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## Caught Between Land and Sea: West End as a Maritime Lake Community on Lake Pontchartrain

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Caught Between Land and Sea:  
West End as a Maritime Lake Community on Lake Pontchartrain

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

By

Madison Hazen

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would first like to thank Steve Wagner, who fought for the Sintes story to be told. To the Sintes family, Lawrence, Geri, Judy, Dave, Steve Sr., Steve Jr., and Pam, thank you letting me into your special corner of New Orleans, and for sharing your stories with me. To my committee, thank you for being patient with me, and for showing me how to navigate the history field as a woman. Finally, to my family—Mom, Dad, Brother One, Brother Two, Roxie, and Ranger thank you for moving my junk over state lines, so that I can pursue more boat things.

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## **Abstract**

West End has eluded traditional New Orleans history as academics have continued to view the city's history and maritime culture through the Mississippi River. This project looks at the development of West End using the Sintes family and its boatbuilding business as a case study on how generational businesses are affected by tourism, natural disasters, and urban development. This project has used oral histories of the Sintes family to tell their personal story of West End, this terraqueous gap filled with boats, crawfish boils, natural disasters, and human loss, and in doing so, preserved and recorded a part of West End's maritime lake culture that might otherwise be lost.

**Key Words:** Maritime lake community; maritime lake culture; liminal space; terraqueous environment; local history; family business; New Orleans; Lake Pontchartrain

## **Introduction**

The history of the Sintes family and its business, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest, a boat construction and repair marina on the southern shore of Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans, Louisiana, is a story of perseverance, hardship, and a community held together by water and land. The purpose of this project is to preserve and record a part of West End's maritime lake culture through a family history defined by a multigenerational boatbuilding business that functions as a part of a larger maritime community.<sup>1</sup> Family stability has been central to this business's success and generational longevity, and has contributed to the solidarity of the wider maritime community of the West End. This history of West End's maritime lake community, and the Sinteses' role in this community, has not been formally recorded for the public until now. The Sintes family businesses, and themselves, are an avenue for the retelling of West End's history through a maritime perspective. Oral histories consolidate and make accessible the family's self-researched genealogical records, business records, and oral folklore and family histories that form the foundation of the business and the larger community.

This project, rather than focusing on the area's decline, introduces West End as a maritime lake community and tells its history through the people who still live in West End. This paper links a maritime lake culture to a wider local and national history of a maritime area and provides a clearer idea of how a maritime community's history can be told through a single family's history of perseverance, hardships, and the relationship between water and land.

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<sup>1</sup> The oral history portion of this paper is partially funded by a grant for the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies "Family Business" project. The "Family Business" project by the Midlo Center allows researchers to document New Orleans family businesses through oral history interviews and a tour stop on New Orleans Historical. An interview with Steve Sintes, Sr. is hosted on the Midlo Center's YouTube channel, with their business, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina, as a stop on New Orleans Historical.



This project is defined by geographical and cultural boundaries, as well as its history as a maritime lake community spanning over hundreds of years, and thousands of people. Within these geographical boundaries, the people of West End have established themselves as a mainstay of New Orleans maritime history. This paper introduces the boat community of West End's larger maritime lake community; the emphasis on the boat community through the Sinteses gives a glimpse of only a small slice of West End. Further research into West End's entertainment and leisure communities could help to tell a more in-depth history of West End.

At over 40 miles wide and covering 630 square miles of brackish water, Lake Pontchartrain is the second largest inland saltwater body in the United States and serves close to 1.5 million people in six separate Louisiana parishes.<sup>2</sup> As a lake, Lake Pontchartrain has shaped the coast of what is now New Orleans's West End for thousands of years, and creating variations of maritime communities along Lake Pontchartrain's coast.<sup>3</sup>

The New Orleans City Planning Commission has placed the neighborhood of West End in New Orleans's Lakeview District Area, and has defined West End's geographic borders by Lake Pontchartrain to the north, Veterans Boulevard to the south, New Basin Canal and Pontchartrain Boulevard to the east, and 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal to the west (Illustration 1). Running along the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal is the invisible line that separates Jefferson Parish to the west, and Orleans Parish to the east. While West End sits firmly in Orleans Parish, another maritime community, Bucktown, is located just west of the Jefferson-Orleans Parish line. West End and Bucktown share lakefront property on Lake Pontchartrain's southern shore. Since 1952, the

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<sup>2</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Although Lake Pontchartrain is referred to as a lake, it is an estuary that is connected to the Gulf of Mexico through the Rigolets and Chef Menteur Pass into Lake Borgne, which is also not a lake.

Sintes family has been running Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina on the southwestern corner of Orleans Marina (Illustration 2).

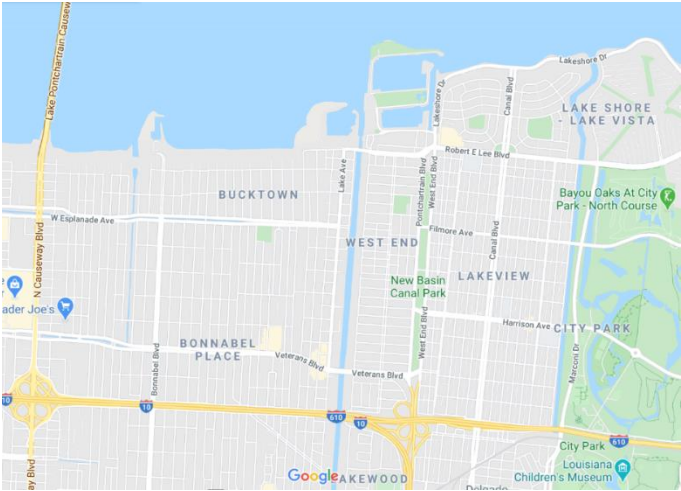


Illustration 1. “West End, a maritime lake neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana.” March 10, 2020. Map data ©2020 Google.

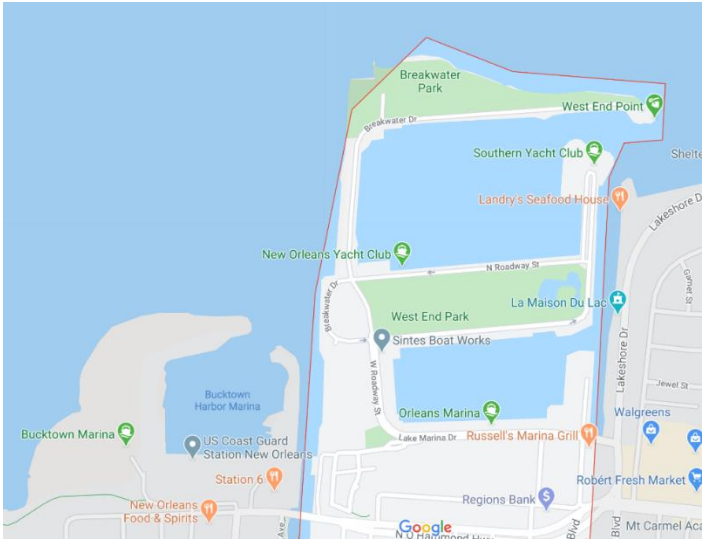


Illustration 2. “Southern edge of New Orleans's West End neighborhood, with Orleans Marina and Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina.” March 23, 2020. Map data ©2020 Google.

In 1952, Lawrence Sintes Sr. opened Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest in West End after working as a warden with the New Orleans Wildlife and Fisheries. Lawrence Sr. married Eva Rose Kaufman and they lived across from the business in the neighboring maritime community of Bucktown. Lawrence Sr. and Eva both worked in West End, Lawrence at the boat shop and

Eva at Fitzgerald's Restaurant, a popular seafood restaurant. The couple had seven children, five girls and two boys: Eva Paddon, Edna Des Dunes, Laura Benezue, Barbara Estingoy, Patricia Pierce, David "Dave," and Lawrence Jr. Both of their boys joined their father's business, with Lawrence Jr. working his way to manager and president, and Dave as the technologically savvy boatbuilder.

Lawrence Jr. married Geraline "Gerri" and lived with their children, Steve Sintes Sr. and Pamela "Pam" Sintes, in the Lakeview area near the Sintes Boat Works. While Lawrence Jr. managed the shop, Gerri and Pam took over the accounting side of the business. Dave joined his brother at the boat shop after serving in Vietnam with the Marines. Married to Judith "Judy," Dave and his family lived in the nearby suburb of Metairie.

## **Methodology**

This paper with the accompanying oral histories and New Orleans Historical site, sheds a light on West End through the lives and experiences of the family. Different methods of oral history and documentation were used to tell the Sintes story of maintaining the family business in West End. West End is a liminal space in New Orleans, both in the physical space and in spatial memory, and to tell the story of West End through the Sinteses meant that this project had to occupy the same liminal space, therefore, this project uses a variety of approaches.<sup>4</sup>

Geographers and government planners have told the story of West End with data and numbers.

In contrast, the Sintes family as a case study, this project uses the stories of the people to tell the

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<sup>4</sup> For this project, liminal space and liminality are defined as the intersection of a place where outsiders have chosen the place's role in their memories and the shared memories and histories that the place's residents have established for themselves. West End has become a liminal space in New Orleans's history as it has shaped the memories of those who have visited and maintained the livelihoods of West End's permanent residents.

history of West End. Prior to the Sinteses opening their business in 1952, West End's history has been told through policy makers' official documents, such as the New Orleans Port Levee Board land development projects, Workers Progress Administration documents and state and federal documents pertaining to the development of West End as a resort destination and the attempts to maintain the tourist status quo. This project brings that formal history of West End and the personal history of the Sintes family together through a combination of digital access and oral histories, where the Sintes family business is situated as a historical spot in West End.<sup>5</sup>

New Orleans Historical is a web-based walking tour app of New Orleans that brings New Orleans history to the community. Through New Orleans Historical, the stories of local businesses, schools, and important moments in New Orleans history are brought to visitors in an easily consumable form through their own devices. Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina's historical site highlights the maritime business perspective of West End, adding to the current Lakefront historical sites tour that focuses on the tourism side of New Orleans's entire northern lakefront. Standing out, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina's site encourages further research into the businesses and people that provided for part of Lake Pontchartrain's tourism industry. On New Orleans Historical, the Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina site features a comprehensive history of the Sintes business along with quotes from the Sintes interviews used throughout this paper as sound bites.

The interviews with the Sintes family occupies the same liminal space as this project through the interview and recording methods used to document the stories. The four interviews

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<sup>5</sup> New Orleans Historical is a mobile platform that shares stories and scholarship about New Orleans and the surrounding area. This project is part of an ongoing tour portion of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies "Family Business" project that highlights family businesses in New Orleans that have lasted for generations. New Orleans Historical is a project by the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at the University of New Orleans and the Communication Department of Tulane University.

were recorded from June 2019 to January 2020, with different interview methods for each. The first interview was conducted with the family and a friend at their shop, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina. At this interview, Lawrence Jr., Geri, Judy, Steve, Stevie, and Steve Wagner, a former employee and current family friend, spoke about the family history and the hardships that the family had faced throughout the years. After the group interview with the family, Steve Sr. agreed to a separate interview in which Steve walked around his boatyard, pointing out his daily jobs, talking about the different boats that they were working on, and reminiscing about his first boat that he rebuilt with his uncle Dave. This interview with Steve gave an intimate look at what happens at the boatyard on a regular working day, away from the stuffiness of his father's office and directly into the boatyard and marina that Steve knows like the back of his hand.

On August 24, 2019, a third interview was conducted at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pamela "Pam" Sintes Memorial Regatta at the New Orleans Yacht Club. This interview involved speaking with members of the West End maritime community who came together to remember Pam Sintes, the daughter of Lawrence Jr. and Geri, who was murdered by an ex-boyfriend. At this interview, members of West End's maritime community were recorded as they celebrated the life and memory of Pam, while a band played, and the sun set over Lake Pontchartrain. On January 22, 2020, the fourth interview was recorded as part of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies "Family Business" project; Steve was the only member of the Sintes family that was interviewed and he spoke on the family's business, from when he began working there at 15 years old to his hopes for the business in the future.

## **Historiography**

New Orleans's maritime culture and history has focused on the city's founding as a maritime port community on the Mississippi River. This limited view of New Orleans has

allowed the maritime lake communities along Lake Pontchartrain's coast to slip through the gaps as natural and human forces have altered the communities over the past 300 years of New Orleans's existence. When Lake Pontchartrain's coastal communities are formally written about, their history is usually limited to how the communities have benefitted by New Orleans tourism beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Academics such as Richard Campanella, Lynn Accardo, and James P. Baughman have defined Lake Pontchartrain's history by tourist consumption of the local communities, rather than looking at the communities themselves.

Information on West End's history prior to the European settlement of New Orleans is limited. Although recent research has revealed local Indigenous water and land use, most scholarly work begins with West End's position as a tourist destination.<sup>6</sup> The Sintes oral histories are the major contributing primary source for this project, along with original land development plans from the City of New Orleans, the New Orleans Port Levee Board, and the Workers Progress Administration. This project focuses on West End and its history with tourism beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through 2020, with an emphasis on the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Sintes first came to West End. Other sources include research by geographer Richard Campanella and historians Lynn Markey Accardo and W. Adolphe Roberts.

Geographer Campanella has written extensively of Louisiana's and New Orleans's coastal communities, and his article on West End follows the maritime lake community's rise as the "Coney Island of New Orleans" while focusing on the slow death of West End.<sup>7</sup> As part of the "Coastal New Orleans: Lost Communities of the Urban Delta, 1820s-1920s" lecture, Campanella defines West End by the abundance of tourists who spent their days lounging by the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Usner Jr. has recently published scholarly work on Indigenous land and water use in *American Indians in Early New Orleans: From Calumet to Raquette*.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Campanella, "The Story of West End: The Coney Island of New Orleans," *The New Orleans Advocate*, November 2, 2019.

water, dancing in the warm evenings, and gorging themselves with locally caught seafood.<sup>8</sup> While Campanella highlights the rise and fall of West End as a tourist destination and the consumption of the maritime lake culture of West End residents, like others, he focuses on the tourism perspective on West End, while neglecting the perspective of West End's present residents and the maritime lake community that they built for themselves. This project instead is from the perspective of the people who produced the amenities that were consumed by tourists.

The family and business history of the Sinteses illustrates how tourist intervention in West End has affected the maritime community. The Sinteses oral histories show that their entire existence in West End has been the result of tourism—Lawrence Sr. and Eva moved into the area after the New Orleans Port Levee Board land development projects of the 1920s; Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina expanded to Gulfport, Mississippi, during the 1970s, following the flow of water recreation along the Southern Gulf Coast; and Dave's new technological boat construction techniques allowed for the Sinteses to build even more recreational watercrafts, which fed the appetites of tourists along the Southern Gulf Coast.

A May 2006 land use report commissioned for the New Orleans's Regional Planning Commission by N-Y Associates, Inc. details how West End's land and water has been used by former residents to drive tourism in the maritime community from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through 2005.<sup>9</sup> This site analysis differs from Campanella's West End research, in that the analysis looks directly from the perspectives of West End's permanent and current residents, rather than how tourists consumed the area's resources, people, and maritime lake culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Campanella, "Coastal New Orleans: Lost Communities of the Urban Delta, 1820s-1920s," (lecture, Freeman Auditorium, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, December 2, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> N-Y Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers Architects & Planners, "West End Redevelopment Land Use and Site Plan Analysis" (Regional Planning Commission, Metairie, 2006).

This land study by N-Y Associates looks directly at the effects of tourism on West End's landscape. Land improvement through the development of the West End Park for recreation, the breakwater to protect the Southern Yacht Club, and the seawall that runs parallel to Lake Pontchartrain were all put in place to increase tourism in West End. These land developments displaced former West End residents in order to construct condominium skyscrapers. It was these land developments, however, that influenced Lawrence Sr. and Eva to move their family to West End and begin Sintes Boat Works on the newly reclaimed West End Park. N-Y Associates' land study focuses on the negative effects of West End's land development on the maritime community, without the voices of the community. This project adds the voices of West End's maritime community to understand the effects of the New Orleans Port Levee Board land developments, as they pertain to a business that services customers all over the United States.

Lynn Markey Accardo, in an honors thesis on the community of Bucktown, adjacent to West End, mentions West End as another maritime lake community.<sup>10</sup> Accardo details the origins of Bucktown, with a brief mention of West End, as well as the reasons that Bucktown survived as a maritime lake community. While Accardo's focus is on Bucktown, her work is useful in looking at West End, a similar community. Accardo's research looked at both the effects of tourists on a maritime lake community and how permanent residents both create and sustain their maritime lake culture as defined by tourism.

In contrast to most scholarly work on Lake Pontchartrain's coastal communities, W. Adolphe Roberts has written on the often-forgotten history and culture of Lake Pontchartrain compared to the maritime communities along the Mississippi River.<sup>11</sup> In *Lake Pontchartrain*,

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn Markey Accardo, "Bucktown, U.S.A. Weathering the Winds of Change" (honors thesis, University of New Orleans, December 1989).

<sup>11</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *Lake Pontchartrain*, (Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946).



Roberts has argued that Lake Pontchartrain has always been cast aside for the Mississippi River as the most dominant geographical feature of the Mississippi Delta region. In Roberts's book, Lake Pontchartrain takes the lead role in the history of New Orleans as its own maritime entity and details the lake's history from early European explorers through the era of Louisiana Governor Huey Long. Roberts takes on Lake Pontchartrain's history in a top-down approach by looking at the lake's role in New Orleans history. In contrast, this project will present the opposite, with a bottom-up approach. Looking at Lake Pontchartrain, apart from its shores, separates the people who live along its shorelines from the water and land that they call home. Taking the bottom-up approach, this project's focus is on how the maritime lake communities are defined by their relationship with Lake Pontchartrain.

## **The History**

This paper details the history of West End beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the area's first stint as a tourist destination for locals and travelers. Beginning the story of West End in the 19<sup>th</sup> century allows for the area's role in New Orleans tourism and defines the time when the line separating West End's residential borders and tourism began to blur. Guobin Yang has argued that social movements are a liminal phenomenon, and that these movements separate participants from preexisting structural constraints that allow tourists the freedom and power to remold themselves and the society that they are visiting.<sup>12</sup> While tourists are the makers of these changes, there is a threshold effect and the entire experience becomes a dividing line in the personal histories of the residents and the visited community often suffers from long-term consequences. Without West End's history and relationship with the tourism industry, the

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<sup>12</sup> Guobin Yang, "The Liminal Effects of Social Movements: Red Guards and the Transformation of Identity," *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 3 (September 2000), 380.

Sinteses would not have had the opportunity to settle in West End and continue to run the same business since 1952. This position that defines West End, between residents and tourists, has created a liminal space where residents must continually produce goods and services for their survival to the tourists that demand more from the area during every visit. The Sintes family history illustrates how difficult it is to separate the consumption and production of West End, and that neither is exclusive of the other.

### *19th Century*

Beginning in 1835, with the New Basin Canal, New Orleanians were able to make the six-mile journey from the inner city across cypress swamp to the cool beaches of Lake Pontchartrain (Illustration 3). This new water avenue was dug by the hands of Irish immigrant workers from 1831 to 1835 for the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company (N.O.C. & B.C.). The N.O.C. & B.C. paid the Irish workers \$1 a day at the expense of over \$1 million for the sixty foot wide, six foot deep, and nearly seven miles of the New Basin Canal.<sup>13</sup> It is estimated that upwards of 20,000 Irishmen died working on the canal that connected the Mississippi River with

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<sup>13</sup> N-Y Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers Architects & Planners, “West End Redevelopment Land Use and Site Plan Analysis,” 13.

