. Of course, inflation was in there, too, but the standard of living was coming way up, from World War II on.

*RD Pitre:* Oil fields are hard work but it was different every day. I used to like to wake up in the morning looking forward to the day because something different was going to happen. It never was dull. No dull moments. No same thing, like working in the saw mill, running a board here. Something different every day.

*Joe Young:* Those guys were dedicated back then. They really were. I mean, they would give you a day's work and they would stay with the same [company]. They did not change jobs all the time, like they do now. I remember the rigs that I worked on, those guys had been working for that contractor for 20, 25 years. All the drillers, they usually had 15 or 20 years before they ever got to be a driller. Those guys worked roughnecks 10 to 15 years. [It was hard work], but they made good money. Those were some of the best paying jobs. Well, the oil field paid better back in those days, paid better than most jobs did, really. Like you say, it was tough work. You earned your money. But it was good money. I can think back to when minimum wage was about a dollar fifty an hour. Those roughnecks made seven to eight dollars an hour. An average paying job was probably three fifty to four dollars an hour, and those guys were making seven and eight dollars an hour.

*Red Adams:* In '58 I married and moved here. And we've been here ever since. So '58—we are going on 44 years... Yes, it was wild, but you have to look at the people that worked in the oil field. I mean you didn't have weak people – I mean strengthwise – because it was such a hard job. I mean no boy that didn't have a little muscle to him, and then the people that work in the oil field were very, very proud. It was one of the few industries, I would say of any industry, that if you were out there working and pushing a crew twelve hours a day – and I was pushing a crew, talking about a roustabout crew – I would try to do more work than you. And you would try to do more work than me. Drillers on these crews were trying to outwork the other crew. Make more hold, trip the stack faster. A lot of competition. But not competition where you are trying to stab someone. Competition where you're...it's friendly. [You say,] "I tripped from 12,000 feet in six hours. I've seen on the tower reports any time you did that it took you eight hours. You are wasting time, huh?" That kind of competition... Town's been good to me. You know, beautiful place. And a lot of people make money here. A lot of people made [money] because it was a working place. The business was here basically for all those years. The business was here and they left the business here. Now, for me, when I make my sales calls it is New Orleans, Lafayette, Houston, and Dallas. That's where I go. And that's where the people go... These companies here had beautiful people here.

*Mike Hughes:* I think the most exciting years were when we were living out of the back of a pickup truck. We had the whole world ahead of us. The people in Morgan City were wonderful. They would extend you credit on a handshake. The oil companies would give you contracts, million dollar contracts, with no documents; just go out there and get it done. And when someone puts their trust in you like that, it really is a great feeling. You didn't get "lawyer'd" to death. The accountants didn't pinch every penny and question every hour on the invoice; that put

a burden on us to be honest about our bill. It was a real true partnership with the offshore oil industry, and there was a lot of satisfaction in that.

*Marcelle Ordogne:* I learned so much about the French people here and we have raised our wonderful family here, three children and six grandchildren. We, I, always, when I would talk to people about what they liked about Morgan City, Berwick, Patterson, this area, it was always the people. The people here are just special. All of the men would come in the restaurant off the oil rigs and eat in the restaurant and tell stories about what went on and how things happened in their families. So it was to me an education, believe me. I went to business school in New Orleans, but it was nothin' like this oil field education that I acquired when I moved in Morgan City.

*Earl Hebert:* What effect has the oil industry had on this community? Well, people started coming in, I would say about 1945 or something when people from West Texas started getting transferred in and started doing basic work. Out of that initial group, I got my best friend for one thing, and I think they caused the local people to become better people. A lot of these people had been around in various cities and various schools and we had always been, we had lived here forever, and they brought in new ideas and they helped us to grow. Now, it wasn't easy. Some people had a hard time with accepting people. I heard stories where a person would be living here for 20 years and still wasn't considered a permanent person. But they brought growth to the minds and to the spirit... Morgan City was a dead little community and it was quiet... People worked, there was a shell crusher here. There was a lot of people worked at that plant. There was shrimping. There was a lot of, well this area has always been a one industry economy and at that time it was shrimping and trapping and fur buying sort of thing. But then about '45, '46 or '47 when the people started coming in, they started opening their eyes to other things and after they had been here for a while they decided, well, we ought to have a tennis court. People here didn't play tennis at that time. So a tennis court got built and some people complained, "Our tax dollars are going to tennis courts. We don't play tennis." I mean, you got all that kind of stuff. And then they caused, because of the influx of people, they caused us to have to build new schools. And they caused people to think about things. Okay, should we have a consolidated school that encompasses half of St. Mary's Parish or should we have a little school in each vicinity, you know?... You know, there's a civic center for example in Morgan City, Berwick, and Patterson. You wouldn't have those things if you hadn't had the outside influence. And then to really help it all out as time goes on, the people from here went to work for the oil companies and they started to go to Nigeria and they started to go to New York and they started to go to London and they broadened their interests and their knowledge, and then they brought that back here and I think that helped us to grow.

