

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Billy Cochran

COLLECTION: 4700.2389

IDENTIFICATION: Native of Darbun, Mississippi and former professor of agricultural engineering and solid waste specialist for Louisiana Cooperative Extension Agency

INTERVIEWER: Wyatt Winnie

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: March 7, 2014

FOCUS DATES: 1940-1996

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4318

Introduction; Cochran is retired professor agricultural engineering at Louisiana State University and solid waste specialist for Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services; born in Darbun, Mississippi, on December 10, 1933; parents Arville Alexander Cochran and Gertrude Lewis Cochran were farmers of cotton, corn and vegetables; parents' farm had cattle and swine to provide meat; he worked on the farm planting cotton; no mechanical assistance, baled hay by hand and put in shocks; everyone in community farmed to provide for their families; would help neighbors with harvesting without remuneration; farm was only 160 acres, small by today's standards; attended rural schools without air conditioning or heat; four classmates smart enough to skip from first to second grade; did school work by lamplight because no electricity, had time because no television or distractions; family moved from farm to Columbia when he was nine; active in clubs and sports in high school, also choir and debate club; first job as paper boy earned him two cents per paper; second job as car hop at a drive-in; parents had fewer educational opportunities and no resources to use their educations; WWII did not affect his education because he was still on the farm; only access to news was radio; father left farm and worked in war factory for three years; received assistance through welfare services; sports motivated him to go to college; received scholarship to [?] River Junior College; played as a guard on the college basketball team; he volunteered for the draft and after two years became eligible for financial assistance for school; when he was discharged he went to Mississippi State; he didn't participate as much in college activities because he was married; he graduated in 1958; the week after graduation he received a phone call from the department head at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University asking if he would like a position as an instructor; at Texas A&M he researched cotton mechanization; harvesting, spraying, and insect control; sometime later he received a call from Louisiana State University with a job offer as an assistant professor; soon it

came to a point where he would never advance without a PhD; he applied to Oklahoma State University for an assistantship; he was required to come back to LSU for at least a year because he earned his PhD while on sabbatical; when information needed to be passed on to the people—agents, specialists, and researchers would go together and set up field days and demonstrations to present the information; the agents would present the information by providing publications or information, and the researchers would present the technical support aspect; he helped develop a method of sugar cane insect control where steam was applied to the plant to help kill a disease spread by insects; he notes how agents were the intermediaries between the researchers and the farmers and how the information benefitted people; he note his respect for Norman Efferson who was the first chancellor of the Ag Center; he also respected Rouse Caffey and Doyle Chambers; he traveled with Denver Loupe and presented papers at international meetings; around 1980, Rouse Caffey asked him to apply for a position in the International Rice Institute; he went to the Philippines for a year and came back to LSU; within six months he was asked to join the staff as a senior scientist in the Philippines; he finished his time by taking early retirement and traveling to Thailand; he worked internationally for about ten years; Denver Loupe hired him with the extension agency after he returned from Thailand; he did some of the same things as an extension specialist as he did as a researcher at LSU; at the time, environmental education was promoting new concepts in transferring education; they were setting up remote centers at the parish office so that the farmers could receive more information in the parish; at the time, extension specialists also got into recycling and composting; the national composting organization approached extension services on setting up a training program for composting facility operators; it was for training and equipment; the extension services didn't have any money, so they went to their congressman, J. Bennett Johnson; the congressman wrote some legislation to provide \$200,000 dollars to go to LSU; the money helped extension services start a compost facility training program for compost operators; he helped set up the compost training facility and worked with them for about three years; Senator Johnson left the senate and they lost funding for the compost training program; an alumni came in from agricultural engineering who donated \$100,000 to set up a building for the composting facility; he notes his interest in international consulting; as a consultant, he helped introduce mechanization into Thailand and the Philippines; much of the mechanized equipment in Thailand lacked quality; he helped to set up a testing facility in Thailand's agricultural engineering department to test equipment and quality control; he helped developed the standards for the manufacturers so that they could become certified manufacturers; he notes how education and mechanization has helped farmer's live better lives today than in the past; it has allowed for the farmer to have a much better life; the drudgery of farm life is not what it was seventy five years ago; he also enjoyed working with commodity groups; they'd discuss and recognize problems and give opinions on solutions to problems; there is a difference between now and then; he feels that LSU should be more involved with the commodity groups so they can interact and solve problems and provide information that the farmer might need; LSU doesn't have the strength in agriculture for funding that it once had and as a result the budgets are diminishing; he enjoyed his job; he didn't mind working nights and weekends because he enjoyed his work; end of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T4318)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 5 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 6

OTHER MATERIALS: Resume, Interviewee Biographical Information Sheet,

RESTRICTIONS: None