Lake Pontchartrain, with the dead buried along the levee that ran parallel to the New Basin Canal.<sup>14</sup>

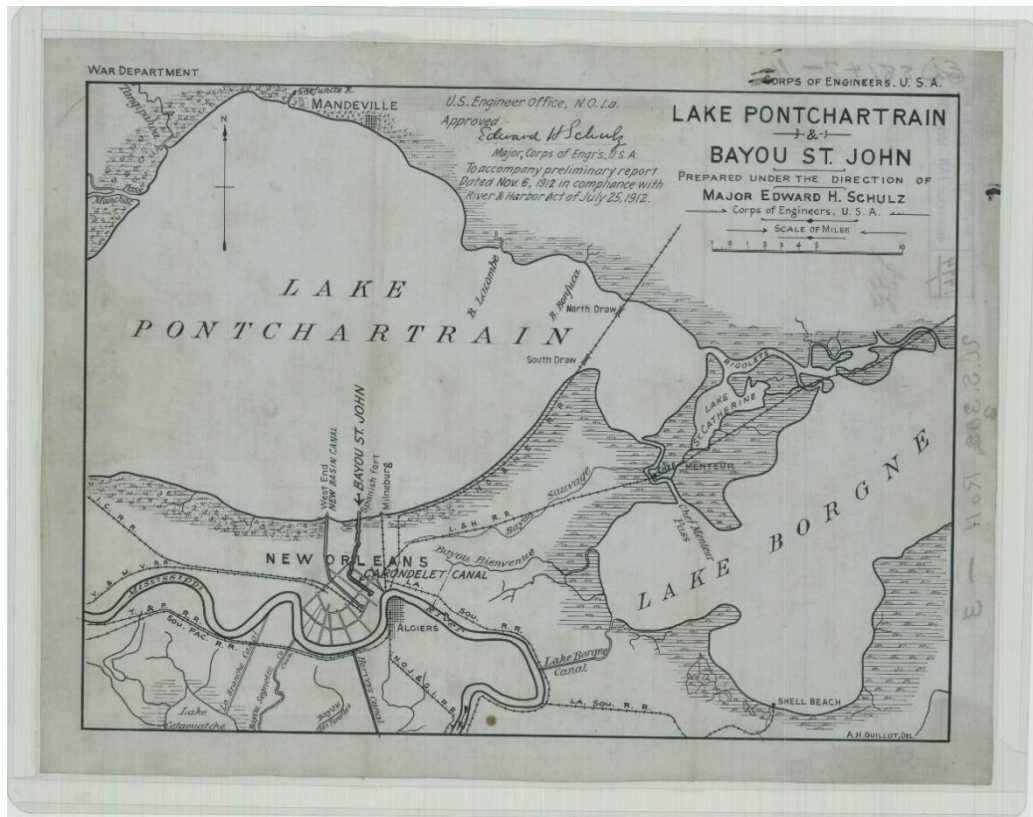


Illustration 3. Photograph number 86744326. “Lake Pontchartrain and Bayou St. John, Louisiana,” November 1912; Records of the Civil Works Map File, 1818-1947, Record Group 77; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

New Orleans businesses brought trade goods and people across Lake Pontchartrain, down the New Basin Canal, and into New Orleans for transport on the Mississippi River. The New Basin Canal was extended with jetties to reach further into Lake Pontchartrain, allowing for easier navigation into and out of the canal. In 1838, the New Basin Canal Lighthouse was built to navigate pilots to the canal’s entrance; the new elongated canal connected Lake Pontchartrain to

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Campanella, “Before I-10, the New Basin Canal flowed through New Orleans,” *Preservation in Print*, November 1, 2019.

the American, now Uptown, sector of New Orleans, where the trade goods that traveled down the canal were sold, or chartered towards the Mississippi River.

As West End, known then as New Lake End, accepted its role as a port for New Orleans, former transient passengers became permanent residents of a budding maritime lake community. The first structures were wooden buildings on stilts, and the first inhabitants made their living from fishing, crabbing, hunting, and trapping (Illustration 4). Once New Lake End established itself within New Orleans cityscape, permanent residents transitioned from a subsistence-based community to one that served the tourist, such as providing rental boats, serving seafood dining, and offering beds at lakefront hotels.<sup>15</sup>



Illustration 4. "Lake Pontchartrain Fisherman Shanty." Painting by Marshall J. Smith (1854-1923) courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, The L. Kemper and Leila Moore Williams Founders Collection. Acc. no. 1962.29.

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<sup>15</sup> Lynn Markey Accardo, "Bucktown, U.S.A. Weathering the Winds of Change," (honors thesis, University of New Orleans, December 1989).

It was during this Antebellum time that maritime communities along Lake Pontchartrain's southern shore were in the middle of their first round as a New Orleans tourist destination. James P. Baughman argued that as traffic on the New Basin Canal increased, hotels and restaurants developed rapidly to serve tourists.<sup>16</sup> The first rail line to West End was powered by steam trains to carry workers and goods to the port. The completion of the Jefferson and Lake Pontchartrain Railroad in 1853 completed the transition of West End from a local maritime neighborhood to a tourist destination, as travelers took the railroad from New Orleans to West End.<sup>17</sup> In 1898, the New Orleans Traction Co. completed the transition of the steam powered streetcars to the electric West End streetcar (Illustration 5).

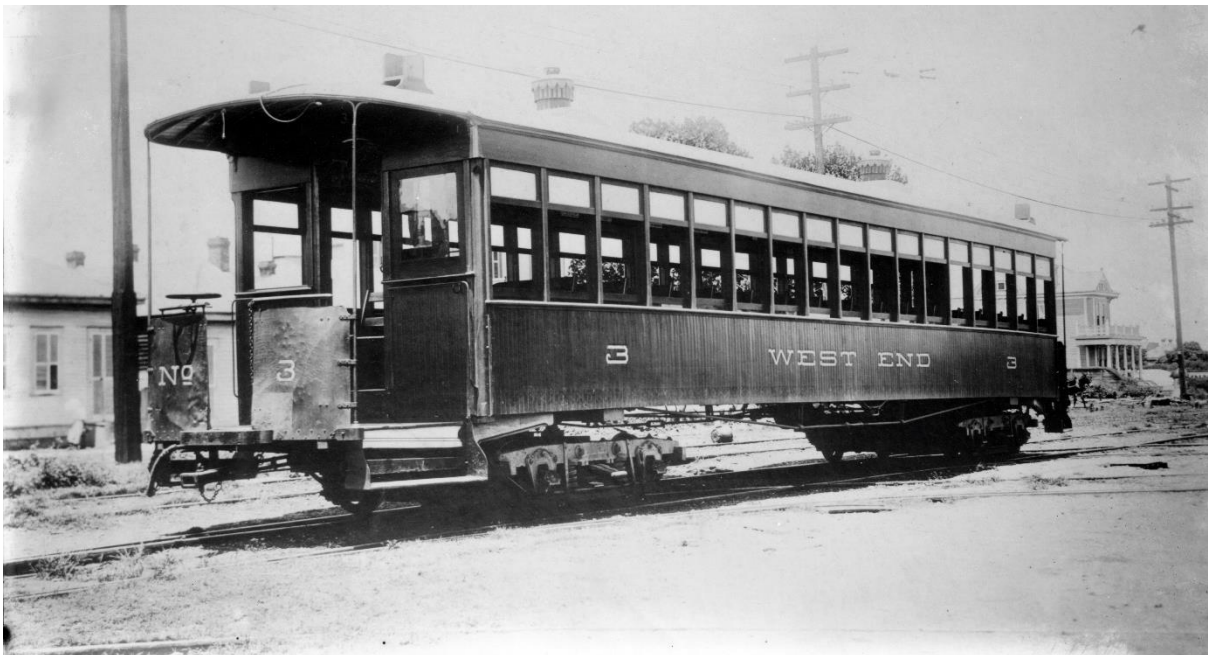


Illustration 5. "West End Street Car." The Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at The Historic New Orleans Collection. Acc. no. 1979.325.6138.

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<sup>16</sup> James P. Baughman, "A Southern Spa: Ante-Bellum Lake Pontchartrain," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 25, 1861.

The variety of recreational activities, hotel and resort options, seafood restaurants, and transportation opened West End to almost every traveler. At West End tourists flocked during the season to the shore for fishing, yachting, and swimming, with cruises casting off at West End for the northern lake communities of Mandeville and Madisonville. With the official season lasting from May to October, lake activities were at the mercy of lake storms that damaged facilities, and at the mercy of summer sicknesses that racked New Orleans. Despite the hurdles, lake revelers still made the trek to West End for recreation, restaurants, and a retreat.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in 1849, West End saw the rise of yachting through the founding of the Southern Yacht Club, the second oldest yacht club in the United States.<sup>19</sup> The first regatta commenced on September 21, 1849, but interest in the sport began to wane after lake storms and epidemics impeded maritime lake tourism. West End's popularity faltered with the onset of the American Civil War, and the maritime lake community did not see another exponential rise in tourism until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Early 20th Century***

West End's popularity rose with the re-emergence of resorts and restaurants, new amusement rides, and brass band concerts that featured a new genre of music-- jazz (Illustration 6). In 1928, West End's position in New Orleans music influenced songs such as "West End Blues" by Joe "King" Oliver and popularized by Louis Armstrong.<sup>20</sup> This more laid-back and family-orientated West End atmosphere insured consistent income from tourists and helped maintain the maritime lake culture that permanent residents built for themselves.

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<sup>18</sup> Baughman, "A Southern Spa: Ante-Bellum Lake Pontchartrain," 1, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 27, 1894.

<sup>20</sup> N-Y Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers Architects & Planners, "West End Redevelopment Land Use and Site Plan Analysis," 15.

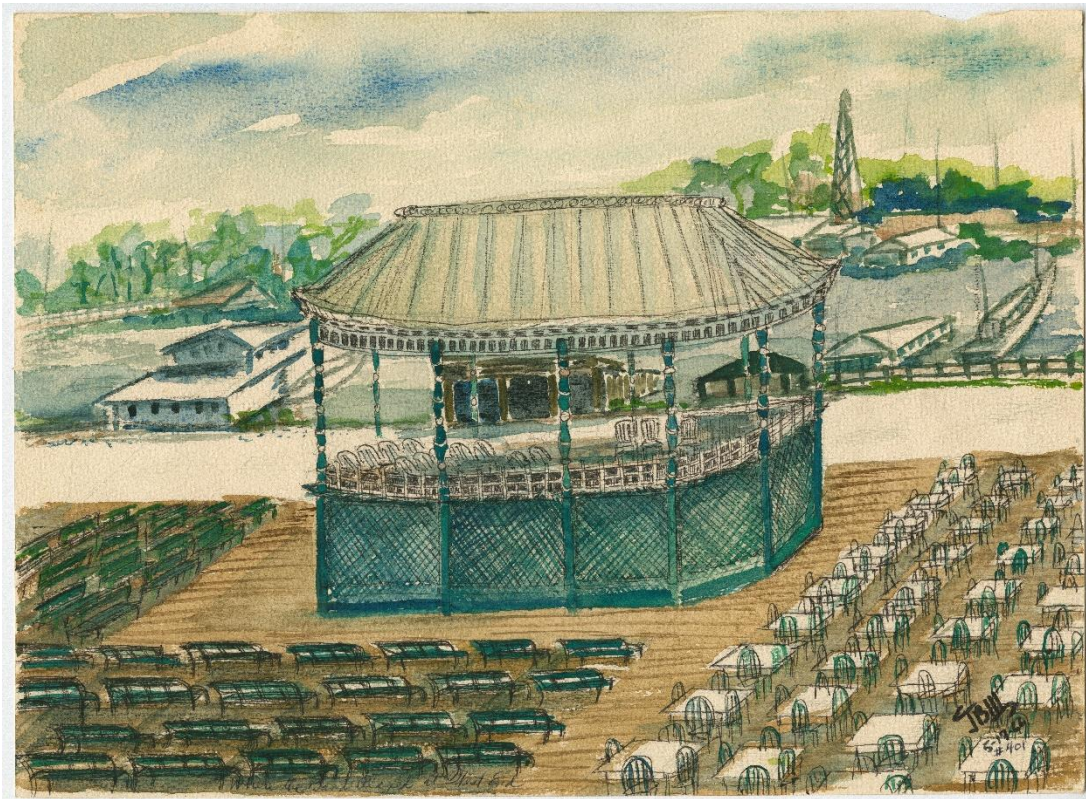


Illustration 6. "Where the Band Played." Watercolor by Jane Boutall Woest. Bequest of Dianne Audry Woest, The Historic New Orleans Collection. Acc. no. 2005.0120.2.1.

In 1921, as Prohibition settled on the land, West End's popularity with tourists did not cease. Foreign liquor was smuggled into New Orleans through Lake Pontchartrain contrary to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, with locals rum-running up the same transport lines that brought tourists to the maritime lake resorts on Lake Pontchartrain.<sup>21</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment passing in 1933 re-opened the tightly closed liquor bottles and West End and New Orleans were once again open for tourists.

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<sup>21</sup> John Magill, "The Liquor Capital of America- New Orleans During Prohibition," *The Historic New Orleans Collection Quarterly* (New Orleans, 2018).

As the heart of West End continued to pump well into the early 20th century, the body of the New Orleans maritime neighborhood experienced physical changes. In 1909, the New Orleans Railway and Light Company announced it would construct a rail line along Lake Pontchartrain's southern shore beginning in West End. On May 13, 1909, a *Times Picayune* editor detailing the proposed rail line promised a new world for New Orleanians, including the "redemption of all remaining swamps back of the lake shore," a sea wall that "will be the barrier against the lake, and all of that land on the shore line will be filled with the fresh sand from the outer lake, and the black and soft slush eliminated forever," and that the shore of Lake Pontchartrain will be the summer and winter capital of the country.<sup>22</sup> The proposed rail line by the New Orleans Railway and Light Company never saw the light of day, but the concrete sea wall made its appearance in 1930.

In 1926, the Board of Commissioners of the Orleans Levee District, part of the New Orleans Levee Board, began the Lakefront Land Reclamation Project; the primary purpose of the project was for the protection of New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain's flood waters, but the underlying objective was to improve New Orleans's untidy lakefront area as a place of pride.

<sup>23</sup>As part of the 1926 Lakefront Land Reclamation Project, the West End Seabrook Beach Improvement Plan displaced thousands of permanent residents of multiple lake communities, for a sea wall that would protect New Orleans, while leaving the outlying maritime communities in danger of storm fallout.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Times Picayune*, May 13, 1909.

<sup>23</sup> Robert W. Hastings, *The Lakes of Pontchartrain: Their History and Environments* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Betty A. Smallwood, "Milneburg, New Orleans: An Anthropological History of a Troubled Neighborhood" (PhD thesis, University of New Orleans, 2011), 35.



During the 1930s Great Depression in the United States, the New Orleans Port Levee Board hired employees through the Works Progress Administration to fulfill the Board's \$1.8 million land development plan.<sup>25</sup> The concrete seawall was built 500 feet past the settlement's old embankment, which resulted in a newly filled-in thirty-acre West End Park, a breakwater that protects the Southern Yacht Club and the Municipal Yacht Harbor, the Orleans Marina, and serving as a barricade between New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain that runs west to east for nearly 12 miles.<sup>26</sup> This new terra addition to West End removed a part of the maritime lake community by displacing permanent residents to create the 2,000 acres of land from West End to the Industrial Canal, eight miles east of West End.

### *Mid-20th Century*

In 1928, Pontchartrain Beach Amusement Park opened on product of the New Orleans Port Levee Board's land development of West End and New Orleans's Lakefront, increasing tourism in the area (Illustration 7).<sup>27</sup> The first Pontchartrain Beach Amusement Park was located at the end of Bayou St. John near West End, but with the reclaimed land, the amusement park was relocated to the new Pontchartrain Beach.

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<sup>25</sup> Smallwood, "Milneburg, New Orleans: An Anthropological History of a Troubled Neighborhood," 35.

<sup>26</sup> N-Y Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers Architects & Planners, "West End Redevelopment Land Use and Site Plan Analysis," 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Larson, "Bryan Batt takes readers back to Pontchartrain Beach in family saga," *The New Orleans Advocate*, November 2, 2018.



Illustration 7. "Pontchartrain Beach at Spanish Fort panorama." The Charles L. Franck Studio Collection at The Historic New Orleans Collection. Acc. no. 1979.325.6713.

While West End residents suffered from a loss of water space with the construction of West End Park and the developed Lakefront, economic survival came in the form of a breakwater constructed north of West End Park as part of the New Orleans Levee Port Board Lakefront Land Reclamation Project.<sup>28</sup> The breakwater had been built to protect the Southern Yacht Club, the new Municipal Yacht Harbor, and surrounding piers, but by the 1940s, West End's new western border became a destination for a cluster of seafood restaurants, such as Fitzgerald's Restaurant, Bruning's Restaurant, and Sidmar's Restaurant.

The 1926 Lakefront Land Reclamation Project required the removal of some businesses and homes as an enormous 29,040-foot long concrete sea wall was built to protect the Lakeview and Gentilly neighborhoods from the same waters that had allowed West End to thrive. As trucks and cars became the mode of transport, highways, rather than canals were used to transport goods and people across land. In 1957, the Lakefront Land Reclamation Project was completed with the opening of the Pontchartrain Expressway and West End Boulevard, the 21-year road construction project erected over the defunct New Basin Canal. The 300-foot-wide neutral ground between the two roads was once again covered by dirt and grass, with a Celtic Cross monument honoring the unknown number of Irishmen that died digging the old New Basin

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<sup>28</sup> A breakwater is an example of a coastal modification that is often constructed near piers to protect boats and coastal residents from waves. The West End breakwater was constructed as part of the New Orleans Port Levee Board's 1930 land development plans.

Canal. Today, the only remaining portion of the New Basin Canal is at West End between Lake Marina Drive and the Southern Yacht Club, within rowing distance of Sintes Boat Works.

### *The Sintes Family*

In 1952, Lawrence Sintes Sr. founded Sintes Boat Works on the corner of South and West Roadway streets on the southwest corner of Orleans Marina.<sup>29</sup> The shop was opened by Lawrence Henry Sintes Sr., after he retired from Louisiana's Wildlife and Fisheries Department, where he had worked along the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal as a game warden, repairing the Wildlife and Fisheries boats as needed.<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Sintes Jr. remembered when his father had moved from Louisiana's Wildlife and Fisheries and started Sintes Boat Works:

He was a game warden, and then he got a job at the new basin canal with the wildlife and fisheries, taking care of all of their boats. He voted for the wrong guy as governor, and he got fired. And that's when I told him I thought we were building sixteen-foot wooden boat ( ) when the wooden boat business went to hell, I told my dad instead of building these hulls which we built across the street, that's when we decided we could bring the boats over here for a repair business.<sup>31</sup>

The completion of the New Orleans Port Levee Board's development projects in the 1950s allowed for the Sintes to move into West End, following the opening of West End Park and new residential areas along the lakefront. The new land that had filled the New Basin Canal and Orleans Marina had encouraged urban development over the survival of a historic West End.

The Sintes family followed the flow of commerce into West End and used the uptick in residential movement to their advantage as they began their business. Lawrence Sr.'s purchase of a boat crane elevated the boat works beyond its competitors and advanced the business to boat

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<sup>29</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> *Advocate*, August 14, 1949.

<sup>31</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

construction, so they built their own boats while continuing boat repair jobs (Illustration 8).<sup>32</sup> Sintes Boat Works was not the first time that the Sinteses had entered the boat business, Lawrence Sintes Jr. recalled that, “after the 1947 hurricane, my grandfather had rented skiffs down there at Lake Catherine, when all of the skiffs were destroyed, my dad and I had rebuilt all of the skiffs and we built six new skiffs for him.”<sup>33</sup> The Sinteses had begun a tradition of boatbuilding for longer than they can remember, passing down the same skills, histories, and tools. While Lawrence Sr. worked every day at the shop while Eva, his wife, continued to work the evening and night shifts at Fitzgerald’s Restaurant. Living across from their business, Lawrence Sr. left work every day at 3:00 p.m. to have lunch with Eva, and then he would drive her down the block to Fitzgerald’s Restaurant.<sup>34</sup> When he was eight years old, Lawrence Jr. began working with his father, cleaning and sweeping the shop’s floors and the boatyard at the end of every day, working his way up in the family business.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina Manager) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.



Illustration 8. “Sintes Boat Works boatyard in 1958, with the crane that allowed the Sintes family to expand their business.” Courtesy of Steve Sintes Sr.

The Sintes family had settled in West End just as the old was meeting the new with the completion of the New Orleans Port Levee Board’s 31-year land development projects (Illustration 9). Once, there had been limited ways of crossing the wide expanse of Lake Pontchartrain, with the earliest and most reliable being watercrafts. The opening of the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, a 26-mile-long bridge, created a quicker, more reliable mode of transportation across the lake as people and goods could travel in their own vehicles. The new causeway connected Metairie, a Lake Pontchartrain neighborhood on the south shore, with Mandeville on the north shore, allowing people to cross the 20 miles on the world’s longest continuous bridge over Lake Pontchartrain in less than an hour. This new road shifted the

transportation of goods by barges from the ports at West End to 18-wheelers crossing a two-lane bridge to reach the destinations that tourists had flocked to during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Illustration 9. "Lakefront- West End aerial." Photo by Sam R. Sutton. Gift of Mr. Sam R. Sutton and Mr. Chester V. Dyer, The Historic New Orleans Collection. Acc no. 1984.166.2.37.