*Julie Prestenbach Barrilleaux:* I guess maybe when we were that age we were having to struggle so much and then we started having children and we didn't want our children to have to struggle as much. And working in the oil field, that generation, my generation, was able to make the money that was needed to be able to spoil our kids, you know, and it didn't take that much, that long a period of time because the oil field pays well. I mean, the oil field is a really big industry and it pays, the booming years, people just really prospered, businesses prospered even though whenever the oil field would drop they would go out of business. They still had a good nest egg and people learned how to work the oil field, you know, from that period 'til now. They knew

the dips and valleys and it's like a bear storing his food for the winter, you know. You store your money for the bad times because you know they are gonna come so people got used to being able to work their money better. And then the stock market during that period was doing a lot better until now, until the bottom fell out again. I don't think that will ever be up like it used to back then.

*Frances Cockerham:* Well, when Daddy came home it was always a celebration... Most of the time when he left to go back, it was middle of the night. So I would still be sleeping and find out the next morning he was gone, before you could comprehend what it was to work this type of schedule... It was mother and I doing this. When he would be home, that's when we would go deliver his papers to the office. I think that's what helps me with the kind of life I lead now. It's because I'm as comfortable in an oil field yard as I am in a business office... It's a life you'd almost have to live to really be able to feel a part of. There was a way that allowed him to spend more time with his family when he wanted to. It didn't mean he always did. There was always things, as with any man, to occupy his time. Back then a man wasn't as family-oriented as we see them today... It was still woman's work to be the supporter at school, to do the normal things that we think of entire families doing today. At the same time, there's a lot of things that I have picked up from him. I'm more mechanically inclined than most young ladies of my generation were. I'm more comfortable handling how to work a motor. And, going to these faraway places, these strange locations... The things I did as child by going to locations and going out on rigs would never be allowed in today's world. In a way, they're right. It is dangerous. It is a hazard to have a young child, even twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old out there. As mother said earlier about maturity being at an earlier age then, I knew when I was there – I also knew when I got a certain look or a certain move of the hand, it was, "Get out of the way." You didn't wait and question like today's generation would do. You had to be on your toes. But, at the same time, I look at what I gained being exposed to all this and realize that the current generation is at a loss for it... It wasn't until he got hurt the first time, because there were other smaller injuries, there always is in that type of situation, that I realized how dangerous what he did really was. It was an eye opener.

*Joyce Cockerham:* People didn't think about suing anybody during our oil field days. It's just the newer generation. We were all- everybody was glad to be working, making a living. That's all they wanted was to make a living. And they loved doing what they were doing. That was the in thing, was the oil field, during our time.

*Bill Wilson:* I think the industry really affected this area here, Morgan City. Of course, it's kind of departed from here recently, but the last few years because of the channel being a big problem here, the shallow channel and the silt and things are being done by our political structure in our community to try to get that channel deepened and hopefully that will, if that happens, we will see a return of a lot of our oil industry that was kind of forced to move out because of that. The, Morgan City is a very diverse small community. There's hardly any natives left here. We are all from somewhere else, but this is our adopted home just like I chose to come back here to retire when I retired. I like Morgan City. I worked here for years before going to the big city, New Orleans and raised a big portion of my family between Morgan City and New Iberia. It's where I raised my family and all. Morgan City has a lot of zeal, I guess would be the word I would want to use for that. You have got a lot of people with a lot of knowledge about a lot of things in this

little town and maybe you don't see that when you are driving through it or you are just visiting here and all, but to me people is what makes up a community... During the boom years of the oil industry in Morgan City, we did not have the foresight, I guess I want to use the word, for development to be able to keep the people here as a result of the growth. Part of it is because we don't have the space, but part of it was poor planning, poor forward planning or poor vision for what could be. Then there's kind of a collapse that happened as a result of some of that. The oil companies instead of, didn't have the space, the subdivisions to be built, the community growth moved away, went to other areas to operate out of... Maybe years ago it was make a fast buck and we will move out when we get our money. But I don't think that's the mindset here now. I see a lot of positive things on the horizon and I think Morgan City has a real bright future to tell you the truth. I really think it has a bright future.

