

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: William Richardson **COLLECTION:** 4700.2387

IDENTIFICATION: Director of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service and vice president for agriculture and dean of the College of Agriculture.

INTERVIEWER: Jennifer A. Cramer

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: April 8, 2014

FOCUS DATES: 1962-1972

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4316

Jennifer Cramer introduces Chancellor William Richardson, who is Director of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, and LSU Vice-President for Agriculture and Dean for the College of Agriculture; born in southeast Missouri, in 1944; he was raised on a soybean-cotton farm; his dad was a farmer and his mother was a stay at home mom; his grandparents decided to serve coffee and sandwiches to men selling cotton; his father served in WWII and had a rich military history; his hometown was Dearing, Missouri; he was involved in 4-H at a very early age and participated in livestock projects that are almost identical to livestock projects today; he attended Dearing public schools where there were forty people in his graduating class; he had some teachers who helped him realize he needed a college education; he stayed close to home when he went to college; describes farm life as being either manual labor or driving a vehicle; receiving a driver's license at 16 was kind of anticlimactic for him because he was already driving tractors; but it was more fun than picking cotton; back in the '40's and '50's farming was all manual labor and just starting to mechanize; he always started school after July 4th and went until Labor Day and then was out of school until November; during the fall he'd work on the farm all day and go play basketball at night; learned work ethic from his parents; if the sun was shining he was working; Saturdays were a work day; his grandfather would often say "We're going fishing in the morning"; that meant he'd pick him up at four in the morning, fish until six-thirty, and be to work by seven; everybody had a garden; they were the old victory gardens; most people didn't go to the grocery store to buy staples; in those days people cured meat by putting it in the smokehouse with salt; there wasn't much refrigeration until people started purchasing freezers; he planted the gardens and worked in the gardens; he says "the Farmer's Almanac is one of the best predictors of the weather there is. It's been accurate more than weather forecasters have been in the last couple of years"; he raised a few cows and some pigs; most people had their own eggs; most houses had a chicken house and a smokehouse out behind them along with an outhouse; he had responsibility feeding livestock; the livestock had to be fed twice

a day; families started to scatter some; he notes that when the jobs in agriculture became minimized by mechanization a lot of kids left the communities to go off to find employment or go to college; a lot of his classmates went to Memphis; note how everyone in most people's family lived near each other, which is different than you see today; he was ten in fifty four during the Korean war; probably one of the best things that happened post war was the G.I. Bill because people could go to college that wouldn't have gone otherwise; after he graduate high school he went to Arkansas St. College; he played basketball in high school and college for three years; he would go to the gym on Saturday and Sunday afternoons; for pickup games they would go by the coach's house and pick up the key to the gym; ROTC was mandatory in college for the first two years; a lot of people he went to school with didn't come back from Vietnam; many people chose to go to ROTC in the last two years which would get them in an officer training program; he thinks today's students are more tuned in to what's happening than the students of his day; the news was probably more objective; the social consciousness was really changing; the kids he went to school with found out there was a world going on around them; he didn't know anything other than agriculture; that's the only thing he knew existed; earned a degree in ag education because he knew he could get a job teaching if he needed to; did that for about three years and then encountered Gene Love; he got enough nerve to approach Love and say "If you ever have an assistantship, I'd love to come back to school,"; a year later he got a call asking him if he would like to work on a Ph.D.; by the time he left Arkansas St. in '66' and got to Missouri in '70, the world had changed tremendously; the world had changed dramatically from him leaving the farm to going to Columbia; he was forced to find out what was going on in the world; he came from a pretty sheltered background; he grew up in a segregated, very bigoted area; he played basketball with the first black basketball player Arkansas St. ever recruited, Milton Sullivan; Sullivan took an unbelievable amount of abuse because of his race; the whole thing of race was ridiculous; Richardson's dedicated his life to fighting racism; there wasn't open racism among Richardson's teammates, but the visiting teams were vicious; there were fights and a couple of games were stopped to keep people from getting hurt; there was racism on both sides, but more on the white side; he played against Texas Western [first all-black collegiate basketball team] when they played at Arkansas St.; Texas Western was superior in their ability to play basketball; wasn't surprised to see them beat Kentucky; 15 years ago there was still bigotry in some areas; some say women are supposed to stay home in the house taking care of the husband and not be the one to work; people are constantly fighting social justice battles about race, sexual orientation, gender and more; people were praying for him when LSU Ag Center put sexual orientation into their diversity statement; he says, "accept people for who they are, not what they are,"; doesn't want to be judged on being a white man; not all white men are good; the standard height and weights of athletes in high school and college have changed since he was a college athlete; most athletes are taller, faster, and weight more; he mentions changes in food preparation; many people harvested vegetables from their gardens and canned foods from homemade soups to vegetables; many meals consisted of meat; popcorn was a popular snack; his first exposure to extension was through 4-H; people depended on extension individuals to get information; people didn't get information from the news or Internet; that's how people got their information; they depended very heavily on county agents; there also weren't any fertilizers when he was growing up; cotton rates at the time were about three cents a pound; really good farms could pick 200 pounds a day; he discusses how important county agents were because there were very few people who had PhDs in agriculture at the time; many PhDs run farms today and will get information off the internet; he says that many PhDs will talk to other PhDs rather

than going through extension because they are familiar with each other; he says the importance of extension is that the extension people are objective; they're not selling a product; they tell people what the research shows; objectivity has kept extension in business; they make recommendations based on science, not that your favorite color is green; end of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T4316)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 47 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 9 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: None