### *Late 20th Century*

On September 9, 1965, Hurricane Betsy overpowered New Orleans with 110 mph winds and power failures throughout the city. For over ten days, Betsy's power caused a storm surge over Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, causing the levees on both sides of the Industrial Canal to fail. Lake Pontchartrain's waves inundated West End's marinas, shores,

and buildings.<sup>36</sup> Sintes Boat Works suffered damage to its outer warehouse, shipping crane, and boatyard. Remembering the rebuilding of the boatyard, Lawrence recalled that the family never threw anything away, and that after Hurricane Betsy, they rebuilt the yard with recycled tin and pine that had once been the boat houses of the Orleans Marina.<sup>37</sup>

The heavy flooding caused by Hurricane Betsy's storm surges over Lake Pontchartrain encouraged the United States Congress to pass the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity, Louisiana Hurricane Protection Project in the Flood Control Act of 1965.<sup>38</sup> This new project gave authority for the design and construction of New Orleans's future flood protection to the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers were charged with constructing a stronger levee system that would cover a wider area of New Orleans. As a federally authorized project, this Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project was a joint local, state, and federal effort expected to take 13 years to complete at \$85 million.<sup>39</sup>

In 1968, David "Dave" Sintes joined his brother at the boatyard, after serving with the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, where he received the Purple Heart.<sup>40</sup> While working at

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<sup>36</sup> Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, "Report on Hurricane Betsy" September 9-10, 1965" (New Orleans 1965).

<sup>37</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Anu Mittal, "Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives: Army Corps of Engineers: Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project: Statement of Anu Mittal, Director Natural Resources and Environment," (Army Corps of Engineers, Washington, DC, September 2005): 3.

<sup>39</sup> Anu Mittal, "Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives: Army Corps of Engineers: Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project: Statement of Anu Mittal, Director Natural Resources and Environment," 3.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Lazarus, "Designer/Builder Dave Sintes: 1947-2016," Professional Boatbuilder, <https://www.proboat.com/2017/04/designerbuilder-dave-sintes-1947-2016/> (accessed March 3, 2020).

the shop, Dave introduced new boat construction techniques to the Sintes Boat Works and began his own offshoot of the family business. In 1969, Dave launched Sintes Fiberglass Design, building over 600 commercial and recreational boats created with his new construction technology. This new technology allowed the Sintes family to use computer software to create the prints used in the construction of their boats, and to cut down construction time. When remembering his Uncle Dave, Steve Sintes Sr. recalled that, “I guess he was a genius when it came to designing boats, he could look at a boat and know how to change it, how to make it better, and improve what he did on the regular basis.”<sup>41</sup> Dave’s new boat technique had allowed him to complete a boat construction in a week, starting “on the weekend, the boatyard was shut down on Saturday, and we’d start setting up a boat in one of the buildings and by Tuesday we’d put out a complete hull finished except it had to be outfitted and stuff. On the weekend, we would haul out a boat.”<sup>42</sup> Joining his family in West End, Dave continued his father’s legacy of constructing and repairing boats in the same boatyard that his father had built.

When Dave returned to his father’s business, the maritime community of West End had begun to experience a decline in the community’s amusement-based tourism due to increased urban land developments by the city of New Orleans. Since the thriving restaurants at West End lay on the border of Jefferson Parish, Orleans Parish received no tax benefit. However, the parking lots to the restaurant lay in Orleans Parish. In 1977, to combat the loss of tourist income and to sustain their own maritime lake community, New Orleans officials allowed a parking business, Airport Parking Company of America, Inc. (APCOA), to convert the West End parking

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<sup>41</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (manager of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (manager of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.



lot into a paid parking lot.<sup>43</sup> This financial move by officials resulted in a near-complete loss of visitors to West End, as *Times Picayune* editor stated:

Congratulations, New Orleans, you have done it again! Found a new way to drive revenue from the city, that is. The recent flak about the parking at West End park restaurants will do it, you know. For it's only a matter of time before some smart, innovative and intuitive businessmen will find the way of establishing a West End park in Jefferson Parish. Anytime a group of people have dinner at a West End restaurant... you pick up a \$70 to \$80 tab, paying for that privilege by adding an additional \$2.50 for parking won't make you in a hurry to repeat the occasion.... I was always under the impression that the West End park was public property, i.e., city property. As children we spent many a long summer evening playing in that park and watching the magnificent, magical fountain with its crescendoing heights of waters and sparkling lights and gazing over the endless stretch of water watching boats sail from our sights. In those days wouldn't it have been a pity to have to pay for these delightful memories by paying parking fees. Isn't it a pity to have to pay for them now?<sup>44</sup>

Judy Sintes recalled that this financial move “almost put us out of our business and the restaurants started losing customers,” West End restaurant owners along West End Park claimed that they had lost thousands of dollars a week because the city of New Orleans had put in a paid lot before the high season.<sup>45</sup>

Defining the coast and boundaries of West End includes taking the aspects that make a terraqueous environment that permanent residents of West End mark as their maritime community. Ford argues that when coastal communities define their borders, that boundaries are set by ownership, and this coastal ownership “exacerbates ... tensions by bringing cultures into contact over a greater geographic expanse ... by increasing the value of the space to be

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<sup>43</sup> *Times Picayune*, June 7, 1977.

<sup>44</sup> *Times Picayune*, June 13, 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

controlled.”<sup>46</sup> After Tom Trinkner, the manager of the paid parking lot, accused the West End restaurant owners of encouraging their customers to drive away without paying the parking fee, New Orleans mayor Maurice “Moon” Landrieu ordered city council meetings to find a compromise among all of the effected parties.<sup>47</sup> Not wanting to lose the \$500,000 in government money that was used to build the paid parking lot, the parties came to an agreement—West End restaurateurs would validate their customer’s parking tab, by adding a fee to their food total. This sub-par win-win situation ended with fewer customers visiting West End, shuttering the doors of restaurants and clubs. This new development eventually put an end to the paid parking lot, as not enough people visiting West End to finance the lot.

### ***The Sintes Family Over the Years***

In 1981, 15-year-old Steve Sintes, Sr., after being stabbed in a fight, was given an ultimatum: work at the shop or get out of town. Steve’s first job was the same as his father’s, cleaning up the shop, and sweeping the yard clean at the end of every day. With his Uncle Dave, Steve began to repair his own boat, taking what he learned watching his father and uncle around the yard, to create his own boat with his own two hands.<sup>48</sup>

Pamela “Pam” Sintes had joined her parents, Lawrence Jr. and Geri, and her brother, Steve Sr., at the family business as an accountant after graduating from the University of New Orleans in mathematics. On March 14, 1993, Pam was murdered outside her home in the Lakeview neighborhood of New Orleans by her ex-boyfriend. In 1995, Pam’s family set up the

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<sup>46</sup> Ben Ford, “The Shoreline as a Bridge, Not a Boundary: Cognitive Maritime Landscapes of Lake Ontario” *The Archaeology of Maritime Landscapes*, ed. by Ben Ford (New York: Springer Science + Business, 2011), 67.

<sup>47</sup> *Times Picayune*, June 7, 1977.

<sup>48</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (manager of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.

Annual Pam Sintes Memorial Regatta in her memory. The event raises money for local advocacy groups, and serves as a celebration of Pam. The first Memorial Regatta was hosted by the South Shore Yacht Club along the shore where West End meets Lake Pontchartrain, and just within eyesight of Sintes Boat Works (Illustration 10).



Illustration 10. “The 24th Annual Pam Sintes Memorial Regatta on Lake Pontchartrain, held on August 24, 2019.” Courtesy of Steve Sintes Sr.

### *Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

More redevelopment in the West End continued into the early 21st century.<sup>49</sup> The area along the south side of Orleans Marina saw the construction of Lake Marina Tower, the first true residential skyscraper along Lake Pontchartrain, with Marseilles, another residential skyscraper, followed soon after.<sup>50</sup> These West End skyscraper condominiums stand tall over the tombstone foundations of West End’s former residents.

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<sup>49</sup> Louisiana Revised Statutes. § 38:336 (2011).

<sup>50</sup> N-Y Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers Architects & Planners, “West End Redevelopment Land Use and Site Plan Analysis,” 18.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana and New Orleans, and storm surges caused by the meeting of Katrina and Lake Pontchartrain caused widespread flooding while the Corps of Engineers failure caused levee breaches. Lake Pontchartrain's waves inundated the entire West End neighborhood as extensive flooding forced residents to stay in place after the storm had passed. At Sintes Boat Works, the Sintes family was able to evacuate their homes while their boatyard was caught in the middle of the fight between land and water.<sup>51</sup> Upon their return, the Sinteses found their boatyard turned upside down—boats had been picked up by Lake Pontchartrain and strewn across West End; water had flooded their shop and torn apart their boatyard; luckily, their container warehouse had remained unscathed.<sup>52</sup>

The Sinteses were some of the first to come back to West End, as Lawrence Jr. and Geri recalled that:

I don't know how many hurricanes we've had since we've been here, but every last one of them has affected us. Everybody that I know has had trouble getting money from the government to fix their business. The last time, Katrina, it took us more than two years to collect from the insurance, and what we did was—I used the money that we got for repairing our house, I put into the business, and when I got paid from the insurance company for the business I put to the house. And we put the business back together, Steve put the business back together, and his son, and the people that work for us. When they came here to rebuild the business, we couldn't send them loose to get something to eat, so Geri and I went to Sam's and we cooked for them. They all came to my house to eat and Geri fed them so well.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

The Sinteses had brought their employees to their “gutted house, sitting on two-by-fours” and they ate together.<sup>54</sup> Just as Hurricane Betsy had tested Lawrence Sr. in 1965, Steve had confessed that:

I had always wanted to know what it was like for my grandfather and I guess Katrina gave me it to me, it gave me the chance to find that out. But also, the fact that I read out how his life was and gathering all of the materials that he did and finding out what his life was like. Katrina was kind of a blessing for me in that respect.<sup>55</sup>

Rebuilding their family business with the same designs, measurements, and recycled materials, Steve was able to live like his grandfather. Steve was able to rebuild Sintes Boat Works in almost the exact same as Lawrence Sr., and make 21<sup>st</sup> century improvements to the boatyard to serve more customers. As their customers continued to visit and ask when they would once again be open, Steve recalls that he would go out to places around West End and New Orleans, and people would wave to him and ask “when are y’all going back in business, because losing y’all would be like losing K&B,” an iconic New Orleans business.<sup>56</sup> Getting back to Pre-Katrina business, Steve recalled that, “it was interesting to see how easy we had it before Katrina versus after Katrina. We really had to work hard, we had to ask people for money upfront and some people who have dealt with me for a long time were upset about it, but once I told them our situation they were open to it and understood,” but the Sintes were able to reopen by expanding on some of their traditional business ways.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019. The K&B that Steve Sr. was referring to is Katz and Besthoff, a drug store chain in New Orleans that was opened from 1905 to 1997 and has remained in the memory of New Orleanians ever since.

<sup>57</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.

In 2007, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina reopened supplying its West End neighborhood with boat repairs with the new Fiberglass repair designs constructed by Dave (Illustration 11). With this new construction and repair technology, Dave had transitioned the old Sintes way of using pencil and paper to computer programs whose finite details make boats faster, safer, and better than their competition. Judy had remembered that Dave took a class at:

UNO on small boat design and he walked into the class and the majority of the students were engineers. They went up to David and were like, “Thank you so much for recommending for this job, the reason I have the job I have now is because of you Dave.” And when the professor came in, and he finds out that Dave Sintes is in the class, he’s like, “well, Dave, I can’t teach you anything, and you can teach the class.”<sup>58</sup>

After Dave’s passing in 2016, boat enthusiasts around the United States applauded his designs, 21<sup>st</sup> century boatbuilding technologies, and his accomplishments in transforming the boatbuilding industry.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Lazarus, “Designer/Builder Dave Sintes: 1947-2016,” Professional Boatbuilder, <https://www.proboat.com/2017/04/designerbuilder-dave-sintes-1947-2016/> (accessed March 3, 2020).



Illustration 11. “Sintes Boat Works ten years after Hurricane Katrina, with the same crane that was purchased by Lawrence Sr.” Courtesy of Steve Sintes Sr.

Early on the morning of August 24, 2020, the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pam Sintes Memorial Regatta began, as women skippers once again raced across Lake Pontchartrain for Pam. After the events of Hurricane Katrina, the Memorial Regatta had been transferred to West End’s New Orleans Yacht Club. (Illustration 12) Judy remarked that Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina and Sintes family have become West End staples and that “it’s just always been here.” Responding to Judy’s statement, Lawrence Sr. stated that the reason the Sintes have been able to continue their business in West End was due to their consistency.<sup>60</sup> In 1952, Lawrence Sr. had established his

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<sup>60</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

name in West End’s history with Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina, and the strength of the Sinteses have continued to keep their family’s business alive through natural disasters, city developments, and family loss. The Sinteses have left their mark on every boat that has gone through their shop, and with every person that they have met. When discussing the future of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina, Steve Sr. had remarked that he hopes they never change, and that his family will continue to build boats, build relationships with their customers, and to simply “never change.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.





Illustration 12. “Steve Sintes Sr. presents a check from the Pamela Sintes Memorial Foundation with members of the New Orleans Family Justice Center on November 2, 2019.” Courtesy of Steve Sintes Sr.

## The Project

This project began as an oral history project that examined the life and business history of the Sintes family and its boat works. The Sintes family lived, breathed, and died the maritime life that they cultivated for themselves, within the maritime culture of West End. As a family, the Sinteses found themselves growing along with an established maritime community, and with their boat works business, they were able to assist in maintaining the maritime lake community of West End.

By recording the Sintes history, a sliver of Lake Pontchartrain's maritime and coastal cultural memory is collected for future generations. As the space between water and land continues to diminish due to human and natural influences, the maritime culture caught in this fight is disappearing as urban development continues to grow over the ruins of West End's former maritime communities, and as each natural disaster reclaims the space that was once lost to human development. This liminal space between water and land where the Sintes have planted themselves dictates how this story has been retold: the Sintes family has created its own found and sacred space that has allowed them to bridge this gap between water and land for their customers, and themselves.

This story of West End's maritime culture and community has been defined by the continuous movement of water, and follows its own course; it begins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the birth of West End as a New Orleans neighborhood and ends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the Sintes family and their interviews. By focusing on West End as a maritime lake community, this project shifts the usual narrative of West End's demise through tourism to the narrative that is woven by the Sintes oral histories. With limited formal research, both the Sinteses and their West End maritime community are having their stories told through the lens of a family and business that has survived in the same location through natural and human disasters. Because of the liminality of West End's position as a maritime neighborhood in New Orleans, and its terraqueous location on the southern bank of Lake Pontchartrain, the permanent residents have always been at the mercy of natural disasters and disregard from the historical narrative of New Orleans. This situation has led to personal items and memorabilia lost to natural disasters, permanent residents forced to leave their maritime lake communities due to land loss and

gentrification, and a lack of formal and academic research on a historic New Orleans neighborhood.

However, while the physical memories and shared spaces may be gone, with the collection of oral histories, the folk traditions, maritime cultures, and shared community memories can be preserved. The maritime lake community still lives the history that scholars search for; the history of West End is incomplete with only the documents that live in archives. By talking with the same maritime community, the story of West End becomes more whole.

To better promote the understanding of West End's maritime lake culture, interviewing the Sinteses at their boatyard, and walking through the marina, as a method of recording their perceptions of their community, allowed for an uninterrupted retelling of their history. David Taylor has argued that documenting maritime folklife opens the door to a maritime culture that has often been overlooked.<sup>62</sup> Documenting the Sintes family as part of the West End maritime lake community opens the door for other members of their community to share their history and shared memories. Observing the family at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pamela Sintes Memorial Regatta revealed much of how different community members interact with the Sintes family, and how the Sintes family has both supported and been supported by West End's maritime community for the past 70 years.<sup>63</sup>

Documenting the Sinteses' history through oral histories allows for a subject's self-reflection of their roles in their maritime lake community. The reflexive nature of oral histories allows for the dissemination of tradition, history, and culture that has been woven through West

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<sup>62</sup> David Taylor, *Documenting Maritime Folklife: An Introductory Guide* (Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, 1992).

<sup>63</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, August 24, 2019.

End's maritime community through families like the Sinteses. This form of intangible community expressions are not easily deciphered from written documents, but they are accessible through oral histories. Taylor has argued that one of the best ways to document a living maritime community is to follow the subjects as they go about their day as "cultural values are lodged in the nonphysical expressions, just as much as they are in physical ones"; following subjects as they complete their duties at work, accompanying them as they do their honey-dos, or joining them during their leisure time opens documentation up as a form of cultural appreciation.<sup>64</sup> Giving subjects the lead gives them their own agency in how their story is told, and how their history will be interpreted by the interviewer.

The conducting of, and interpretation of the Sinteses oral histories ran the risk of the subjects misremembering their own history.<sup>65</sup> By having the first and second interview recorded at the Sintes Boat Works and the New Orleans Yacht Club, the familiar settings assisted in helping the subjects recall more authentic memories of their family's business history, and how the Sintes have interacted with their maritime lake community over time.<sup>66</sup>

This project, along with oral histories, has a digital life. The history of the Sinteses and their family business has been uploaded to the digital website and smart phone application, New Orleans Historical, as part of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies "Family Business" project. As a site on New Orleans Historical, Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina sheds light not only on West End's and New Orleans's maritime business history, but also on historical New Orleans's family businesses. On New Orleans Historical, the Sinteses family business will

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<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *Documenting Maritime Folklife*, 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> Elaine Batty, "Reflections on the use of oral history techniques in social research," *People, Place and Policy* 3, no. 2, (July 2009):113.

<sup>66</sup> Alice Hoffman and Howard Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History," *Today's Speech* 22 (Winter 1974): 26.

be a stop on the Midlo Center's "Family Business" tour that spotlights long-established New Orleans family businesses. On their site, quotes from the interviews that were used in this paper are available to watch, along with a short history of the Sintes family business and family photographs. Using the New Orleans Historical website and app for the Sintes family and business history opens West End up for future researchers and visitors to learn more about one of New Orleans's maritime neighborhoods.

### **The Study**

The Sintes family consists of four generations that have lived, worked, and safeguarded their slice of New Orleans West End neighborhood through their commitment to their business, their family, and their maritime lake community. The Sintes story is interwoven with the history of West End, past to present, beginning in 1952 with Lawrence Sintes Sr. By weaving the story of this family into the existing history of West End, the emphasis is on personal verities of belonging to a maritime lake community, and how its survival is steeped in family, self-sustainable businesses, and understanding their terraqueous environment. Oral histories allow for the preservation of linguistics, vernacular vocabulary, and insider information on what is important to people. Oral histories furnish information that written documents cannot, or information that was perhaps not deemed important in the past, but is important in hindsight.<sup>67</sup> In the maritime lake community of West End, the lives of the permanent residents may have been ignored by scholars, but interviews with the Sintes family reveals that West End as an oral culture has much to say.

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<sup>67</sup> Patrick Sharma, "Oral History, Policy History, and Information Abundance and Scarcity," *American Historical Association Perspectives on History* (April 2012): 26-27.

## *Interview One*

The first interview in this oral history project with the Sintes family included: Lawrence Jr., Geri's husband, father to Steve Sr. and Pam, and current owner and president of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina; Geri, Lawrence Sr.'s wife, mother to Steve Sr. and Pam, and former accountant for Sintes Boat Works; Judy, Dave's wife, aunt to Steve Sr. and Pam, and known by the Sinteses as the family historian; Steve Sr., son of Lawrence Jr. and Geri, and the current manager of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina; Steve "Stevie" Jr., Steve Sr.'s son, and a current employee of Sintes Boat Works; and Steve Wagner, a former employee of Sintes Boat Works, and a current family friend. The interview was held at Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina, in the office that has housed the records of Sintes Boat Works since 1952.<sup>68</sup> In this interview, it became clear that family and community were interchangeable concepts: the Sintes family grew out of community, and the community thrived along with family. The oral history format allowed the Sintes family to express their emotional connections to the family and the community in ways that other written accounts may not have permitted, thus allowing a more complete story. An advantage of oral histories is that feelings and emotions, often left out of more formal accounts, may be recorded.

