

The Gulf of Mexico's Past: History of Offshore Oil and Gas Development

MMS recently announced the publication of, History of the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry in Southern Louisiana: Interim Report. This report is the first of many products that will flow from MMS's ongoing research effort "The Offshore Oil Oral History Project." The three-volume interim report is intended to showpiece some of the kinds of materials that will be developed.

Volume I, Papers on the Evolving Offshore Industry (MMS Publication 2004-049), provides a short overview of the Oral History Project and its goals, as well as a series of short, focused, analytical papers on a variety of subjects that build a selection of the collected interviews. For example, in the paper "The Brave and the Foolhardy: Hurricanes in the Early Offshore Industry," Joseph Pratt discusses how the industry, by chance, moved into the Gulf during a period of relative calm in the Gulf. Nevertheless, even though major platform design criteria were wave height and force, these explorers learned through sad experience that they had underestimated the size of waves and failed to consider the threat of mudslides. In another example, "A Brief Look at Commercial Diving and the Role of People, Technology, and the Organization of Work," Diane Austin discusses how returning World War II veterans created modern commercial diving in the Gulf when they began to apply the tools and techniques of the U.S. Navy to the offshore oil industry.

Volume II, Bayou Lafourche: An Oral History of the Development of the Oil and Gas Industry (MMS Publication 2004-050), demonstrates the wealth of information contained in oral histories by constructing a history of the area's industry entirely from carefully selected quotations.

Today, the offshore petroleum industry is enormous and operates worldwide. However, it was born in the wetlands and coastal regions of Louisiana and its birth has been little documented. The Oral History Project is documenting this remarkable history through the eyes of the people who built it, worked in it, and lived with it. To date, approximately 400 interviews have been collected and hundreds of photographs have been digitized and catalogued.

Volume III of the interim report, Samples of Interviews and Ethnographic Prefaces (MMS Publication 2004-051), provides hints at the rich materials to be mined from these projects. This educational material will be made available to the public upon completion.

Relevant websites:

- [History of Offshore Oil and Gas Development in the Gulf of Mexico](#)
- [MMS Ocean Science Journal](#)

[MMS: Securing Ocean Energy & Economic Value for America](#)
U.S. Department of the Interior