*Ken Perry:* The majority of the change was in the '80's with the consolidation of the oil companies... I got in on the tail end of the "good old days," the tail end of the kind of the cowboy days, 'cause you were just pretty much out there on your own. I do remember, it was my second job that I got a pager and then you were a little more connected, and then that's when the microwave phones started getting better. That's when the radios started getting smaller where you could put them in an airplane where people started putting telephones in their cars and then the digital stuff started. So it really started accelerating in the '80's with the cell phones, but that had begun in the late '70's, early '80's... We had for example, Texaco, the way Texaco was set up, they had these warehouses. There was one in Houma. There was one in Harvey. There was one over here in Morgan City. And the way that it worked was if the Field Foreman wanted something, you could make that sale and he would write it up. Then it would go in on the boat to the warehouse guy. Now if the warehouse guy liked you – the warehouse manager was the man, next to the field guy – then he would go ahead and put the order in. Now if he didn't like you, he would change it to another company so you kind of had to kind of keep both guys happy. But as the communication got better, and also the supply got better, the highway system got better... You didn't need to have so much material... You can have one spot in Louisiana now as opposed to five spots. Of course that means fewer people, it has gotten more efficient. I do know that when I first started it was extremely inefficient, and you look back on it now and you wonder how they ever made any money. But you can't look at it as it is today because you didn't have the infrastructure. You didn't have the communication. It was days to get something someplace as opposed to hours, and that's just the way technology, things change. Unfortunately what that's done is it's cost a lot of people their jobs. There's not nearly the amount of people working and people who were very good at what they did, a lot of the guys who got caught in the grinder of the '80's. I was fortunate in that I was still relatively young and I had saved some money. I was able to go into business for myself. A lot of guys that got caught in the meat grinder in their 40's have really never recovered. If they were in their 40's in the '80's and they were in a position that got [cut], there are a lot of people now who are pushing 60 who have been under or not employed for 20 years and that's a damn shame because they are the guys that actually built the industry to where it was.

*Alden Vining:* I think the oil companies were very good for this area, I really do, because they paid us good wages, we had good benefits. We had good working schedules and they took care of our . . . I really feel thankful that I went to work for Shell. I went to work by accident. I was not looking for a job. But they took care of me. They raised my family. They raised my kids.

They put my kids through college. But I think, today in Morgan City, that era is over, I really do, for several reasons. You have a bunch of these small companies in here that are not hiring as many people. The smaller people are not hiring as many people to do the job. They don't have that much exposure. They are just cleaning up a lot of these fields, wiping up a little bit of oil that they have got left in a lot of these shallow waters, particularly at Eugene Island block 18. Other people came in there and took over these fields, tried different techniques and more modern techniques, and I think at a lot of places, they have increased their production. At one time when there was seismograph, geophysical seismograph, they did all that with explosives and everything, and that was not environmentally good.



**Figure 8.2. Overloaded Workboat Headed Toward Dulac, Louisiana, 1973. Boat Almost Sank Because It Was Too Heavy. Photo Courtesy of Lynda Miller, OOGHP.**

*Jimmy Jett:* Well, the biggest change I found out there is the safety part of it. If they would assign you a job and tell you to do this, and if, [you would] say, “Well, man, that’s dangerous,” [they’d] say, “Well, either do it or go home.” That was it. But now, if they’d tell you to do something, and say, “Well, wait a second. I don’t think that’s quite safe.” “Okay, let’s see if we can do it another way.” That was the biggest change. ’Course they had change in their technology and everything, production, and all that. But, I think the biggest change was safety... I could be wrong, but I would think it’s around 1980... [In the early days,] safety was a factor, but, like when I was barge captain, we had the pump room on the barge. They had a set of quads – it’s four engines together – and it had two sets of quads, and the pump room with no mufflers, anything on it... And when you stay in there fifteen, twenty minutes, when you get out, you feel like you’re walking on air. And, no ear protection or anything, and now they won’t let you do anything like that unless you have good ear protection, mufflers. They got these little fiber things, like, you’d put in your ear now. And things like that, it’s the whole thing, with a turnover in safety... They had a few [injuries]. Not too, too many. We had a pretty good safety man. And, his favorite thing he would do, like Nixon, he’d put those fingers up, he said, “Before you have an accident, you could have that red light. And that red light tells you, don’t do that, that’s dangerous.” He said, “Back off of it.” And if you backed off of it, someone would say, “Go home.” So, it was just do or don’t.