As Lawrence recounted the events following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, he became emotional as he recalled how Sintes Boat Works employees came back into the city while New Orleans was still closed down, in order to rebuild the Sintes boatyard. Working for two years, the Sinteses and their loyal employees were able to reopen Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina and continue their business in West End. Steve Wagner, a former employee, gave an employee's

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<sup>68</sup> Sintes Family (owners and employees of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

perspective of working at the boatyard. Wagner recalled working for Sintes Boat Works as a teenager in the summer, and how after he had moved on from the boatyard, he still attended the business's Christmas parties and summer crawfish boils. Every Fourth of July, Dave, as the family's head crawfish boiler, cooked masses of food for the employees and their families, pouring the crawfish into a wooden skiff that Lawrence Sr. had built when he first opened the Sintes Boat Works. Thus, the Sinteses created a business that is also a family, with friendships and social gatherings beyond the workday.

### *Interview Two*

Immediately after the first interview with the Sintes family, Steve Sr. was interviewed as he walked around the Sintes Boatyard and the Orleans Marina, pointing out the boats that had gone through his boatyard and the people he has known through the years.<sup>69</sup> This immersion into Steve Sr.'s work life, broke down the barriers between the Sintes maritime business and their role beyond their boatyard and into West End's maritime lake community. Walking around the boatyard, Steve Sr. spoke of his daily work, beginning with how he opens the shop in the morning to testing the boats on Lake Pontchartrain. This untraditional oral history method was heralded by maritime folklorists and documenter David Taylor as one of the best ways to document the occupational aspect of maritime communities, as this type of information about the everyday jobs are not often recorded because the work is not seen as important.<sup>70</sup> Judy Sintes recalled that her husband, Dave, had always said that "the best way to learn how to build a boat is being in the boatyard and looking at the boat," and it could be argued that the best way to learn

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<sup>69</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, June 18, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor, Documenting Maritime Folklife, 12.

how the Sinteses have run their business since 1952 was being in the boatyard with Steve Sr. as he walked through his place of work.

During this walking interview, Steve Sr. pointed out each boat being worked on, listing out every detail of the boat—the type of boat, the repairs that were planned for the boat, and the name of the boat owner. Steve Sr. lays out the boatyard’s history from 1952 to the day of the interview, pointing out the warehouses that were rebuilt using recycled boathouse wood from Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina, and the crane that his grandfather, Lawrence Sr., had purchased in 1952 when he opened the boat works.

This interview with Steve Sr. revealed the strong connection between the maritime lake community of West End and Sintes Boat Works, as well as the business’s role in maintaining the community’s history and culture. As Steve Sr. walked down the pier over Orleans Marina, at each boat he talked about the owners as if they were part of the Sintes family. Steve knew each of the boat owner’s names, how long they had been customers, and in one instance, how Steve had helped a dying customer settle into his boat, so that his life would end where he was the most happiest—on his boat in Lake Pontchartrain.

### ***Interview Three***

The third interview with the Sintes family was conducted on August 24, 2019, at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pamela Sintes Memorial Regatta.<sup>71</sup> This informal interview was conducted from the perspective of an outsider looking into the community of which the Sintes family held an integral place. Since 1995, the Sintes family has remembered the life of Pamela Sintes through a community-sponsored regatta. The Memorial Regatta gives opportunities for women skippers to

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<sup>71</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, August 24, 2019.



show off their skills as they attempt to control the brackish waters of Lake Pontchartrain, and, in 2019, the event raised \$15,000 for organizations that advocate for the victims of domestic violence.

In the previous interview sessions, the Sintes family has been the subject. For this interview, the community surrounding and, in some ways, protecting the Sintes family and the relationships they have cultivated through their business were the subjects. The event is an illustration of the strength of the community through good times and bad. For ten years from 1995 until Hurricane Katrina damaged the yacht club in 2005, Pam's Memorial Regatta had been hosted by the South Shore Yacht Club. In 2006, the New Orleans Yacht Club took on as host for the Memorial Regatta, and the club has continued to host the Regatta, silent auction, and potluck lunch for the event. This interview reveals the ways that West End residents continue to come together for their community, providing donations, food, and amusements for their departed community members while supporting their families.

#### ***Interview Four***

The fourth interview with the Sintes family was part of the Midlo Center's "Family Business" project and was conducted with Steve Sr.<sup>72</sup> The separation of the interviewee and his familiar setting of his boatyard inspired different stories, perspectives, and expressions that had not been caught on camera in previous interviews. The stories that Steve Sr. recalled during this last interview filled in gaps on how the Sintes viewed themselves as a family business in New Orleans and West End. In this interview, Steve Sr. focused on his time working with his father and Uncle Dave at the boatyard, and how he runs the business as the manager.

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<sup>72</sup> Steve Sintes Sr. (Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina manager) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2020.

Steve Sr. recalled how his father began taking him to the boatyard when he was seven years old and then his experiences when he officially began as a formal employee. In this interview, Steve Sr. spoke about his grandfather, Lawrence Sr., and how Lawrence always kept a journal of what he had done at the boatyard for the day. Through his grandfather's journals, Steve Sr., related that he had learned how to rebuild the boatyard after Hurricane Katrina because Lawrence Sr. had rebuilt after Hurricane Betsy. Using Lawrence Sr.'s journals, Steve Sr. was able to rebuild his grandfather's boatyard the exact way that it had originally been built.

While this interview was conducted with just Steve Sr., a videographer and researcher were also present for the interview. The two outsiders had no knowledge of the Sinteses or their family business, but this opened the interview to different questions and perspectives that Steve Sr. had not been asked before. New stories emerged from Steve Sr. that had not previously been recorded, and the interview became livelier as Steve Sr. was able to talk about his family without his parents being present.

## **The Results**

Throughout the 200 years of West End's existence in New Orleans, New Orleanians have experienced Lake Pontchartrain as a welcoming throughway and a watertight boundary. The liminality of Lake Pontchartrain, acting simultaneously as a throughway and boundary, has led to an incomplete identity of the lake's permanent maritime communities. As maritime lake communities, West End and its neighbors are separated from the constantly shifting maritime river communities that lie along the Mississippi River; Westenders are bound by the same physical boundaries that have held them in place for generations—Lake Pontchartrain, New Basin Canal, 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal, and the current Veterans Boulevard—and by spatial borders, such as the parish line that separates Bucktown and West End past the coast and far into Lake

Pontchartrain. The shared experiences of West End—as people moved through as permanent and transient members of West End—have resulted in a littoral community that is separated from terrestrial New Orleans, yet still a part of the cultural tapestry that makes up the city. This frailty of a total identity, as well as the liminality of West End, has resulted in a realignment of what it means to be a part of West End.

Studying the variation of a small area assists in understanding the traditional values and knowledge of how maritime communities transform over time due to commercial, social, and technological influences.<sup>73</sup> Local artifacts, in the form of communal spaces, oral histories, and shared memories, become invested with deep symbolic meanings given by the permanent residents in order to remember who they are, as a maritime lake community of New Orleans. The maritime lake culture has formed with and without the maritime river culture of New Orleans's slice of the Mississippi River. Lake Pontchartrain's maritime lake culture has formed as a stationary, end-of-the-line stop for New Orleanians; there is no coming and going, or easy sharing of information or goods through Lake Pontchartrain that allows for the growth of a stationary maritime community. As opposed to the major transportation thoroughfare connecting the Midwestern United States with the Gulf of Mexico, the maritime river culture that grew out of the Mississippi River has allowed for the transportation and assimilation of cultures in the maritime river communities along the Mississippi's meandering coast. The maritime lake culture, in contrast, is the development of a culture that has had limited influence from other competing maritime cultures. Meanwhile, West End has suffered from cultural urban development and upheaval for as long as the neighborhood has existed; the movement of new people into old neighborhoods and displacement of former residents by natural disasters and land

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<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *Documenting Maritime Folklife*, 14.

development projects has transformed the community from a fishing settlement to a place of memories.

## **Conclusion**

The Sintes history illustrates the difficulty of separating the consumption and production of West End, and that neither is exclusive of the other. The Sintes and their maritime lake community of West End has eluded traditional New Orleans history, as academics have continued to view New Orleans history and maritime culture through the Mississippi River. However, this project on the history of West End and the Sintes family occupying the liminal space between storytelling and academic research, the project argues that this strategy can successfully reveal much about these communities.

Communities that grow around bodies of water are defined by how they use the body of water, and how that body of water uses them. Maritime communities established on coasts and rivers act as avenues between the transient ships and people, and the permanent members of a port city. In these maritime communities such as New Orleans, ports act as a place of change for both the permanent and itinerant communities that meet on the Mississippi River; the ideas and cultures of these ephemeral ports travel to other ports and harbors. This constant movement of water, goods, ships, and people influence and alter the surrounding maritime community to the point that river ports become a sacred space for the travelers rather than the permanent residents.

In contrast, a maritime lake community is a community of people whose lives are defined by the constant of an unchanging lake. On the coast of a lake, a maritime community does not interact with a transient community; instead a maritime lake community intermingles with the same neighboring communities, or tourists who visit, looking for the same activities every time they visit. Their livelihoods are ruled by the conditions of their terraqueous environment, how

they interact with their environment and climate change, and how urban development and tourism affects the permanent resident's maritime lake culture. Ben Ford defines the shoreline as a "bridge, not a boundary."<sup>74</sup> The shore of West End, the terraqueous meeting point between water and land, acts as an avenue between permanent residents and visitors as both parties come together to exist in the same place. These aspects of a maritime community, Ford argues, influence cultural traditions that are "taught by subtle hints and repetitive reinforcement from birth, and are unique to a specific population."<sup>75</sup> Each iteration of West End as a tourist destination has influenced how the next generation of permanent residents are expected to provide income for themselves through the exploitation of their environment.

The maritime lake community of West End was founded as a permanent residence for New Orleanians who used the terraqueous landscape in ways that the riverside of New Orleans could not—the residents of West End defied the environment by living above the water that inundated the land, making a living serving the boaters on Lake Pontchartrain, and cultivated a maritime culture that has managed to survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This story of New Orleans's West End neighborhood through the residential perspective has allowed the voices of the community to be heard through this project, which includes the Sinteses' oral histories and the digital aspect of the boat works site on New Orleans Historical. This story of West End can add to the traditional historical narrative while revealing how one family's history has suggested, and been supported, by this project's research of a lake community sieged by nature and displacement.

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<sup>74</sup> Ford, "The Shoreline as a Bridge, Not a Boundary: Cognitive Maritime Landscapes of Lake Ontario" 67.

<sup>75</sup> Ford, "The Shoreline as a Bridge, Not a Boundary: Cognitive Maritime Landscapes of Lake Ontario" 63.

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## **Appendices**

The included transcripts have been copied from the oral histories conducted by the author and the Sintes family. The transcripts and oral histories have been gifted to the University of New Orleans's Earl K. Long Library's Special Collections and are awaiting processing. The January 22, 2020 oral history interview with Steve Sintes Sr. will be available on the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies YouTube page along with the full transcript. Excerpts from the oral histories are also available on New Orleans Historical under the "West End" tag.

## **Appendix Interview #1**

**Transcript: Sintes Family Interview #1- Lawrence Sintes Jr., Geraline “Geri” Sintes, Judith “Judy” Sintes, Steve Sintes Sr., Steve “Stevie” Sintes Jr., and Steve Wagner.**

(Compiled June 23, 2019)

Interviewees: Lawrence Sintes Jr., Geraline “Geri” Sintes, Judith “Judy” Sintes, Steve Sintes Sr., Steve “Stevie” Sintes Jr., and Steve Wagner.

Interviewer: Madison Hazen

Interview Date: June 18, 2019

Location: Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina 7385 West Roadway Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70124

Sintes Family in discussion with Madison Hazen at Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina on June 18, 2019. This interview was conducted in the manager’s office of Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina with Lawrence Sintes Jr., Geraline “Geri” Sintes, Judith “Judy” Sintes, Steve Sintes Sr., Steve “Stevie” Sintes Jr., and Steve Wagner.

Judith “Judy” Sintes: It’s like times have stopped, we still have gotten- -.

Steve Sintes Sr.: My grandfather had even built a boatyard on the beach of Gulfport, [Mississippi], and there’s even pictures of that.

SSS: He was a builder

JS: Actually I have the coast guard license for one of the boats that my father in law built, it’s got the seal and everything on it, it says certificate of award for an undocumented vessel &

it's got a number and the owner of the boat is Martin George Grow. Which of the grows was that? And the name of the vessel, because it was built in, or it was documented in, August of 1948. Which would have made David a year and a month old. And Mr. Crow named his boat the *Little Dave*, after my husband. And Mr. Crow brought this to my husband years later after the boat was no longer in existence when my husband was building boats across the street and gave this to my husband. It says the builder is Lawrence Sintes of New Orleans, Louisiana and the engine was a ( ) and then there is the serial number of the engine, the five-horse power motor, and it was issued by the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> coast guard district, and his name was B.M. Augustine. And, that was all the information that was on it, and it was notarized.

Lawrence Sintes Jr.: That's something that happened in 1948, that was nearly as important as the building process, I was the one that had to police up all the tools at the end of the day because all the guys were going out and drinking beer--

SSS: Because he was twelve years old--

JS: He would have been thirteen by then.

LSJ: - and to this day, when I work on something, I don't want to pick up the tools. I want to leave them right where they are, because I'm going to come back the next day and use them. And to me, that is the most efficient way to do it, but I was twelve, and my dad wanted me to get away from the adults, so my dad said, "ok, you go do this, we're going to drink and go do this." After I graduated from high school in 1953, we had started this business over here in 1952, and this was- we had put the crane up here probably the- we had to build the wall before we got the crane in.

Steve Wagner: Now Lawrence, you and your dad and someone else built that crane?

LSJ: We had a guy in the Rigolets that built the crane, and my dad had ( ) students machine working that, that crane now is a portion of the original crane. After my dad passed, I had the yard extended and the crane enlarged. And basically, what we did was, I mean we only did something when we had the money to do it, we had never thrown anything away, we always recycled it. The woodworking shop out there, it's built with tin and iron off of it, was off of the boat houses that were dumped in the parking lot over there after hurricanes, the 1952, and Betsy. And after Betsy, ( ) we had to put the business back together and put the roof back over my dad's house. Because we had the house across the street that we had to fix.

SSS: Mom told me that when I met your dad, I was embarrassed because your dad's house didn't have flooring in it, it had scaffold floors. Because everything went into the business.

LSJ: After the hurricane, because I was in the national guard, I had night duty, because I wanted to help fix my dad's house during the day. My job was to take guns away from people to stop the fighting. You don't take a weapon out against a guy, what you do is take them away from them.

Madison Hazen: So, I was doing research before I came here, and it was difficult to find articles about y'all. When did y'all start and why did you choose boatbuilding?

GS: Why the boatbuilding?

LSJ: Well, actually my dad was a game warden, I'm the oldest of seven, and while he was a game warden, we used to build sixteen-foot wooden ski boats. He was a game warden, and then he got a job at the new basin canal with the wildlife and fisheries, taking care of all of their boats. He voted for the wrong guy as governor, and he got fired. And that's when I told him I thought we were building sixteen-foot wooden boat ( ) when the wooden boat business went to hell, I told my dad instead of building these hulls which we built across the street, that's when we



decided we could bring the boats over here for a repair business. I said we need to go into the repair business, because we didn't need as much capital. When you're in the repair business, you could pick a boat up on Monday and finish the work on Friday, and collect on Saturday, so that you could get paid. If you're building a thirty-six-foot hull, it would take us probably two months, three months to waste, it was all the money going into it, but nothing coming out. Most of the money going into the hull was my dad's and mine money, he took my money from me.

JS: Now, going back to father in law's time in wildlife and fisheries, he was not just an ordinary wildlife and fisheries person, look how he's dressed. And they were picking up contraband, like liquor and narcotics, even back then. The one with the cigarette in his mouth, ( ) he was tall.

LSJ: Well when he was a game warden, he used to take me with him, ok, and we'd go there. We were at Howard's beach one morning, and it was about thirty minutes before we'd start shooting and it started like the wall was coming down, so he told me, "I'll be back," and he went off. He came back with thirteen people he had to take to the justice of the peace, and all I had to do was just sit there. After that, he took me out there to hunt, and I didn't have a dog, so he had his fellow deputy to retrieve what I had killed. He, while he was with the wildlife and fisheries, he had to open the spillway over there, he took me out there to do that, and he let me crank the board up. After the 1947 hurricane, my grandfather had rented skiffs down there at Lake Catherine, when all of the skiffs were destroyed, my dad and I had rebuilt all of the skiffs and we built six new skiffs for him. I still have the cypress side fabricated for it in the woodworking shop.

SW: Well Lawrence, was it your grandfather, or your great-grandfather that started boatbuilding, as part of the business?

LSJ: I think it was my dad. My dad was the person who could create things, he could start things, but he couldn't run them. He started the boatyard here, and then we started another boatyard in Gulfport, Mississippi. My dad and I built the travel lists, we also, while he was also doing that in Mississippi, he was taking all the funds I was making here and putting it into that project. The main thing that makes this business is consistency.

JS: Exactly, it has not really changed, since I first met the Sintes family when I married and was courting Dave.

SSS: After Katrina, when I would go out places, people would wave to me and ask are y'all coming back to business, because losing was would be like losing K & B. and that was interesting because people compared us to Katz & Besthoff.

JS: Because we've just always been here.

LSJ: We always try to ( ), when we first married, we put ten bucks a year into a savings account and that worked for us, because that's what we used to pay the hospital bills. There was no insurance, you just went to the doctors.

JS: Now when you had small company's you didn't have insurance. And sometimes you paid them ahead of time for the year for your children, like \$100 dollars a year, and you can bring your children in anytime for their shots or whatever, they were already pre-paid. The doctor was already paid, and you didn't have to come up with any more money.

LSJ: I don't know how many hurricanes we've had since we've been here, but every last one of them has affected us. Everybody that I know has had trouble getting money from the government to fix their business. The last time, Katrina, it took us more than two years to collect from the insurance, and what we did was—I used the money that we got for repairing our house, I put into the business, and when I got paid from the insurance company for the business I put to

the house. And we put the business back together, Steve put the business back together, and his son, and the people that work for us. When they came here to rebuild the business, we couldn't send them loose to get something to eat, so Geri and I went to Sam's and we cooked for them. They all came to my house to eat and Geri fed them so well.

SSS: At the time their house was gutted, so we were sitting on the floor on two-by-fours, and I remember one day leaving here with people in the van. My van went underwater during Katrina, so my lights weren't working, and I was going to their house. The 17<sup>th</sup> street canal bridge was closed, so I took the highway and the police were behind us. I work without a shirt on and all my guys were in the yard, we've got like ten people in the van, and two cops were behind us and I heard, "the lights aren't working, what should we do? If we pull the Mexicans over then somebody's house won't get finished--."

JS: Well they were the only people working here, we don't talk about the Mexicans, they were the only people here--

SSS: --they just assumed from the way I was dressed that I was Mexican, when I'm Portuguese.

MH: So, you've been here since the boat works started?

LSJ: We've been here since before 1953. We started the business in 1952.

SW: So, Lawrence, this has to be one of the oldest, continually run family businesses out here?

LSJ: I think so.

JS: You haven't seen that one, you could probably pick out your old house in that picture on Lake Avenue—

GS: behind the marina. I don't know if it's still there.

SSS: So, they have a plaque dedicated to the marina, and my grandfather's name is on it, with a few other people's.

JS: The winter before Katrina, my grandson and my husband, this was our business, and their on their way to Bruning's their main building was closed, they were recovering from a hurricane a few years before that, so Bruning's had moved their restaurant over here. So my husband and grandson were on their way to have lunch with Barry Baker, who was another boat repair person out here before Katrina, and I asked my grandson, "are you and Pop Pop are on your way to have lunch?" and he said, "no we're on our way to get candy." He remembered that when you first walked into Bruning's there was that checkout with candy that kids could get, apparently after lunch, his Pop Pop had bought him candy.

LSJ: Do you have that picture of *Etta May*?

GS: The boat?

Steve Sintes Jr: We have it outside on the thing.

JS: That's right, because I brought a copy in the frame.

GS: I don't have anything in a frame at the house, just the big picture.

LSJ: Yeah, I have the picture at the house.

SSS: A boat named after one of their sisters-

JS: Actually, I thought it was named after Etta May, his sister.

LSJ: It was named after Etta May, and the boat was made out of ( ) logs, and my dad and I built it.

JS: You see how this generation has to come along to the boatyard, this was how Steve was raised, this was how Lawrence was raised, how my husband was raised. Family, it was all family.

GS: And we have another grandson, who works here.

LSJ: That's Pamela, my daughter's, son. After his mom was killed, we raised him from the time he was five to the time he was 18.

SSS: The night we were making funeral arrangements for Pam, I remembered my boat was sinking here, and always- when a boat would start sinking I would set the battery charger up and get the pumps working to try to stop the boat from sinking in the water. I remembered that night, setting everything up, like I always set up, and thinking, "wow, my parents don't need to bury two children in the same week." So, I unplugged the boat and used batteries and some 12-volt batteries to pump the boat out. But I was amazed after my sister got murdered how risky I was.

MH: Has there been one big project or boat that y'all have had that has been the most memorable?

GS: One of the things he did was, you know the boats at one time were all wooden boats when they first started the business, and you always needed to caulk the bottoms of the boats before you finished them. And now someone comes along, and they have a fiberglass boat, he has never worked on a fiberglass boat. But when we used to have pictures, remember when you used to have the fiberglass job and you told the guy that you could do it.

LSJ: This was a fiberglass boat, and the people had it had run into the pier and they poked a hole through the bottom. They came over here, and I said I could fix it. And Geri asked, how are you going to fix it, have you worked fiberglass, and I said not yet.

JS: Kind of similar to the tar and cotton of the wooden boats?

LSJ: I've done everything in the boatyard that there is to do ( ) I've worked on fiberglass boats, ( ) sailboats.

GS: When I married him, he was sanding boats.

LSJ: ( ) Every time I've sent someone to a school, I go with them because I want to see how the school is. And also, if they've worked with me for four or five months, two years, I know they're going to go and make something of themselves if they leave the company, but if they're here, ( ). We've had a number of people that come here and work with us in the boatyard over the summer, I'm talking doctors, lawyers, and whatever and they all come here they say that the best time they've had was working in the boatyard, and that they want to back and doing that again.

JS: That's what David will ( ) what on earth did you do growing up and having fun doing. Cause that's what Lawrence was the worker, he was twelve years older, he was the worker in the boatyard. My husband was twelve years younger; he was the baby and he played in the boatyard. So—

SSS: he did his own things—

JS: and he loved it, he loved it. He thought this was the life. When he started his business, the fiberglass work and repair, taught David how to set up the resin and stuff like that--.

SSS: Exactly how father was. And by the time I was eighteen, he helped me to build my boat. You know the gift wasn't the boat, it still is a gift, but building the boat, that was the gift. And when you see it, you'll be amazed at how it looks, I built it before he [Steve "Stevie" Sintes Jr.] was born and it's older than him, but it looks newer than my pickup truck.

LSJ: Well my brother, Dave, was the one who designed and ( ) all that. Actually, he ( ) dug it out himself. Nobody taught him that. He had some programs that he got, and what he did was he wrote those programs himself to do what he was trying to do.

JS: Which was the best way, I think, for him to do it, because he didn't take something somebody else had written and try to figure it out. Because even after he died, we couldn't figure out anything on his computer programs.

SSS: He could have.

JS: It had died in his brain. It was buried with him.

LSJ: ( ) It was not something we could recreate; it was something that we could get enough information out that we could help some people out ( ). And also, Mason and I, were able to demonstrate what was in his computers enough to show people who bought his systems. Supposedly, they're going to keep his designs alive, but I don't know if they were able to get anything off of them [the computers]. But I think it's only a matter of time before they do that. I've also- Mason and I have also told people that we could help them, we did a lot to show them, so that they knew what they were buying.

JS: They knew what they were buying. It's just figuring out how to get—

LSJ: what they have to do is, they have to get somebody that can dig it out, because it's there, it's safe, it just needs somebody who knows how to do it.

JS: Every single thing—

LSJ: It was safe in his mind.

JS: Every single thing, because we did not lose any of his computer data—

LSJ: He was always so secretive about everything. At one point I told him, I said, "Dave, you need to understand that you can tell me stuff, you have to remember I was in the military special forces. I've been trained to keep secrets, ok? If I tell you that I'm not going to tell anybody, then you already know that I've been through all that training, so that if you get captured, you only give them your name, rank, and serial number. You don't speak, that's the

only thing left in your brain, your name, rank, and serial number. You're going to kill me, then kill me."

SSS: I went to a seminar one time with him [Dave], and they paid him to speak. They asked him questions and he said, "I can't tell you it's a secret. I can't tell you it's a secret." They're paying him to tell them his secrets, now tell them!

JS: I'm not telling them! I'm not telling them anything! No, I remember one of the classes that David took at UNO on small boat design and he walked into the class and the majority of the students were engineers. They went up to David and were like, "Thank you so much for recommending for this job, the reason I have the job I have now is because of you Dave." And when the professor came in, and he finds out that Dave Sintes is in the class, he's like, "well, Dave, I can't teach you anything, and you can teach the class."

GS: And then, little by little, when they had the funds, when Sintes Boat Works had the funds, they started Sea Chest store. That was back in 1980 was when they combined the businesses into Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest.

SSS: It's a marine store and a distributing business, and a boatyard.

JS: And there was a lovely, before Katrina, a lovely boutique on the second floor. When I say boutique, I mean boutique. It was designer clothes, all the foul weather gear, and exercise clothes, and beautiful shoes by Sperry Topslider. Anything that the mariner would have needed at the last minute, they could come up and get.

SSS: We did fashion shows at the yacht clubs.

JS: They could get anything, and fashion shows yes. Pam started that. Boutique jewelry, anything nautical, pictures, anything they had it. The men would go up and the women would



flock out here when it was Father's Day, husband's birthday, anniversary and go upstairs and Pam would say, "this would be nice for him, and that would be nice for him."

LSJ: That boutique upstairs had \$75,000 worth of merchandise that disappeared while the national guard was guarding the front door. They came in through the back door and walked away with the stuff. They got in here and stole the memory chips out of the computers, they didn't take the computers ( ). But they stole the clocks—

JS: all sorts of equipment, and all kinds of marine equipment like for the boats--.

LSJ: Some of it was taken before the national guard came, and when the national guard arrived here, they had trucks sitting out there. And they had a chair like this that came out of my office, and that's what they put the stop sign on. My wife and I once we got back in town, one New Year's Eve we came over here, about 11:30. By that time there were still no lights in New Orleans, there was darkness, and we came here about 11:30 and the national guardsmen were in sitting up in their trucks. And I went over, and the first guy, a serious guy, I asked him where the supervisor was and he pointed over there, he said he was sleeping, and said, "that makes two of yall." I told Geri, this was like 11 o'clock, I said Geri, "we're going back over there." She came with me, and we came back here at 12 o'clock and I got out they jumped from across. When we got ready to go back home, it had gotten foggy, really, really foggy, and we were going back up Pontchartrain Boulevard, and it was pitch darkness, you could barely see. We were locked out of here for thirty days. Steve and his wife, and my aunt, my wife and I, we stayed on a ranch in Hesner? ( ).

JS: My husband and I stayed in Natchez.

SSS: I had a Viet Nam veteran working here who said I got looted, that someone had stole my stuff and he finally told me he knew where he came from. He went and emptied the

place and he said let's go get the stuff now. I went over there, and got our stuff back, and a few weeks later the police show up, "we're looking for Steve Sintes." I'm like what do you want, and they came with us to go after the looter, and they wound up leaving. The police left. A few weeks later, an unmarked car shows up, looking like something off of Mad Max, and a couple in black uniforms come up asking for Steve Sintes. I said what do you want, and they said, "we understand you have some problems, and we're here to fix them for you." They went with me to the looters house and they break into his house, and he showed up and they dragged him outside. They said, "if I were you, I suggest you move out from this area, or else you'll end up being crab bait and there's nothing you can do about it." In the meantime, other people were coming up and threatening the looter for what they did, so the looter ended up in jail and he started pressing charges on us for what we did to him and putting him in jail. We had nothing to do with him going to jail, but we still hired a lawyer to defend ourselves from the looter.

SW: This had to do with after Katrina?

SSS: Yes, this was after Katrina.

LSJ: Are you talking about the guy who stole our stuff?

SSS: Yes.

LSJ: People used to come and tell me, "look he's back here, and he's running around at night, do you want to go see him?" I said no, I don't want to go see him, I don't want to lay eyes on him--.

GS: What happened was we got stolen upstairs and the looter took everything. We had friends that worked here that lived in the apartments right around here, down the street, and they befriended him. Apparently, their apartment building people took him in, and they befriended

him, and he went with them to check out everything, because you could just walk upstairs. Then when he came by himself, and took everything away, by himself.

LSJ: It cost me \$3,000 dollars to have his loot things dismissed. The first time we filed it under John Doe Sintes, because he didn't know our names—

SSS: That's what he told the police officer.

LSJ: And then the next time he filed while he was still in jail, he was in jail this whole time, he named Stevie—

SSS: Because Stevie was the only name he had.

LSJ: And Doug Winthrop, the guy who worked here—

SSS: The Viet Nam vet that went after him.

LSJ: Winthrop was the guy who actually went and retrieved all the stuff that he stole. He sent me and ( ) and the judges ( ). That's why people ask me if I want to see him, I don't want to see him. I don't want him to know who I am.

GS: So, it was after that, that we took plywood where the stairs are and blocked it off.

LSJ: When we got back here, we put up a false roof over the first floor, so that you couldn't get to the second floor, because there was still a lot of merchandise and the big stuff he couldn't carry off. When we got back, there were no, all of these walls were gone ( ).

SW: When you were talking about the building of the Sea Chest, I remember when I was first hired and I came in here in 1973, and you had two power boats ( ), there was no doors on here yet, the front doors weren't on here yet, everything just open. And I was thinking, when will this place be opened? ( )

LSJ: Actually, the walls in here, that wall and that wall back there were lined to keep the noise from the work area out of here, because we used to work on steel boats out there--.

SSS: It was a little store, and this was the work shop.

LSJ: ( ).

SSS: You can guess what happened there, the store kept growing and growing, so we kept moving out there, and the yard kept moving further. What I think happened was that the store ended around there, this was the work area where we are now, that's why it's painted because we had fiberglass on it.

LSJ: All of stuff that was on the second floor, I did that on the weekends. I actually built some of that stuff ( ).

MH: Do you have a favorite memory that happened here, or moment?

LSJ: My favorite memory?

SW: May I interject? My favorite memory would always be Christmas parties, when we would have the big Christmas parties.

LSJ: Oh yes, the Christmas parties and crawfish boils.

SW: The photograph that I brought y'all after Katrina that I had found, it was you and I think maybe Bobby's ( ) wife, and maybe Judy, but y'all were standing in here behind the counter. But that was always--.

JS: We launched one of the boats that David built for their lawyer, for both David and Lawrence's lawyer. David had built the boat and I have a whole album of pictures of that boat launch and crawfish boil. My husband was not only a boat builder, but he was the crawfish boiler of the family, so this was a big thing that happened on the wharf, and this was 1983. So you may have been around at that time--. ( ) There were many activities that happened in the boatyard and across the street in the park, the Fourth of July, everything was done out here with the whole family ( ).

SSS: So, whatever boat was built, or I finished a big job, my favorite part is the test run. I get time on the water, and I get paid to be on the water on a boat ( ). I guess I have thousands of favorite memories, whenever I finish a job and get to test run.

JS: ( ) Exactly, that was David's--. I still have, or did I give you, his speed gun--.

SSS: The radar gun?

JS: I think I still have his radar gun at home.

SSS: He had a radar gun that he would use when we tested a boat to see how fast it was going.

JS: And he could tell you, before the boat even got in the water, how fast it was going to go. ( ). Now these are all pictures of a big party that we had out on the wharf, but that wasn't the only party we had at the time. I guess we had lots of crawfish boils.

SSS: Even looking at black and white pictures from my grandfather's days, there's parties like this going on with the boats.

JS: This is something from 1982, this is when City Hall decided that it was going to do all kinds of big stuff out here, they had a big project from the West End Lakefront Study, and put in the parking lot and put us out of business. And the restaurants started losing customers, because –

GS: they started charging for the parking lot.

JS: Yes, when they started charging for the parking.

LSJ: They don't have pictures of the boxing arenas and the clubs they had out there where that parking lot is now, do they?

JS: No, but I'll look because every now and then somebody, like right now somebody is posting old pictures of Bucktown. I have been posting online on Facebook, and I try to download

whatever I can, but I can probably start going in and punching in “West End,” “West End Memories,” just anything that has to do with West End, and see what comes up. That’s what I used to do before they had Google or whatever, you would just put in www-whatever and all of this stuff all over the world would come into you. That was wonderful and you can’t get that anymore.

SW: There’s so much information out there, I guess it’s segregated.

JS: But at one time you could get stuff from anywhere. Once I found Sinteses that were boatbuilders in Christchurch, New Zealand. I have letters from them and pictures of them ( ), and originally their family was from the Balearic Islands off of the coast of Spain, the island of Menorca, which is supposedly where the Sintes family originally comes from.

GS: There’s a city in Spain named Sintes, someone had told me years ago.

JS: Right now, the most Sinteses live in France, the most Sinteses.

SW: Well what’s the origins of the name? You were saying it was Portuguese?

GS: Portuguese, that’s what Lawrence has always said.

LSJ: Spain or Portuguese.

GS: I remember one time, I was watching a documentary about Portuguese sailors and at that time, their beaches looked just like this.

MH: I was trying to figure that out, and it said Canary Islanders? A lot of them have the Sintes name.

JS: The Canary Islanders? That’s strange, the Balearic Islands---. The Canary Islanders were the ones that settled in St. Bernard Parish, the Sinteses are from the Balearic Islands, there’s Ibiza, Mallorca, and Menorca, the big three islands off the coast of Spain and France in the

Mediterranean. And Menorca, the Island of Menorca, which is the third island, not the big, the island one where the most people live, the northern most island--.

SSJ: The northern most island.

SSS: When you look it up, these islands have a lot of architects—

JS: exactly a lot of boatbuilding was a big thing there. And from that area, a lot of people were doing prospect work in the new world, took people from that area and brought them over here. So, we don't know when, at what time, the Sintes family, our part of the Sintes family, actually came to this country. It may have been during the very, very early development of this area--.

SSS: A lot of the buildings of Menorca are blue and white, you know white buildings with blue roofs, and that's how are building is, too. Which I thought was interesting.

JS: Exactly, and some of the natural stone formations on the island look like the upside-down view of a boat being built. You know how David always said, the boats are upside down, and I'm like, "oh my god, oh my god." Because David, he always said he learned about boats from being in the boatyard and always looking up at the bottom of the boat at the part they were doing the repair work on. So, he had in his mind, what the bottom of the boat would have to look like in order to not get beat up, not to fall apart, or whatever. And so, I'm thinking, genetically, if these people in this area, somebody said, "you know what," over in Menorca, "see that stone there, what if we just throw this paper, or whatever pieces of wood, on this form and turn it upside down and see what it does in the water, in the Mediterranean." And it worked! ( ) It could have been the first molded boat.

SSS: You're right!

JS: The first molded boat in the time of that people were coming over here in--. But everybody that I know of that have the Sintes name, locally, are either in money, they're CPAs they work for banks, or they're engineers, so all of the Sinteses, it seems that--. In fact, I have, someone sent us this picture before Katrina, I don't know when the picture was taken. The sent us this picture and I think it came from the *Times- Picayune*, and it says on the envelope, "Sintes Engineering Company, New Orleans." And it's downtown, in the French Quarter area and it says, "Sintes Engineering." A friend of mine whose last name is Sintes, her father was a ship chandler, they supplied the ship with supplies and food. ( ) I can tell by the lady's clothes that it has to be in the 50s or the 40s.

SW: It looks like it could be --. It could be researched. ( ).

JS: Do you think it Acme Oyster House, or ACME, because ACME could be --.

SSS: A brick company, or --. ( ), it was a popular name for companies back then.

JS: Because it meant the best.

SSS: I just thought it could be Acme Oyster House, but now it could be ACME building, or ACME whatever--.

SSJ: Or the Looney Tunes.

GS: This guy shows up, and says he's looking for a job, a young man, many years ago at the yard. And as it turned out, I knew his mom and dad, I'm from Houma and I grew up in Houma, plus I knew his uncles. This young man's dad had worked with my dad at the sugar refinery which was down by Mawmaw's house in ( ). So, it was interesting seeing people--.

JS: What makes it a small world, is that Geri grew up on a sugar plantation, my dad was killed in a factory explosion when I was three, and he worked for Henderson Sugar Refinery here in New Orleans. And both of us have that sugar background.



SSS: My mom lived in a house that was provided by the owner of the sugar plantation.

JS: It was like the paid slave quarters.

GS: It was, you know there was a back street, a front street, a shell road, a railroad track with the houses lined up along the highway where the boss's house was ( ). One of the guys I went to school with, Johnny Collins rode the same bus and then when he died ( ), he had become an oilfield lawyer, and you know I hadn't seen this guy in years, and if he saw me he would not know who I am. I don't think we would have recognized each other, but when he died, he was such a nice guy, that the people he worked with had a whole page in his memory, a whole page in the *Times- Picayune* in his memory.

LSJ: Geri reads the obituaries almost every day--. The first thing she does is read those.

JS: But that helps you with history ( ), it helps you with history.

SSS: My grandfather, what he did every day, and one year at my sister's memorial race one year, I told a girl I was dating at the time that my grandfather wrote what he did every day and I want to read what happened today. So, I went home and that day my mom's sister, and the day I read from my grandfather's journal, Sidney died on her way to Houma. I just thought it was weird that the day of the memorial race for my sister and we raised money for battered women, I showed the girl I was dating the books that my grandfather wrote in and that day was that day.

JS: It was the same day that Sidney was killed? That was the same day that my husband's best friend was dating Geri's sister and he was prone to have blackouts. And he had a blackout on his way to Houma and he ran into, you know trees don't move, and he was killed.

GS: I remember my dad saying he had to help get the body out.

JS: And, it was awful and to actually know that--. Another thing you don't know about my father-in-law, for working for the Wildlife and Fisheries, he had to write a log every day of

everything he did. So, he even in his business, he wrote every day, in what he called his memoirs. Because I remember sitting at the kitchen table eating there with him and I asked him what he was doing, and he said I'm writing my memoirs. ( ) he said I wrote what happened at the yard, but it was everything that happened, not just that, and when he died, he had a stack of books like this notebook, written in pencil and in his hand.

LSJ: Is that my dad's, where he wrote down everything?

JS: Everything. And Steve can go back, and my father-in-law was the same age that Steve is now, when he--.

LSJ: "Lawrence didn't come to work today!"

JS: Exactly, that good-for-nothing kid! He wrote it all down! It's like, it's wonderful. Who has that kind of prize, to me I think it's a prize to have. Someone's thoughts written down, every day.

SSS: I just sit down and read it. When I was fifty-seven, I started reading it and it turns out he was fifty-seven when he began writing it down. I just thought, it blew me away that I just subconsciously started reading it! So, it was interesting seeing what he was doing when he was my age, and he's doing the same thing that I'm doing.

END OF INTERVIEW

## **Appendix B Interview #2**

### **Transcript: Sintes Family Interview #2- Steve Sintes Sr.**

(Compiled June 28, 2019)

Interviewees: Steve Sintes Sr.

Interviewer: Madison Hazen

Interview Date: June 18, 2019

Location: Sintes Boat Works and Sea Chest Marina 7385 West Roadway Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70124

Length: 37:43

Following Sintes Family Interview #1- Lawrence Sintes Jr., Geraline “Geri” Sintes, Judith “Judy” Sintes, Steve Sintes Sr., Steve “Stevie” Sintes Jr., and Steve Wagner, Steve Sintes Sr. agreed to do a follow up interview of the Sintes Boat Works boatyard. This informal oral history follows Steve Sintes Sr. as he walks through the boatyard and discusses the history of the family’s business, and his history working with his family.

Steve Sintes Sr.: ( ) this is how we’re connected to that road. The crane was there, this wasn’t connected to the road. That woodshed there we built after Hurricane Betsy from all of the boathouses that got destroyed. So, we kept recycling things. And then, the crane that my grandfather and father built, the picture that I showed you with the little boat? That boat was in 1956, and I think I’ve worked on three or four boats for that guy, people who like wooden boats collect more than one, I have no idea why. If they have that kind of money--. This is a building

we built to do boat working in after the store took over that building. But then, after we built this building, we also started selling paint. After Katrina, since my dad didn't share this with you, you can include it, we had over \$400,000 worth of paint in here that got lost to Katrina. So, we had another \$400 loss besides what we lost to Katrina, but to me we were ok because we came back from that. We were uninsured and we came back from that. So, that, we were stronger than I thought we were. I always thought we were weak, but you know what I mean? Hey guys! How's it going?

Boaters: Hey, how are you doing? Have a good one!

SSS: Y'all make sure to make yourselves at home! You got stuff in the boat?

Boaters: No, we're just got to get a couple things.