*Harry LeBoeuf:* [It was] an abandonment. In fact, you was abandoned... As a Texaco employee, I have always been proud of that little company, a bunch of little companies, big company, all these years 'cause we have always said, "If you've got a job with Texaco, you got a job for life. You're gonna retire with 'em." And here the last years, they had a complete breakdown. Matter of fact, they done sold the company now. It's not even Texaco anymore. It's Chevron. That new CEO just sold it out. For what reason, I don't know, it was still making money. As a matter of fact, it's probably making as much money as any of the rest of them. So it's a feeling of abandonment, you lost something that you...

*Gladys LeBoeuf:* ...can never retrieve!

*Harry LeBoeuf:* Yeah, you were proud of or enjoyed havin' and it's gone. I still feel bitterness about that. 'Cause they were good to me... They don't have a sense of belonging at all. They may have a job today and none tomorrow. We never did have that problem until the later years... [When I was coming up] that was the thing to do. You had no other choice, you didn't even think about anything else. 'Cause from Montegut, everybody I know in Montegut my age was still working for Texaco then... One of the biggest things that, when I first went offshore, there were several of us that sort of pushed to have our own people, do our own thing, have our own people in every position, but by the time I retired, the push was to go to contractors, contract everything, get rid of your people and hire contractors to do this. And I guess that is still going on, whereas they are not hiring company people for anything, so they hire contractors to do it and there is no loyalty in a contractor. A contractor's loyalty is to the contractor, and that's going on all the time. That's one of the major changes in the downturn. I don't know if that is just the way people feel or that is the way the industry turned to.... Late '80's was when it all happened... And in the '90's, they just went to pot. [I would do it all over again.] The only thing that I would maybe try to do is get a little more education, to get in the engineering end of the field. There's more potential there than there is in the labor end.

*The offshore petroleum industry developed as it did because of the unique environmental, social, and political features of southern Louisiana. The gently sloping outer continental shelf made it possible for companies involved in exploration and development of oil and gas resources to "walk" their way offshore. The industry quickly grew from its tentative beginnings off the coast of Morgan City and came to dominate the physical and occupational landscape of the region. The people of Morgan City and the surrounding communities have made it clear that the industry had differential effects on the people whose lives it touched, but also that no one could escape its impacts. This past in many ways conditions Morgan City's options for the future.*

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## 10. GLOSSARY

\*Anticline - An arch-shaped fold in rock in which rock layers are upwardly convex. The oldest rock layers form the core of the fold with progressively younger rocks occurring toward the outside. Anticlines trap hydrocarbons, particularly when the rocks in their core can hold fluids and those in the outer layers form impermeable seals.

\*Barite - A dense sulfate mineral that can occur in a variety of rocks, including limestone and sandstone, and is commonly used to add weight to drilling mud.

\*Blowout - An uncontrolled flow of reservoir fluids into the wellbore; sometimes a blowout sends pressurized fluids to the surface. A blowout may consist of salt water, oil, gas, or a mixture of those.

\*Casing - Large-diameter pipe that is lowered into an openhole and cemented in place. The casing must withstand a variety of forces, such as collapse, burst, and tensile failure, as well as chemically aggressive brines.

Cryogenic - Production at very low temperatures such as those required for natural gas liquefaction.

Decompression Table - A set of depth-time relationships that establish rates of ascent from underwater according to specific depth-time exposures.

\*Derrick - The structure used to support the crown blocks and the drillstring of a drilling rig. Derricks are usually pyramidal in shape, and offer a good strength-to-weight ratio.

\*Derrickman - One of the rig crew members who gets his name from the fact that he works on a platform attached to the derrick or mast, typically 85 feet above the rig floor. On small land drilling crews, the derrickman is second in rank to the driller. Larger offshore crews may have an assistant driller between the derrickman and the driller.

\*Dome - A type of anticline that is circular or elliptical rather than elongate. The upward migration of salt masses can form domes, called salt domes.

\*Doodlebugger - A slang term used to describe a seismologist performing seismic field work.