SSS: Great, ok! Great to see you guys! You see them, their family used to own a boatyard and they sold the boatyard. So, now they're working on their boat, it's ( ). Now over here, this is a 1947 forklift, we took it down to the chassis and rebuilt it before Katrina. It ended up under eight feet of water, the water was eight feet high here, and we had it running two days later. So, a 1974 forklift took us a few years to get running--. This is actually the brain surgeon who operated on my son's mother-in-law, before she died, and then he did surgery on a cousin of mine who had an inoperable tumor at the base of her neck, and she was going to die. She's still alive, and he also helped my dad with some back problems he had. So, he was a ( ). This guy's son used to work for me a long time ago, and now he's one of my best friends and his dad's one of my best friends. And one day, he used to have a twenty-foot boat, he was like when I get older, I want to buy a new boat, a bigger boat, and I think that Wednesday I hauled his new boat out. And I said, Mr. Town, I thought you meant like six years older, not three days older!

And then years ago, I mean probably thirty years ago, I Fiberglassed these here. My competition just decided to do the same thing, and I went over to him and I showed him the difference between our quality and their quality, like don't do that. So, I do that to my customers ( ) because we're known for our quality. The young couple that just left, they used to own, their family used to own a boatyard, and this is one of the boats they put together. I mean, they're mighty young to own a boat like this, so I'm really proud of them to do something like this. You know then--. I'm going to take you and show you the boat that I built when I was eighteen years old.

Madison Hazen: Were y'all the first ones out here with a boatyard?

SSS: I don't--. I'm not real sure, you know, I just ran into town, we came up and Schubert's also came up because my grandfather wrote about doing a lot of work for them. So, I'm not sure if we were here first, or, I know with the boom ( ). Because there was Jones next door, and that was three or four boatyards. In fact, at one point I was operating half of that boatyard, and I carved out on the side of it "Sintes East." And this guy bought it, and wouldn't let me do it anymore, so I built a friendship with him, so that I could leave our boats out and stuff. He has a bigger crane than me, so he could pick up bigger boats. So that's my boat, and like I said, my boat--. My truck's a 2006, and the boat I built when I was eighteen. That's the boat I built when I was eighteen years old.

MH: Do you take it out a lot?

SSS: Oh yeah, I do. I think I've been I've worn out three propellers with it. So, you know, most propellers last about ten years, so yeah, I've used it up good. And it's awesome, I use it for towing boats out now, but whenever I'm on the water I'm like, wow, I did this when I was eighteen years old. You know most people are still children, and I was grown enough to do it at eighteen. It's still shiny, the deck's still clean. It was starting to look like my truck, but--.

MH: How long did it take you?

SSS: It took me about three years to put it together. I remember when I was building it, that I had a girl at home, and I said to my dad I got a girl at home can you bring me to the bus station, and he said to put the floor in my boat before he took me to the bus station. I don't need to put the floor in my boat! It's my boat, I can put the floor in on my own time, and he said, "no you're not, you want to go to Houma? You want to go on your date? You've got to put the floor in your boat." So, I woke up at four in the morning and I went to put the floor in the boat. But I was glad that he gave me little goals like that to keep me, as my own-- Like, you want to go to Houma, you put your floor in and I'll take you to Houma, so I got up at four in the morning and I made it to the bus stop by eight. So, it's interesting, it's been a good life, I feel like I've took care of my family. And now, the girl I date now, when I met her I told her I feel like I have more than one hobby, I raise hibiscus, I have 130 hibiscus in my backyard; I work out, I mountain bike in the spillway; but I also boat and race sailboats. My whole life is nothing but hobbies, I feel. I didn't realize the gift I had, until I got older. Once, I got older I noticed that my whole life I've enjoyed my work.

( ) after Katrina, ( ) the back of it looked just like this, all the paint was still stacked up and all. And the front, and I have no idea how this happened, the front had ( ) and all that. The ceiling was down, all the lights were down, and the tools were scattered, this looks like it would stay together better than that, but all those paints it looked like nobody touched that and this was just a mess. Like, how did this happen?

MH: How many boats are you usually working on at a time?

SSS: Usually about twenty, and I'll show you the list I do for the crew, like how my grandfather used to do things after. ( ) This pirogue, a customer was eighty-three years old and

he showed up one day, he said when he was thirteen his dad brought him here and I bought a pirogue. I used it for hunting in different states, he couldn't hunt anymore, so he gave it back. So, this is a seventy-three-year-old pirogue that my grandfather built, it's more like seventy-five now. I mountain bike in the spillway and that's one of my mountain bikes that I use; I have two different bikes because I carry them around. My son gets mad because I don't always put my bike back, so he put red tape--. And this is one of my flowers from my hibiscus, and that's the list I do for the crew the day before. And that was like Susan's idea, ( ) instead of doing what we did after, I do it before. It's a whole lot easier for someone to come through instead of asking what to do next, so Susan gives them what to do next. It was her idea to do that instead of plan in the morning, do it at the end. So, at night when you go home you don't have to think about anything, and in the morning, you come in and read the list and start your day. You kind of relax when you're at home, too. ( )

Susan Weaver: So, *Ghost* got first in her division, for GIA. There's this thing called Challenge Cup, where clubs around the Gulf Coast get together and compete to see whose team can do the best, it's four or five different boats. And one of the boat's we prepped was a big winner.

SSS: The owner of *Ghost* also owns this boat, and I met him, I became friends with him when he brought this boat into town. He's a multi-millionaire, he owns three, or four boats, too. It's funny how I see something, and my imagination will go wild, and I'll meet somebody, and --

SW: So, Madison, I'm sure inundated you with more things, I hope to God you recorded it! Let me give you my card, in case you need to reach somebody, and nobody is answering, because I at least answer the phone. If there's something you need.

SSS: I need to send her a picture of the crane, us working with crane in the 50s and us working with it now. I can send you those pictures by text, and anything else you want. If you want to come back and look at pictures, you're welcome to do that. Steve had also mentioned that, to give you a little receipt or bill for the museum, I can do that, too. We have lots of options, if you want a copy of something. It's been a real pleasure; I've been looking forward to this for a long time. I've been hearing talk about this for three or four years. I didn't know if that would ever happen, because I would be at parties and hear people say this and hear people say it's going to happen one day. And when it finally happened, I was like, "wow, this is awesome."

( )

SSS: Over here is where the boatbuilding shop was, and coming around the corner, there was "Sintes" written on it, and over here we had a sign with "Sintes" on it. We were like the people of the neighborhood.

MH: This is a nice little spot.

SSS: A lot of people just don't know about it. I feel like I come to paradise every day. Where I'm taking you is by the apartments to the other boatyard, that in my time, has been owned by more than one person. In fact, when I was twenty-eight years old, some new people bought Schubert's boatyard down the street, and they invited us to a party for him. The guy introduced himself to me and told me, "my goal is to put you out of business." I was twenty-eight years old and I was competition to him, and it was ( ). I always worked outside, and ( ) I thought it was amazing that I was his benchmark and he was my age now. What happened to him was him and his son didn't get along, and his son went home one day and set his dad's motorbike on fire and committed suicide. Six months later the dad died of some disease. It seems like a lot of tragedies happen out here ( ). Over here, you see some people and boatyards. Where they are (



). Somebody else bought it last year, the guy was, for Mardi Gras, in Destin [Florida] and he got hit by a car and died in a motorbike accident, so now his son is trying to keep going on. I'm bending over backwards to help him out. His dad's name, he started *Little Rascal* and his dad's name was ( ).

One time I had dropped a boat, and they had come down to help and bring me belts, one of my belts broke--. This is the Southern Yacht Club, there was a fire and after Katrina it was rebuilt--. It's not even finished yet, it's brand new. Until then--. I go bike riding a lot, and when I go out on my bike there would be nobody out here, and in the past two months I've started seeing people again. It's kind of nice. And, of course, this ( ) was after Katrina, it was destroyed also. Another thing I never noticed, the trees over the road and all, it's a really beautiful park, and since I grew up, I didn't realize. About ten years ago, I brought a friend out here, and they were like, "wow, this place is beautiful." They said it kind of reminded them of Oak Alley, and I never thought of it that way. I grew up with this and now that they said something like that, it made me feel even luckier to get to come out here.

This is the New Orleans Yacht Club, they did burn down and rebuilt it after the hurricane. This one's more like Animal House, like a frat house, and the other one is more high society. I get along better with these people; I don't know why! I helped them with a family day last year, and I showed up in dress code with a shirt on, and they were like, "what are you doing? You work with no shirt on and you show up wearing a shirt now? ( )" So, I even got to be in a yacht club barefoot with no shirt on. It was just so much fun to be myself. Originally, my father's house was back up in there, that was like a wooded area. Over the weekend I would go to ( ) house across the boatyard. They prefabricated it in their yard, and set it up over the weekend, because they didn't have permits or anything. Where these two buildings are, this used to be a wooded area,

even when I was growing up not too long ago. Now there's the high-rise full of condominiums. I guess they're trying to pack as many people into the area, that want to pay, as they can. This part over here wasn't damaged at all after the hurricane. ( )

I was reading the book, *Co-dependency No More*, and it says to do a family history of yourself, and I was thinking, how am I supposed to do this. It's interesting, because I had just finished the book and done an outline of what I'd read, and I did everything in the book except that, like how am I supposed to do this. I thought, oh yes, I'm doing that now! Reading my grandfather's stuff was like reading a family history, too, going through his stuff over the years.

MH: It's amazing that he kept up every day.

SSS: I know! Another thing, my grandmother worked at a restaurant called Fitzgerald's, and that was right around the corner, you could see it from the boatyard. And he always wrote, "I drove the old lady to work," and I thought that was so sweet, to take off at 3 o'clock and drive her to work, and then wait until she came home to eat with her. I thought that they had a pretty good relationship. "Jules Schubert Memorial Harbor of the Orleans Marina. Dedicated to the memory of Jules Schubert, long time tenant of the marina in February of 1981. Orleans Marina built under the administration of Gerald Gallinghouse, president, and Claude Duke, president pro tempore, in 1961. Marina gained recognition through the promotion and contribution of the following: Lawrence Sintes, Sr., Joseph I. Young;" J. Young used to own the boatyard right next to us and Schubert owned the boatyard down the street. People used to tell me that it used to be Sealey's boatyard before it was Schubert's, Sealey was the guy that lived around the corner from me, so I knew him, I knew Schubert, and I knew J. Young. I got to know all those guys through my life, and I work out here in the harbor. Like I said, it's like I come to paradise every day. Do you want to walk along the pier? We'll go down the one with the nice big boats.

I had a friend, Steve ( ), he was like the mayor of the harbor. About two years ago he got pancreatic cancer, at first, they thought it was just diabetes; he exercised and got healthy. He kept getting healthier and healthier, and leaner and leaner, turns out it was pancreatic cancer and not diabetes. I set his boat up, had hospice come aboard, and he wound up dying in his boat. That was interesting, I think he died last October.

MH: You really get to know everyone?

SSS: I get a good relationship with everyone, and when I was married to Stevie's mom, she always liked the Southern Yacht Club parties, and my friends were always inviting me to pier parties. I liked coming and hanging out with the people in the boats for the pier parties, because they're more down to earth people on the boats, and that's what I like to do. I like to be here, not there. I like this boat; this is an old boat from the 40s that the guy rebuilt. He did a really nice job. The guy that owns this boat, I remember the day he bought it, he bought his wife a brand-new convertible and he bought the boat the same day. Now the boat dealer, was like, most people get one or the other, how do you decided if you're going to ride around in your new convertible, if you've got a boat. It's just interesting to see their problems, versus our problems. The guy with this boat, *Panache*, he's like an engineer and the few times he comes into the office when I was doing builds, asking what I'm doing. I'm like, I've got these builds, you're on my time, he says I want you to get gas and take you on a boat ride. The boat that my friend died on is that boat over there, the powerboat with the red Bimini top ( ), and then--. This guy, Mark, bought this boat for me to work on, but it's too big for me. If I pick it up in another yard--. I don't know if you know Mike ( ) His wife works for the New Orleans Historical Society and he used to live on that boat for years before he just married her. This boat belongs to a friend of mine who was always picking up pickup trucks and turning them into tow trucks, he's the kind

of doing the same things that all of my friends were doing the same things I was. Now, he owns Mardi Gras Towing, a tow truck company. It's interesting to see how my friends that are like me, are like me today. My boatyard's the white crane down there, and the blue crane's my competition. We have a good reputation, and you can't buy integrity, you know. It's something that you have to earn, and I like that we have that reputation. We used to have one customer that used to live here, and always paid me a year in advance for his maintenance, and he got sick one time and I took that money to pay the harbor master his slip rent. The harbor master was like, it's so kind of you to pay his slip rent, but it's like, no, he paid me for boat maintenance a year in advance and I'm giving you the money he paid me. It's interesting how people say oh, you take care of your customers, but it's like, no, he's taking care of me.

The black boat belongs to Walter ( ), a Louisiana lawyer and politician, he doesn't do much anymore, but like I said, we get to know some awesome people in intimate ways, and they become very good friends.

I'm glad that Steve came. Steve's brother, at my sister's wedding sung, he sung "It's a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong. Then last year for my sister's memorial race, he showed up; we had a live band and he wanted to sing, so I asked the band if he could go up and sing. He wound up singing "It's a Wonderful World" up there, too. That was the, I don't know if you know Steve's brother, but when we were little, he was hardcore, just normal guy and he played in rock bands, and he wanted to be a rock and roll star. ( ) he was in choir at school, he was the baritone, or the one above it, and he became a professional opera singer. He went to Europe and did opera for years in Europe, he's my age and he's retired now, he's living in a condo right over here. Like I said, all my friends that were rock and roll stars, they used to make fun of him, but he did better than we did! He told us he was going to play opera music, and we were making fun

of him a lot, and now he's retired and successful and we're still playing in Bourbon Street barrooms. His family has been in my life since I was a teenager. I even remember sitting around playing and getting girls when we were younger. It was here where there used to be nice boathouses along here, and different people owned the boathouses. Like different parts of the city government owned the boathouses, than the ones around the park, so they couldn't make rent. People started bailing out on them and the houses began to fall down in disrepair; there was no one there to keep the electricity going, and they fell apart, so they had to tear a bunch of them down. They're losing people all the time, as you can see, people are selling them. There were some pretty nice ones here, but--. Like my friend I told you about, the one who was the ex- Viet Nam vet, he retired from me and moved to Costa Rica and his dad died when he was fifty-seven, so he wanted to retire young. He retired young, and he died when he was sixty-three. I was kind of glad that, I hated to lose him, but he was working here since I was eighteen, actually I was sixteen, so it was like losing a part of the company. Seeing how young he died, I was like, oh man, I'm so glad he retired; it was selfish of me, it's like when you keep a dog that is dying alive, and you should've let it go. I tried talking him into staying, and I'm glad I didn't, because-- . ( )

The guy that owns, my friend Brett, owns all three of those boathouses, and I owned the one right next to him. What happened with that was, the levee board let us stay in it but we hadn't paid rent for years because they were having problems with the levee board, so when they started tearing things down, we didn't say anything and my friend let me move into his boathouse. We didn't want to say anything--. The levee board guy told us we could stay in there and deal with it later on, and ten years later he never got to us. We were worried that if we waited, then everyone would start talking, so Brett let me move into his boathouse. He's a boat collector, he has like

three or four boats, and one year when I had one of his boats, I had the blue one in my yard, and he said that he was donating it to charity. I said, “oh man, really?” and he said, yeah, the Fred Adam’s charitable foundation, so that he could write them off in his name. He often tells me to come on over and see what he got last night and that it was only \$80,000, and he’d have a new hotrod car, or something, so he’s got dumb money, but he’s really nice. He still hasn’t charged me anything for being in there, and I’ve been in there for two years now. I used to charge him, now whenever he needs a favor, I just do it for him now. This guy here, he used to have a huge boathouse on Breakwater Drive and one day his wife calls me, and when I called her back, she says, “I’m in Wyoming, we’re building a house in Wyoming. But I had to drive back and get some things.” So they have the house here, the boat, and the boathouse on here, that’s the most elaborate one here, and you’re building a new house; it’s like where do you have the time to do anything else, he owns his own bank and insurance company. They worked hard and a lot for their money.

MH: Have a lot of these people stayed here for a long time?

SSS: A lot of these boats have been here a long time, like the guy who owns this boat. His name’s Joe Jefferson, and have you ever heard of the play *Rip Van Wrinkle*? Ok, you know the actor Joe Jefferson that played Rip Van Wrinkle, he’s the direct descendant of Joe Jefferson Yaeger. He’s a great friend of mine, too. His story is that when he was little, his parents, for gifts, would give them \$10,000 for Christmas, birthdays, and all. He didn’t know what to do with his money, so he kept investing in it, he became a forensic professor, or something like that, and taught college for a while and he just kept reinvesting his money. For a while he didn’t work, then he started investing in restaurants, I think he has three gulf restaurants now and he has gulf chef cooking shows and stuff. It was weird because he got bored not doing anything, and in his

50s he decided that he was going to start doing something now. He was successful, but it seemed that everything he did was successful, but also when you get \$10,000 birthday presents when you're a kid, it's kind of easy to do, too. What I like is that he had money and didn't have to work, but he did, and he uses this boat when he comes up to the Gulf Coast to stay on. This guy here, ( ) Ruth, he was a river boat pilot, I worked with him twenty years ago and he had a sailboat, and when he had his son, he sold his sailboat. He always told me that he was going to get back in the boat, and he got this boat; then he and his wife split up, so he lived on the boat sometimes, and now he's back living in the house, I think he and his wife got back together. It's just interesting that I have people telling me that, "I'm getting back," and they come back. Like I said, that used to be one of the best boathouses on the water, the guys daughter, her name was Carey, and he had a boat with a tow on it and he had taken the boat out with some friends. She would come up and say, "I wished I had grown up like that." Now that I'm older, I'm like, "you did! You just weren't living in the boatyard." It's been an interesting life for me, and I didn't realize, how lucky I was.

MH: You're the third generation?

SSS: That's right, my grandfather, my father. My son's the fourth.

MH: Is he going to take over after you?

SSS: He plans on it. That's what a lot of customers say, because by the third generation, the sons have run it into the ground, partying and using the money. This is the highlife, coming out here. I was having a real bad day Tuesday; nothing was going my way. Susan had set me up to move a customer, and the name of the boat was *The Good Life*, so on the way back to the slip he was like, "I can't back into the slip," and I said that I would teach him how to back into the slip. I spent forty-five minutes teaching him how to back in, he calls his wife, "you'll never

believe me, I backed the boat in and Steve helped me,” and then he tells his baby, “I backed the boat in and Mr. Steve taught me how to back in.” Hearing how excited he was, I forgot about how bad my day was going, and I got to be on a boat at noon time, I got to make him happy. Giving him a skill, I had, it was just really nice, and it got me out of my head. No matter your worst day, it’s still better than anyone else’s average day. Our neighbor, whenever it might flood, will call me asking Susan to check my porch on river road, this guy has Porsches and Audis, and so she gets to drive them. I let her do that, because I get the boat rides. When I’m on the water, I’ll send her pictures because she’s stuck in the office all day, she does a great job here. She’s been working here since I was thirteen, so I’ve known her since I was a kid, too. That boat, that was something that my Uncle Dave used to take to shows, to show how he built boats, and then my Aunt Judy gave it to a friend, who in turn gave it to me. Since I’ve had it, I repainted it trying to make it look nice, I haven’t finished the deck yet. I had a paint school, and ( ) the people who distribute the paint for us, came in and we taught them.

END OF INTERVIEW



## **Appendix C Interview #3**

### **Biographical Information: Interview #3- 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pamela “Pam” Sintes Memorial Regatta**

(Compiled August 28,2019)

For Interview #3- 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pamela “Pam” Sintes Memorial Regatta, footage was captured of the event and participants answered questions off the record. The b-roll footage from this interview are available as if it is a formal oral history, with the rest of the Sintes family collection at the University of New Orleans’s Earl K. Long’s Special Collection.

## **Appendix D Interview #4**

### **Transcript: Sintes Family Interview #4- Steve Sintes Sr.**

(Compiled March 3, 2020)

Interviewees: Steve Sintes Sr.

Interviewer: Madison Hazen, Kathryn O'Dwyer, Rick Olivier

Interview Date: January 22, 2020

Location: Rick Olivier Photography Studio 601 North Saint Patrick Street New Orleans,  
Louisiana 70119

Length: 54:40

Steve Sintes Sr. met with Madison Hazen, Kathryn O'Dwyer, and Rick Olivier for an oral history as part of this project and for the Midlo Center for New Orleans Research's "Family Business" project. The oral history was conducted at Olivier's photography studio on January 22, 2020.