Dredge Barge - A barge used to remove mud and sediments from waterways and wetlands to create canals and deepen channels.

\*Driller - The supervisor of the rig crew. The driller is responsible for the efficient operation of the rig as well as the safety of the crew and typically has many years of experience working on rigs. Most drillers have worked their way up from other rig jobs.

Dynamite Boat - The boat holding the dynamite used during seismic operations.

\*Fault - A break or planar surface in brittle rock across which there is observable displacement. Some fault surfaces contain relatively coarse rubble that can act as a conduit for migrating oil or gas, whereas the surfaces of other faults are smeared with impermeable clays or broken grains that can act as a fault seal.

Gang pusher - An individual who supervises and coordinates the activities of workers engaged in construction, maintenance, and cleaning activities at petroleum facilities.

Gauger - An individual who reads the gauges on a petroleum production platform.

\*Gravimeter (gravity meter) - A device used to measure the acceleration due to gravity, or the variations in the gravitational field between two or more points.

Leaderman - The individual in charge of a work crew.

Moss-Picker - An individual who picks moss to dry and sell or prepare for use in mattresses or other products.

\*Mud - A term used for drilling fluid that can mean almost any of the fluids used in hydrocarbon drilling operations, especially fluids that contain significant amounts of suspended solids, emulsified water, or oil. Mud includes all types of water-base, oil-base and synthetic-base drilling fluids.

\*Mud Scale(mud balance) - A device to measure density (weight) of mud, cement, or another liquid or slurry.

Oiler - A type of vessel or a person who works in the oil field, especially one who works within the engine compartment of a vessel or helps to keep equipment lubricated.

\*Party Chief - The ultimate leader of a survey crew.

Pirogue - A small, lightweight flat-bottomed boat used for transportation in the bayous and wetlands.

Pneumofathometer - An air-filled device used for measuring depth.

\*Pooling - The accumulation of smaller tracts of land, the sum total acreage of which is required for a governmental agency to grant a well permit or assign a production quota or *allowable* to an operator.

Power Tong - A tool with hydro-pneumatic controls that is used for working with pipe, snubbing units, and other oilfield equipment.

PT Boat (Patrol Torpedo Boat) - A small, fast, wooden craft that accelerated rapidly and carried more firepower per pound than any other craft in the Navy during WWII.

Pull Boat - A boat used for pulling cut timber through the swamp.

\*Pumper - An individual who operates pumps, flow meters, and manifold systems to load petrochemical products into trucks, barges, and tank cars and help ensure continuous flow of the product. The pumper determines the movement of product through pipelines from storage tanks to tank trucks, barges, and tank cars, inspects and weighs vessels to prevent contamination and to satisfy loading procedures, and records operating data, such as the products and quantities pumped, storage tank used, gauge readings, and operating time. The pumper also may perform a variety of tests to determine viscosity, specific gravity, and flash point of sample contents.

Quarterboat - A vessel that is used to feed, house and provide logistic support for workers.

\*Quebracho - A powdered form of tannic acid extract from the bark of the quebracho tree, used as a high-pH and lime-mud deflocculant. It was in widespread use until the 1950s, at which time lignosulfonate became widely available and performed the same function better and cheaper than quebracho.

Rigger - An individual on a drilling rig responsible for setting up and repairing rigging gear to lift and move machinery, equipment, or materials in shipyards and fabrication yards, and on rigs, platforms, and vessels.

\*Rotary Drilling - A method of making a hole that relies on continuous circular motion of the bit to break rock at the bottom of the hole. This method is much more efficient than the alternative, cable tool drilling. Rotary drilling is a nearly continuous process because cuttings are removed as drilling fluids circulate through the bit and up the wellbore to the surface.

\*Roughneck - A low-ranking member of the drilling crew. The roughneck usually performs semiskilled and unskilled manual labor that requires continual hard work in difficult conditions for many hours.

\*Roustabout Any unskilled manual laborer on the rig site. A roustabout may be part of the drilling contractor's employee workforce, or may be on location temporarily for special operations. Roustabouts are commonly hired to ensure that the skilled personnel that run an

expensive drilling rig are not distracted by peripheral tasks, ranging from cleaning up the location to cleaning threads to digging trenches to scraping and painting rig components.

Saturation Diving - A special diving technique that allows nearly unlimited time to work underwater. Under saturation, the partial pressure of a gas dissolved in a fluid is equal to its maximum partial pressure.

\*Seismograph - A device or system that records the ground oscillations that make up exploration seismic data or earthquakes. A seismograph can include amplifiers, receivers, and a recording device (such as a computer disk or magnetic tape) to record seismograms.

Shock Hole - The hole that a shock from a blast punches into a surface.

\*Shoot a Well - To perforate a wellbore in preparation for production.

Shooter - A member of a seismic crew who uses a radio controlled blasting device to detonate dynamite in shot holes.

Skidder - A type of heavy vehicle used during logging for pulling cut trees out of a forest.

\*Spinning Chain - A length of ordinary steel link chain used by the drilling crew to cause pipe being screwed together to turn rapidly. This is accomplished by first carefully wrapping the chain around the lower half of the tool joint that is hanging off in the slips, stabbing another joint into that one, and then throwing the chain in such a manner that it wraps itself on the new upper joint. At the proper time, the driller must pull tension on the chain while a member of the floor crew holds some tension on the free end of the chain. This causes the new drillpipe joint to act like a spool, and as the driller pulls the chain on one end using the drawworks, the spool (or new pipe joint) turns and screws into the joint hung off in the slips.

\*Spud - To start the well drilling process by removing rock, dirt, and other sedimentary material with the drill bit. To apply weight to a troublesome drilling section, usually by moving the drilling string up and down, in hopes that the section will drill faster.

Surveyor - An individual responsible for measuring and mapping the earth's surface and establishing official land, airspace, and water boundaries. Surveyors write descriptions of land for deeds, leases, and other legal documents and take measurements of construction and mineral sites.

Tender - A diver's helper, responsible for managing the diver's tanks, hoses and tools during a dive.

\*Toolpusher - The location supervisor for the drilling contractor. The toolpusher is usually a senior, experienced individual who has worked his way up through the ranks of the drilling crew positions. His job is largely administrative, including ensuring that the rig has sufficient materials, spare parts, and skilled personnel to continue efficient operations. The toolpusher also serves as a trusted advisor to many personnel on the rig, including the company man, who is the operator's representative.

Torsion Balance - A device created by Charles-Augustin de Coulomb in 1777, to measure very weak forces, particularly the electrostatic force between two point charges. The torsion balance consists of two metal balls attached to the ends of an insulating rod suspended from the middle by a thin fiber.

Tug Boat - A boat used to tow or push other vessels in rivers, canals, and other waterways and to tow barges and platforms.

Weir - A small or low dam used to raise or otherwise control the level of water in a stream or river.

\*Wildcat - An exploration well about which little if any of the subsurface geology is known with certainty, especially the pressure regime. The high degree of uncertainty necessitates that the drilling crews be appropriately skilled, experienced, and aware of what various well parameters are telling them about the formations they drill.

\*Wireline - A general term used to describe operations conducted using single-strand or multistrand wire or cable for intervention in oil or gas wells. Although applied inconsistently, the term commonly is used in association with electric logging and cables incorporating electrical conductors. Similarly, the term slickline is commonly used to differentiate operations performed with single-strand wire or braided lines.

\*Workover - The process of performing major maintenance or remedial treatments on an oil or gas well. In many cases, workover implies the removal and replacement of the production tubing string after the well has been killed and a workover rig has been placed on location.

\* Definitions adapted from the Schlumberger Oilfield Glossary, accessed online at <http://www.glossary.oilfield.slb.com/>.



### The Department of the Interior Mission

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.



### The Minerals Management Service Mission

As a bureau of the Department of the Interior, the Minerals Management Service's (MMS) primary responsibilities are to manage the mineral resources located on the Nation's Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), collect revenue from the Federal OCS and onshore Federal and Indian lands, and distribute those revenues.

Moreover, in working to meet its responsibilities, the **Offshore Minerals Management Program** administers the OCS competitive leasing program and oversees the safe and environmentally sound exploration and production of our Nation's offshore natural gas, oil and other mineral resources. The MMS **Minerals Revenue Management** meets its responsibilities by ensuring the efficient, timely and accurate collection and disbursement of revenue from mineral leasing and production due to Indian tribes and allottees, States and the U.S. Treasury.

The MMS strives to fulfill its responsibilities through the general guiding principles of: (1) being responsive to the public's concerns and interests by maintaining a dialogue with all potentially affected parties and (2) carrying out its programs with an emphasis on working to enhance the quality of life for all Americans by lending MMS assistance and expertise to economic development and environmental protection.