Madison Hazen: Today is Wednesday, January 22, 2020, I'm sitting here with Steve Sintes. Do we have your permission to use the audio and visuals that we're recording today?

Steve Sintes: Absolutely.

MH: When did the first Sintes move to New Orleans?

SSS: I'm not sure about that, I just learned about my great-great grandfather and he was already here. You'll probably have to find that from my father, or my mother. My Aunt Judy is the family historian and she could probably tell you; she's mapped out our whole family history.

MH: I know that last time we had an interview, that Lawrence had said that his father had started the business?

SSS: Yes, he I believe he started the business in 57, in 1957\*, so for a while now.

MH: Have many things changed?

SSS: No, not really. I have pictures of the boatyard before we we're even connected to the park it was just the small crane and room for maybe three boats. Now on our land I can pick up about thirteen boats total, with the three trailers that I have. We have our woodshed that we got out of the boathouses after Hurricane Betsy, my dad and grandfather built that out of the raw materials from the boathouses. So, we got a woodshed after Hurricane Betsy. And I have pictures of before we were even touching the park, now the dock runs all the way to the park the land was filled all of the way to the park, and I have pictures with boats on trailers over there. We have room for more than three boats like back when the yard was built, so we have grown. I rode out there a lot with my father, and then in the 80s we had a distributor business and we built a concrete slab with a big building that we used to paint boats inside the building. As the distributing business grew, we used that as a storage building for our paint and fair compound, we started selling paint and fair compound and the distributing business into a pretty profitable thing. Then we started the marine store, my father always wanted to be a shoes salesman, so at the store he started selling shoes, too, and then it grew into a boutique upstairs. The boatyard kind of grew in three different directions, which was kind of interesting to see my father's dream of being a shoes salesman turning into a boutique beside a supplies store. I guess my grandfather's dream of having a boatyard grew, and at one point we even had a boatyard in Mississippi that my grandfather built, and I had pictures of that and I think the Copa Cabana Casino bought the property that that was on. But we were having trouble keeping two boatyards

going and the IRS threatened to shut us down, because we weren't paying taxes. My dad told them, "shut me down and I won't be able to pay you," so they gave us a reprieve and my father paid them back and I guess the rest of it was kind of history as to what we're building now.

MH: That's a very long history, I didn't even know you had a boutique upstairs.

SSS: Yeah, we had the boutique upstairs, but since Katrina it doesn't do as well because the boat population was cut in third. I'm sure once the marina is finished being built, we'll get busy back into the boutique. People still come shop here, and a lot of my customers will go out of town and come to the boutique after, saying, "I want to get gifts for my friends," and we'd just say we got this from Florida, because we have stuff from all over the country in there. Depending on where they said they went, they were able to get stuff from the boutique to fill their needs.

MH: I like that! Have you seen any change in the neighborhood since you've been there?

SSS: I guess it's changed on a regular basis; I know that every winter seafood restaurants will catch on fire; I don't really know why. As a kid, my grandmother's house and our woodshed was across the street from where the boatyard is now, and that later became my uncle's boatbuilding property, I'd stay there a lot and I would always hear people screaming about. West End at one point was the equivalent of the French Quarter, there was a lot of parties and drinking going on, but as a kid I didn't know that. Then when I grew up in my teen years, I remember being out there and sleeping out in one of the sheds back there and going back into work the next morning after staying out in West End all night long. It was a pretty popular place, as far as somewhere like the French Quarter or Bourbon Street. Then there were some offshore boat races, and for the offshore boat races, there would be parades and all, so I guess in my lifetime and around the time of the Popeyes offshore boat races, West End was peaking in my lifetime. It was

like a landmark, my friends in school would come visit me out here, and they'd be like, "I like it out here!" You know there's girls and there's people and activities, there were hotrods, and motorbikes it was a place to cruise and stuff. On weekends sometimes, Orange County Chopper would have bike shows, that would have Hawaiian Tropic swimsuit contests at the restaurants there and stuff. It came to be quite a place, until Katrina came. When Katrina came it kind of just wiped everything out, I mean you've seen what it looks like now. There were seven restaurants out on the water, and now there's nothing. I guess I've seen a lot of change. What I remember of my grandfather had he had wrote diaries of when he built the boatyard. My family gave them to me, and I'd read them, in fact I think he was sixty-eight when he died, and so this year I began reading, no fifty-eight when he died. This year I began reading what he was doing when he was my age because he was fifty-eight and now, I'm fifty-eight. It was just interesting to see what he did to build the boatyard, but after Katrina I knew what to do because I had read how he did it. It was interesting, because I always said, "I wonder how he built this, how he did that," well after Katrina, I had to rebuild the dock. The city wasn't open or anything, so we just gathered all of the scrap wood from the neighborhood, the telephone posts that had fallen down and stuff, we cut them and drilled them and made water jettisons and used my crane to drive them into the water. It took two weeks to get my crane working, probably a month to get the yard cleaned up enough to rebuild the dock. From October to December we rebuilt the boatyard after Katrina to what it is now, and I actually made the dock a little bigger and did a few other things that I just needed to do to get back to business. I remember I had a list of sixty boats when I was waiting for West End to open up, I would go up to where Sidmar's used to be and look over the wall and people would show up there every day asking when I was going back to business, I would take their names. I had a list of sixty boats to work on and I just did a bunch of quotes for what I

needed to work on, and for three years I would say bring your boat in and get it fixed. It did kind of change the way I did business for a while, and when I went back to doing routine maintenance and I didn't have a job of the week, I didn't know how to do that again. I had to retrain myself, like ok, I've got the quote of the week and a boat of the week, instead of going to the sixty boats I did with a ticket. What I remember, too, of that time was that people would come in and they'd be number ten on the list, well you'd wait for those ten people to settle out of their claim, I have money from the insurance company, so I'd say, "thirty percent deposit now and we'll start tomorrow. So that helped put us back on the map, but some customers would come up like, "we've been with you, I've been a customer for twenty years and you've never asked for a deposit," it's like "look at my staff, I don't have any money in the bank, I need your deposit to keep going," so people would say, "ok, I understand." It was interesting to see how easy we had it before Katrina versus after Katrina. We really had to work hard, we had to ask people for money upfront and some people who have dealt with me for a long time were upset about it, but once I told them our situation they were open to it and understood. It was interesting, I had always wanted to know what it was like for my grandfather and I guess Katrina gave me it to me, it gave me the chance to find that out. But also, the fact that I read out how his life was and gathering all of the materials that he did and finding out what his life was like. Katrina was kind of a blessing for me in that respect.

MH: I really liked that when we saw his diaries, you started yours around the same time.

SSS: I think I sent you a picture last Saturday, one of my cousins who didn't know about this sent me the picture of me, my grandfather, and two of my other cousins. I was seven in the picture and my grandfather was fifty-eight in the picture, it was six months before he died, it was the summer before he died, and I was looking at the picture. It was interesting that she didn't

know anything about this, so I sent her the video that you sent me and told her what was going on, and since then I got in touch with my Aunt Barbara who also sent me a picture of the shop that day from the 40s, there's cars at least from the 40s in the picture, the picture might have been taken in the 50s. it was shot from across the street at our original store front, I thought it was interesting that they didn't know about this and the Saturday that I sent you those pictures, they started sending me pictures of my family history.

MH: There's been Betsy and Katrina, why have you stayed in the same place?

SSS: Well you can't have a boatyard unless you're on the waterfront. Being out there you just have to expect that you're going to get flooded, like if you lived up north, you'll get snowstorm, or if you live in California, you're going to get earthquakes. Just staying out there, we don't know anything else. I do love the location though. I love the fact that I get to go out there and it's like going to your own special island. I think the reason we've stayed there is that we have a name there, we have our reputation, people know that if they come there, that we'll give them good quality work. It's kind of hard to leave, whenever I feel like I've not accomplished anything, I'll ride my bike out to the harbor, and look at the work I've done. That makes me think that we have a legacy here and that we have something to keep going and the reputation for being on time and working hard. I think all of those things, my grandfather kind of drilled into me, we just love the location and we love the place.

MH: I liked that when you took me on a tour of the boatyard, you kept pointing to the boats that you've fixed and the people that you know. Why do you think people keep coming to you and staying?

SSS: I think it's because they get good quality work for their money, and that they know that we care about their boats. I know when some of my customers win awards for their boats in

races and such, they say, “it’s actually Steve’s boat.” I do care for their boats when they go out town, and I find it interesting that they’re paying me to take care of their boat, but they consider it my boat. I really love that about my customers that like me that way. I had this boat *Zephyr*, a 1979 J-Boat that the owner bought sometime after Katrina to replace their old boat. I gave them quotes to replace it and to repair it, and just didn’t see the cost of that. He did some of the legwork, and at the time I was going through a divorce, so after I’d work out, I’d meet him in the boatyard and work with him until two in the morning. The boat is from the 70s and it races sixty-four races a year, which it is one of the winningest boats in the city. It’s interesting to rebuild a 1979 boat and have some fun with it, and it wins more races than any other in the city. She’s in my yard right now, but at one time one of his partners said that he treated her special. My friend Dave says, “no, he treats everyone this way.” I thought that was interesting because I do have a vast interest in that particular boat, because for my sister’s race he gets a crew together and he helps with my sister’s race every year. It’s just interesting that his friend thinks I treat him special, but I treat him just like I treat all of my customers. I think that makes a difference. We’re kind of like a bar, you don’t have to go to the same bar every day, not everybody needs a boat. Boats are just a form of entertainment, and if you get treated nicely at a place then you want to keep coming back. Plus, I think I love that boat just as much as they do, I think that makes a big difference, and I think they know that.

MH: Talking about your sister’s race, how did y’all come up with doing a regatta every year?

SSS: My sister was dating one of my customers and he shot her in the head six times. The yacht club that she was a member of, started a race in her name to raise money for her for domestic violence. As time moved on, the yacht club was killed by Katrina, so they turned it



over to the New Orleans Yacht Club. My friend Gina and Ann-Marie invited me to a meeting one night, and they said, “we’ve been running this race for the past few years, and we want to start the Pamela Sintes Memorial Foundation.” They started the foundation, which supports children who are victims of domestic violence, and that’s kind of how the foundation started. The race has been going on for over twenty years, before that happened and we’re on our twenty-fifth year now. Ann-Marie and Gina have taken it over and they ran with it, the past two years they’ve raised more money than ever and have done a lot to help the people. I thought it was interesting how my sister’s death has brought, even twenty-five years later, people together who don’t even know her, and that has kept her and her memory alive. I just never thought I would have seen this. It’s pretty powerful. In fact, we had a meeting last night, I just think it’s great that people who didn’t even know her are helping twenty-five years later.

MH: When I went to the memorial, we we’re walking around getting footage and people kept coming up to us saying, “oh the Sintes, we know him! He’s so nice, he’s helped us with this boat.”

SSS: That’s nice. When customers thank me when they are leaving, I always tell them I loved that more than the money. The truth is I like both, but the money--. It’s interesting that they really do appreciate what I do for them, I love that.

MH: I’ve heard Dave Sintes, I don’t really know what he’s done.

SSS: Dave was my father’s younger brother, he was thirteen years older than me, so people always thought that he was my brother, even my father. He was a boat builder, and in high school me and my dad, I got kicked out of high school and I went to work with my uncle for a little while. I learned how to build boats with him, in fact right now I have a boat that I built when I was eighteen years old that I still have that I use at the boatyard. He designed and built

boats out of C-Flex, which is a material made out of seaman fiberglass, it was a product where you built the wood frames and you stapled it to the wood frames, and you build the boat upside down. You turn the boat over and knock the frames out, and you put stringers and a deck on, and you have a one-off boat without making a boat out of wood. He built over three-hundred boats that way. What I liked about it was that we would get up at four in the morning and meet at the shops; we'd go to the port, Chalmette, or people's garages and would set boats up. We'd go back every couple of weeks and help them finish, they would do some of the work and we would do some of the work. Sometimes on the weekend, the boatyard was shut down on Saturday, and we'd start setting up a boat in one of the buildings and by Tuesday we'd put out a complete hull finished except it had to be outfitted and stuff. On the weekend, we would haul out a boat. He was just a --. I guess he was a genius when it came to designing boats, he could look at a boat and know how to change it, how to make it better, and improve what he did on the regular basis. He was also an ex- Viet Nam vet, and I think that's why he died at sixty-nine years old, I think some of his complications from the wounds he got in Viet Nam. He was shot, he was missing two fingers, he was supposed to be missing a leg, but they just stuck it back together and it grew back, so he got to keep his leg. He took quite a number of hits, I remember talking to him when he was shot in Viet Nam and he was laying on the ground, they opened fire around him, so that they could save him. As they were crawling around to him, they kept shooting him as he was laying on the ground. Eventually, they lifted him and got him to a helicopter, they airlifted him, and it took him a year. He was a hundred and nine pounds when he went into the Marines and he was ninety pounds when he got out. He was lucky to be alive, and his attitude was I would have died in World War II. When he started to get ill in health, he died at sixty-nine years old. I was holding out on this story, sixty-nine, I'm not going to tell you what that means, but in Viet Nam

it meant that it was unlucky, and you can use your imagination for the rest. I thought it was ironic that he died at sixty-nine years old because every boat had 1969 as the hull number on it. I thought it was interesting that he checked out at sixty-nine, but he loved what he did, and he taught me a lot on work ethics, skills, and all. Everything in his life, like in my father's, revolved around boats, boatbuilding, and the boatyard. He would go on trips to ports to meet people and to look at boats, he built boats in Mexico, just all around the world. He did a lot to promote boatbuilding and to promote the boat industry. He had a lot of friends, a lot of fishermen, that loved him and cared for him. People would say that he was a genius, that he was the smartest man they knew. I thought it was interesting that people really looked up to him, and I've felt lucky to have had him in my life, and he had taught me a lot.

MH: We know that Lawrence, Stevie, and you have all done boat stuff; what have Judy and Geri done?

SSS: My mother has always been like the bookkeeper, the family bookkeeper for the boatyard. Aunt Judy was like Uncle Dave's bookkeeper and ran his books and stuff. Aunt Judy also looked at our family history in depth, so like I said she could tell you more about the family history than anybody I know.

MH: I don't have any more questions, is there anything I haven't asked you that you wanted me to ask?

SSS: Not that I can think of. Right now, my son is working in the store and my sister's son is working in the boatyard, he came to me about twelve years ago and asked me for a job. He said that my dad told me that you would teach me how to work, because my nephew didn't have good work ethics for a while and my mother was nagging him about it. His dad just always complained about him being out because he had work in the morning, he said I bet your dad

made the same excuses to get out of doing fun, too. It's not that I was getting out doing something fun, my work is the fun part. I remember at one point when I was in high school, I sold tickets to a Styx concert to go work on a boat that was coming to the yard. I remember my friend's mom is going, "what teenager would sell concert tickets to go to work on a Saturday?" I just told them I love boats, and I would rather see boats than go to a concert. I remember years later, I still got to see Styx in my forties. That was interesting that as a teenager, it was more important for me to go to work than to go to concerts. I kind of feel that way now.

MH: What does your typical day look like?

SSS: It's usually I wake up at seven, and I raise hibiscus, so I go hang out with my hibiscus and water my hibiscus, do a little read to center myself. I get to the boatyard around ten minutes to eight; most mornings, if I have boats I have to pick up with the crane, I try to pick up as many boats as I can with the crane in the morning, so that my crew can start working on them and painting them. I do quotes and estimates, call customers, kind of keep the work coming in, and run errands. What I find is that my errand times, in my grandfather's time errands were his time. Like at nine o'clock he would run errands, and now I'll run errands between nine and eleven, depending on--. At three o'clock he would go home, and I go home at three o'clock. It's just interesting that we deal with a lot of the same businesses that he used to deal with, so it's interesting to see how my life kind of parallels with his life, even down to the time that I run errands. I used to get home around six o'clock, six-thirty, every evening and then go work out in the evening time. I mean I love my job, but I love my home life, too.

MH: You worked with your father, and now your son is working with you. Do you notice any differences in how you have to work around the yard?

SSS: I guess, I feel lucky that in most families, the father would have stayed inside because my father kind of stayed inside, more than I did. Now I stay outside more than my son did. I think my father was lucky to have me, because it allowed him to grow the business, the distributing business, and the other things. He's grown now, so I don't have to spend time growing the business, now I get to spend more time with the boats and outside during the day while my son does the inside things that I'm not good at. I'm good at fixing boats and repairing boats and making things happen out there, but I don't think I'm good at ordering things and buying things. I remember me and my sister would always argue when we bought the paint, I wanted to order a years' worth of paint, and she's like, "no, no we've got to order three months' worth, because you can't tie up all of your money on paint. We need sandpaper, we need air conditioner equipment, we need this." But I didn't want to sit down and order the things, I just wanted to go to work, so she kind of taught me how to spread my money out and buy stuff for the distributing business and store, so that you don't have all of your money wrapped up in paint, or all of your money wrapped up in sandpaper. My son seems to be much better at all that, than I am; though I am glad I have him and that he likes the inside things and that I like the outside things, I like the hard work and he likes the mental work.

MH: I'm going to open up to y'all, do y'all have any questions?

Rick Olivier: Were you ever drunk at Rockery Inn?

SSS: No, I was drunk at West End Park, at the park I was a few times!

RO: Bruning's?

SSS: Let's see, the Fredricka's is one that I remember and Argie's Delago, and this place called the Paddle Wheel. I remember at the Palace Saloon, pretty popular bands would come out, ( ), you know bands that would play at more than at the little local--.

RO: Do you remember the Meters? How you could go out and see the Meters almost anywhere?

SSS: Correct! And ( ) and the Tom Cats used to play out there a lot also.

Kathryn O'Dwyer: I really like hearing about how the different generations of your family have picked up different aspects of the business, I just loved how that—

SSS: It is interesting, because my uncle was a boatbuilder, and my dad was a boatbuilder, we repaired boats and my dad also grew it out to a distributing business, and now my son is more in that line than repairing.

KO: When did you first start working with the boats?

SSS: I first started working, as a kid I was always at the boatyard after school, but when I was thirteen years old, I got in a fight with six people. I told them, “six against one, go back and get more people,” so they pulled out a knife and stabbed me in the right bicep. When I got out of the hospital, I thought like any handicapped kid, that my dad would take care of me. Instead he gave me a job and charged me forty dollars a week to stay at home. After that it was on and I was working full-time. Then part-time I would go work with my uncle, on Saturdays and Sundays we would go, like I said before, we would go out of town and build boats. That was kind of when I started running the boatyard or working in the boatyard. By eighteen I was hiring people. I had never been on the other side of a job interview; I even remember at being eighteen years old when I was building my boat, one of my teachers, “well you just teach school, I can build a boat. What else can you do?” I’m sure she wanted to choke me, but at eighteen building a boat is a pretty big deal. My dad, I guess, tough love and giving me a job was what got me interested in boats and was what made me into what I am today. The stabbing was kind of a blessing. What I remember, too, when I was getting divorced, I was calling around for lawyers,

and this one girl asked me what I was doing looking for a lawyer, asking if ( ) and I were getting divorced. I said yeah, things aren't going good anymore; "I wanted to tell you something, before you got stabbed, you were a real asshole, and that was probably the best thing to ever happen to you!" Naturally, I hired her! She told it like it was! Looking back, it was a good thing, it was a good thing to happen at thirteen because it changed my thinking and made me a little kinder, a little more not as cocky, and a little more humble. My dad put me to work, and the rest is history.

RO: Your dad was dubious about you being stabbed, right? I mean, he thought what idiot would get himself stabbed?

SSS: Well my dad was a Judo instructor and a Green Beret. My dad and uncle, they were more like--. I remember I got in a fight in the sixth grade one time, and I think the guy hit me in the nose, he said, "you know, if you would of done this, then he would have done that." In the next fight I got into, it's like Steve is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, so he kind of built a monster and he had to turn the monster off. I took Judo from the time I was seven until I was in my teen years. What he should have told me was that you don't fight. I remember years later my son, I was picking up my son and I told him what to do, and he looks at me, "Dad, you're not supposed to fight." I said, "wow, my son knows better than me. My thirteen-year-old son is smarter than I am." At least I raised my son better than I was raised, eventually my dad and my friends drove that into my head, too.

KO: When you started taking the reins in your family's business, was there any changes that you made to the operations?

SSS: Not really--. I guess the biggest change I made was that I, we used to plan in the morning. Susan, she's been working there since I was thirteen years old, she recommended that we start planning everything in the nighttime. That way we could go home and kind of forget

about it. What I do now, is that everybody that works for me in the evening I read over all of the customer order worklist, and I write down what everybody will be doing on their boats. That way I know that if I get a phone call in the middle of the night, I know what we're doing tomorrow. If they get there and I'm sick, they're able to get started and know what to do. What I find is that it lets your mind open for whatever new stuff might happen during the day. If you plan in the morning, your kind of thinking, "what did I forget;" but if you plan at night, you kind of have it in the bag, everything is fresh in your mind when you're planning. You get there the next day, the new stuff is easier to take care of. I think that's the only change I've implemented; everything else is running and was kind of perfected by the time I got there. I guess their hard work made it easier for me to make small changes.

RO: Steve, I want to ask you about your ancestors are Spanish, do you know, Canary?

SSS: The name is from Portugal, the Sintes name is Portuguese. Now I don't speak Portuguese, I just speak English, but--. The name came from Portugal.

RO: Your family is very stoic, in their--, and I don't mean stoic in the common use of the word that we use now of enduring hardship, but rather, using the wisdom acquired in one generation to the next. Even the stabbing story, that's your dad applying some really old ideas to your behavior, that had a really positive effect on you.

SSS: Absolutely, and I thought what he did at the time was mean, but now I think it was the ultimate act of love.

RO: That's wisdom man.

SSS: It was what I needed at the time, especially forty years later when my friend was like, "you were an asshole before you got stabbed." There's this Kenny Chesney song called, "Boats," and I don't know if y'all've ever listened to it, but pull it up one day, and it's kind of



reminds me of my life. I just feel so lucky that I was born into this, God couldn't have put me in a better place.

KO: Did you ever consider working in any other business, or any other--.

SSS: I never did, I never did. As a kid, the fantasies I had were of being a fireman or priest or something like that, but it never really--. As I got older, I never did anything else. During the week I get to test run different boats when new boats come to town, I get to operate them before their owner does, or if they get the new boat, I get the experience of seeing them hanging out on it, or test running it with them. It's nice, you know. I've probably operated three hundred different kinds of boats in my lifetime, not a lot of people can say that. I have a test run on a boat this week that I'm looking forward to.

RO: And to be on the water? It's a gift.

SSS: Right! About a week ago I was riding my bike in the harbor and I had seen a customer and he stopped, and I'm like, "just be positive, just be positive. Act like you can take him." He wanted to take his boat compound, so he came up to me and asked if I could compound and wax his boat. I said yeah, and he said I'm going out of town, how much will you charge me to slip. I said, "wow, ninety dollars and a boat ride, too!" I told him what I'd charge him to bring it back to the slip, and we did the detail work and I got a boat ride back to the slip with my nephew. It's kind of nice, because most of my jobs end in a boat ride, which makes it really, really nice. I get to enjoy the boat as much as the customer does after making it look pretty.

RO: Do you get many speedboats, many large cigarette speedboats?

SSS: Not a lot of the cigarette boats, but I do a lot of power boats and a lot of sailboats. I just had a friend who bought a 36-foot power boat that has three bedrooms in it, two bathrooms, and does thirty-one miles an hour. It was fun teaching him how to back the boat up in my yard

and bringing the boat back to Southshore Harbor with him. I almost took a picture of--, one of my pastors at my church at Lakefront, I almost took a picture of the Lakefront where he works at. He always says, he claims that he's jealous of me in his service in church; he says, "I'm going to pick on you Steve." I like the fact that he knows I have the good life, too.

RO: I'm going to guess that you don't fish?

SSS: I don't fish, no! I just don't like sitting around waiting for things to happen. I like making things happen. Like on my weekends, I work out and I mountain bike in the swamps and the spillway, those are--. People ask me why I don't mountain bike on the streets, well it's because that's an easy bike ride, in the swamps sometimes I have to walk my bike to the truck. You can't sit down, because you can't sit in one inch of water, and when you're worn out, you really have to have fun. So, fishing is kind of boring for me, but my Uncle Dave, the boatbuilder, he fished a lot.

KO: You've mentioned that you have a great rapport with a bunch of your customers. Is there a typical customer for you, do you have customers that you really enjoy working with?

SSS: The people that are passionate about their boats are the ones that I like working for the most. Fourth of July, Marcus ( ), he's a good customer of mine, he invited me to a party at his house and it was turnt. I had just gotten there when someone had shown a picture--, a video of me running his boat. I was at the table and I showed him a video of the boat and my girlfriend looked at me and was like, "you're kind of a pediatrician, you have all of your babies in your phone." It just so happened we were at the table, and Marcus is a brain surgeon, we were at the table with his team, we said that we would have to go out on the boat with just our team on the boat one day. It was interesting that out of all the people I could have sat with, I sat with him and his surgical team and I think his personal trainer is a part of his team. I met the trainer when he

came to the yard, the people—Gwen and Richard, I met them through Marcus, and they became good customers of mine. It's just interesting that it just seems to snowball. Dave Herman, the guy that owns *Zephyr*, he runs the J-30 website and J-30 is a type of boat that they race and they have a regatta where all of the J-30s from other cities race in the city and it happens here every two years. The yacht club has a program with them, they fund up to five boats coming in. I launch the boats and set the masts in them and take them apart when they leave town. This is something that happened because I became friends with Dave when he brought *Zephyr* here. When we were rebuilding that boat, he documented the boat on the J-30 website, and I didn't know that was going on until we finished the boat. I was just treating him like I treat everybody else, and because of that I got that little gift. I liked that little video that you did, Madison. In that video, the dark green boat was a boat that was built in the sixties that we rebuilt in the eighties. The blue boat on the trailer, one night I was just worn out from the summer, and that particular year a boat almost fell on me and I nearly lost my leg, and I was t-boned in a boat six months later, no actually a month later I was t-boned in another boat accident. This was between March and April, and then around September, I was worn out and didn't want to go sailing that night, so I went home and hung out with my hibiscus. Around nine o'clock my phone rang, and *Zephyr* was in a head-on collision with the green boat, the light green boat, that was in your video. I remember thinking it was a good thing that I went home that night, otherwise I would have been in three boat accidents in one year. Not that I mind, but you can only take so much adrenaline. I was just recovered from the boat that nearly took my leg off, so I didn't want to-- I wanted to in control of my life, sailboats should not have control over your life. I thought it was interesting that the two boats in the picture, one was the beginning of my life, and the other was the beginning of me getting saved from not sailing the night I was worn out. The blue boat, they

started the race, they started ahead of the time, instead of turning off to the port side or the starboard side, they made a U-turn right into a stack of boats and they hit *Zephyr* in a head-on collision. Both boats were damaged fairly bad, it took me about two months to fix *Zephyr*, it was quite an interesting little collision. Another thing that was interesting, was they have drone shots of the accident, so if you want that I can probably get that for you; they just happened to have a drone flying overhead that day.

KO: If I'm hearing you right, you work with your family members and you also hire people from the community that you need? How's that dynamic between working with your family and working with people who are outside of the family?

SSS: It's interesting getting to know the different personalities, because I feel like I've hired the same personalities over, and over again. I just recently rehired one guy who had worked with me when I was eighteen years old. He had worked with me on and off over the years, and he recently came back, and I'm amazed at how talented he is. I mean I taught him a lot when he worked with me, but he's also gotten more talented working for other people, too. The dynamics of seeing people grow who have worked for you and you thought that was the best they could be, and they come back better. Also hiring people who have no experiences with boats and teaching them skills. I've also had other people who could fix tools that I couldn't fix, so I've they've taught me how to repair tools and machines, and I've taught them how to work on boats. It's interesting to see how we've traded skills. A while back I had hired a guy, every once in a while you get some bad apples, and one of my mechanics went to give him some advice and he got pissed off at my mechanic and decided to kill my mechanic in front of my. I had to fire him, he's like I'm not a big guy you shouldn't be afraid of me, but you threatened to kill people. My sister being murdered and all, threatening to kill people is a little more different, and more real for me.

He might've been angry, so I told Susan, "I'm not going to let him know that I'm not taking him back here, I'm going to tell him to go home and think about it. I'm afraid that telling him I'm firing today; he's going to flip out in the office. He left, and I told him I'd reach out to him after he left; I called him and he went nuts over the phone, cursing me out, saying, "you don't do this. We agreed that he told me this, and because he told me this, then a man would do that." We didn't agree on that, I said, "you've got some really weird fantasies on how the world goes, this isn't kindergarten." I'm here to have people work, not get angry and threaten to beat my mechanic up. I've got ten years invested in this man, I don't want anything happening to him or me. Needless to say, sometimes you get some bad apples, when you hire and fire a lot of people; most of the time I get really good and talented people, but this one here really left a bad taste in my mouth.

KO: It's wonderful to see how much sharing and spreading this skillset that have been handed down to you all of these years. Is there any advice that you've received from your father or grandfather about running the business that has really stuck with you?

SSS: Well you have to be there all of the time. You have to be there; you know if you're not there things don't happen and people don't work the same if you're not there. It's things that I know, or advice I know to make things go better. One of my customers tells this story, and he went away for a while, but came back, he tells this story, whenever we get together he tells this story, he says, "me and Steve are walking and we're going to look at my boat. On the way to my boat he heard a noise, he said that noise shouldn't be coming from that boat, something's going on. He runs over to the boat and when he came back, he told me that they were using the wrong kind of tool on the boat." He was amazed that just from me walking and talking with him, I could hear that something wasn't right. I know everything that's going on in my yard, so if

someone is using the wrong tool, I know that by the sound of the tool on the boat. I just thought that was interesting that he let me know I've tried other people sometimes because I didn't like your prices, but you're worth every dime. I just finished doing a twelve-hundred-dollar job for him on his 1984 ( ), it was interesting that he left and came back, and let me know that he was mad at me because of my prices. But after having some people do things on his boat, he's happy to be back

KO: I love imagining you walking around hearing these different sounds and having the knowledge of what is happening and what's right and what's wrong. That makes me think of the types of tools and technology that you're using, how has the craftsmanship and the technology change around over the past fifty years?

SSS: I know in the old days we would use the sanding machines that would throw dust all over the place, and ( ) or EPA would show up and make me pay ( ) and pick the sand up. Now I use sanders that suck the dust up, vacuum cleaner sanders that catch them in the bag. The other thing, the machines were all a lot lighter, so they were harder on your hands and on your shoulders and on the people, plus you were breathing dust. As far as the battery pack tools, we always had to run cords to boats and we'd have to run cords to the twelve-foot and eighteen-foots, and now we have battery operated tools and that's made a huge difference. The equipment is more compact and smaller, so that makes it easier to get on boats and stuff like that. As far as the technology goes, a lot of the engines have computers now; we had to get equipment that could run on computers as opposed to before where it was just changing parts if that part just needed a spare changing. In that respect it has changed a lot, and I think it's all for the better. It's improving; I especially like the vacuum cleaner sanders, I think that was the biggest asset because the boatyard was always dirty, and now the dirtiest job isn't that dirty of a job anymore.

It's easier to hire people to do that, that was the hardest position to fill because no one wanted to bottom dust all day, and now with the vacuum sanders it's easier to get people to want to do that.

KO: I've loved hearing about this journal that was your grandfather's journal. Can you tell me how you got it, and anything that really sticks out to you? I know we've heard a couple of great anecdotes, but I just want to--.

SSS: I think they were cleaning out his old house, and they found it behind the wall in his house, and my Aunt Judy eventually gave them to me. I wanted him to give them to me--. I guess the story, the story that stands out to me was that he always went home at three o'clock every day from the business. Would you want me to tell that story? Ok, I was always told by my dad that you had to be there from the time it opens to the time it closes, every time. Every day I would read in the book, "I went home at three o'clock to take a nap." I would think, the crew's working and you're going home at three o'clock? So, they had seven children, and--. My grandfather died at three o'clock, at three thirty in the afternoon, and it turns out he was home having sex with his wife and he died. Years later after reading the books for twenty years, my dad told me, he had to explain to me how my grandfather died, he would go home and have sex with his wife, which I thought was really sweet. I couldn't believe that he would leave the boatyard unattended, they had seven children and his wife worked at Fitzgerald's until 12 o'clock at night. He would go home, have sex with her, bring her to work at Fitzgerald's, which was within walking distance, but he would drive her there. Then at midnight he would pick her up from work and have dinner with her. He got up at six in the morning, which I thought was neat was that he would stay up, drive to Fitzgerald's, fifty yards away, and bring her home. All of the men in my family have talked about how hard my grandfather was, all of the women in my family talked about how kind and loving he was. It was interesting to see that people had two

different opinions of him. I think in the journals, the fact that he went home every day at three o'clock, that's what stood out to me and blew me away the most, and when I heard the reason why I kind of accepted it. He loved his wife.

RO: Fitzgerald's, is the one that was out over the water, it was the big restaurant, a bar-restaurant?

SSS: Correct, it was the restaurant over the water. It was really popular, and my grandmother worked there for years, but her shift would start at four o'clock. It was interesting to see, "took the old lady to work. Picked the old lady up from work." Like he was going down to the French Quarter, you know. The other thing in the book, "I drove to Bucktown to get some supplies. I drove to Canal Street to get supplies," like leaving West End was like leaving the country. I remember, too, sometimes he would go to Bucktown and he saw a guy in the ditch. He went down and got a wrench truck to pull him out of the ditch. Little stories like that were kind of interesting. One time, in the book, I guess it was in the sixties, he talked about some guy burning a cross in the baseball park across from their house, and it gives us the ideas of the signs of the times. These are a few things that have stood out to me in his books, but the three o'clock one--. At three o'clock we had to be there all the time, it blew me away, like we had to be there at three o'clock, every day that I read it.

KO: You were thirteen when you started working with your father, what was the dynamic like when you first started working with your father? What was the typical day like for you when you started working with him?

SSS: I remember he would knock on my bedroom door and wake me up at, we would get to work at seven thirty or around seven. He would have me sweep and mop the store every morning, and I guess he did that while he was getting the crew started in the morning; after that,



he would give me my job after that. Most of my jobs were like sanding and painting the bottoms, that's what I started with, sandpaper the bottoms. We had fifty-five-gallon drums of garbage, and I had to dump the fifty-five gallons of garbage. I remember the grown men couldn't lift the fifty-five-gallon drums into the garbage can, but I had been doing it for so long that I didn't know better. I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to be able to pick up that amount of weight. We also caulked our mast, and I would always crank people up on mast. Since I was always strong from lifting the garbage cans, I always did the hard work. I remember the first time they put me on the mast, I was afraid of heights, and I was like, "never mind, never mind. I want to crank, put me on the ground I want to crank." So, I like to, I preferred the harder jobs because it kept my feet on the ground. Then as time went on, I learned how to work the crane, how to do the topside paint, I learned how to do Fiberglass work, I learned how to do engine work putting engines in boats, and stand masts up and do rigging work. I just learned everything a little at a time, and I guess because I was always around it, it was easy to learn. I had an uncle who ran the machine shop and did our machine work, at nighttime I would go to him and he said, "if you're not running the boatyard, and you're not too busy, pay attention to the people. Pay attention to how the bilges are." When I was seven and eight, they would bring me to the boatyard, and I'd crawl into the areas they couldn't and run wires. Even my uncle who ran the machine shop would tell me, "you're crawling into these hulls, you won't be able to get there forever. Pay attention to how the boats are put together, you get to see things that I can't see anymore." As a kid, looking around like this is neat, and even working as a grown up, I've gotten holes that are the size of microwave doors. People will come in looking for me, and I'd be like I'm in here. They would ask me how I got in, and I would just say, "I just got in, I don't know." I can still get in places

that you're not supposed to get into and see how boats are put together. It brings me back to my childhood, when I first started doing that. ( ).

MH: When are you doing your boat test this week?

SSS: The first warm day we have. The first warm day we have, and the lake is calm. We've got to fill it up with gas, it's takes about three hundred gallons of gas, so we're going to fill it up with gas, and go do a test run on it.

MH: How far do you usually go out on the lake?

SSS: Usually, I go out down to Pontchartrain Beach near UNO Arena and head back, sometimes I go to the airport.

KO: It's so beautiful out there.

SSS: I know! I can't believe, like this is really my job.

KO: We were talking about some of your early days working with your father, when did you start to see the dynamics switch, when you were no longer the rascalion, but a true business partner?

SSS: When I remember when I was young, I would tell customers something they would kind of look at me and then go ask my dad. I would be like, "why are they asking you? I told them the same thing you did," well you look to young for them to believe you, when you start looking older, then they'll believe you. I guess by the time I was thirty-eight, they believed me, but I was running the yard probably in my twenties and I had a hard time saying I was the boss. My father was also out there a lot, and if we were telling the same person what to do, I would usually leave and go do another job. He'd be like, "why'd you leave, I just came out to give you some advice," but the people don't like having two bosses, so if you're going to run that job, then I'll go run another job. We never really argued, he just always let me now that he came out

here to help me, but I knew that people didn't like two bosses. For the most part, we just stayed out of each other's way like that. If I go and start taking over a job that he was running he would tell me, "is it me or you, who's on it." We always had an amicable way of backing out, nobody was really stepping on anyone's toes. If one says who is running this job, I don't want to be confusing the guys, I always told him I don't want to do that, I don't want to be running around telling someone what to do. It confuses them and they don't know who to be loyal to. We never really had an argument in the way that went, we never got in each other's way I don't think.

KO: That's amazing to hear. Were there any other challenges that you faced while you were working with him?

SSS: Sometimes when I would hire people he didn't like, then he would run them off. Or, I remember, too, when I was married and I'd go on vacation to boat shows and stuff, my wife would say, "when you're working it looks like you're screwing off, but when you leave everyone looks like they're in total distress, even your dad." When I thought had developed such a skill with all of my pieces, it was successful for me. But my dad, he didn't have all the pieces when I took over the yard, so he struggled getting to know the personalities of what to do and everybody else got lost, too, because they weren't doing the things they were really talented in. I knew their skills and where to put them where they would be happy and I would get the most out of them; he didn't, and that kind of rattled him a little bit. He wasn't doing it on purpose, he just didn't know what was good. It was interesting what my wife told me, it looks like you're screwing around, but things go so much smoother. I thought, "wow, I've finally made it full circle. I've finally learned how to run a business." That's another thing I remember thinking as a kid, I was always into working out and going to the gym, and my dad and Uncle Dave would always go out and entertain people with dinner. I had the idea that I liked what I was doing, I didn't like going

to dinners, I liked going out to the boatyard, so I thought I would ride my bike around the harbor looking for jobs. It's interesting that I developed my personality in way that worked, because I didn't like going out to dinners. I developed it to fit me. Also, when I work, I don't like wearing a shirt, like the girl I'm dating now, I wear a shirt around. I went to a boat show and people kept coming up to me saying, "oh, you've got a shirt on;" she said that she hears that all of the time and asked why I wear a shirt around her, I said that I just like wearing a shirt around her, and that maybe I'm getting more respectful. Everywhere I go now people are asking why I've got a shirt on, it's interesting to see at fifty-eight that I'm maybe growing up a little bit.

KO: When did your dad really start stepping down and letting you take the reins? Was that a hard thing for him to let go of?

SSS: He still struggles with it. I don't know, it all happened so gradually. As a store and distributing business developed, he just kind of, I don't know if he lost touch, but it gradually gave him something else to control instead of me and the boatyard. The boatyard was his baby, it was the only thing he knew. As he was building the store and going on road trips and building the clientele for that, it left me to run the boatyard without him putting his finger on it. He still tells me to hire more people, and things that he thinks I need to do, so he still tries to run it from a distance. For the most part, he stays out of my way unless I'm struggling, and when I'm struggling, he tells me what I need to do and sometimes I do it, and sometimes I just can't. It's hard, it's easier to say you need to do this, than it is to do it.

MH: The business has been here for fifty years, what do you hope the next fifty looks like?

SSS: I hope that we--. I don't necessarily want to grow, but I hope we keep staying the same, repeat customers, and--. I'd like to see Pam's foundation keep growing, also. I don't think

we need to change much; I like my clientele; I like that we're known for doing good work and being on time. I'd like to see us carry on for another fifty years, or more.

END OF INTERVIEW

## **Vita**

Madison Hazen is a native Texan who has tried her best to plant her feet into the sandy shores of the Southern Gulf Coast. In 2017, Madison graduated with a bachelor's degree in Maritime Studies from Texas A&M University at Galveston and has continued her search for fair winds and following seas in New Orleans's maritime past. As a museum professional, Madison shares her love of maritime culture and history with everything she does, and everyone she meets.