Gulf States magazine

FALL 1979

EAGLE
Symbol of America's strength and purpose, the bald eagle was once numerous in all parts of the country. Now it is rarely seen except in Florida and the far northwest. A few remain in this region. *See related story on page 4.*

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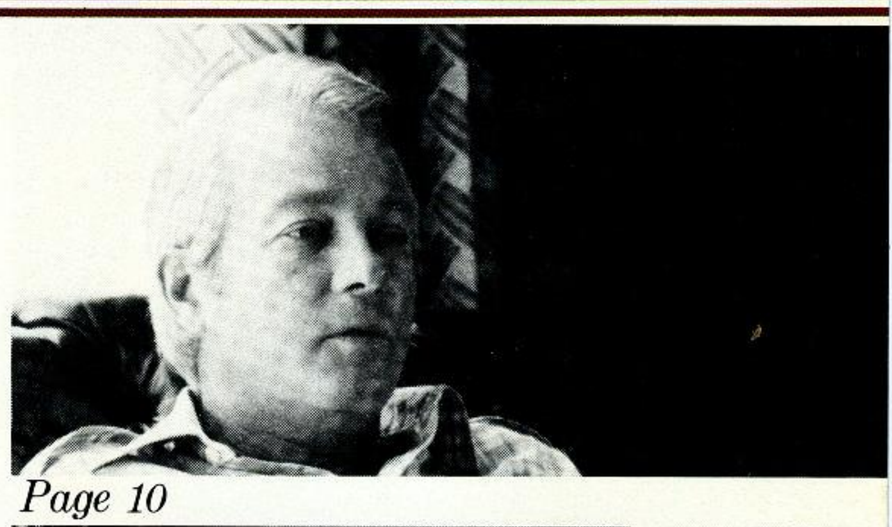

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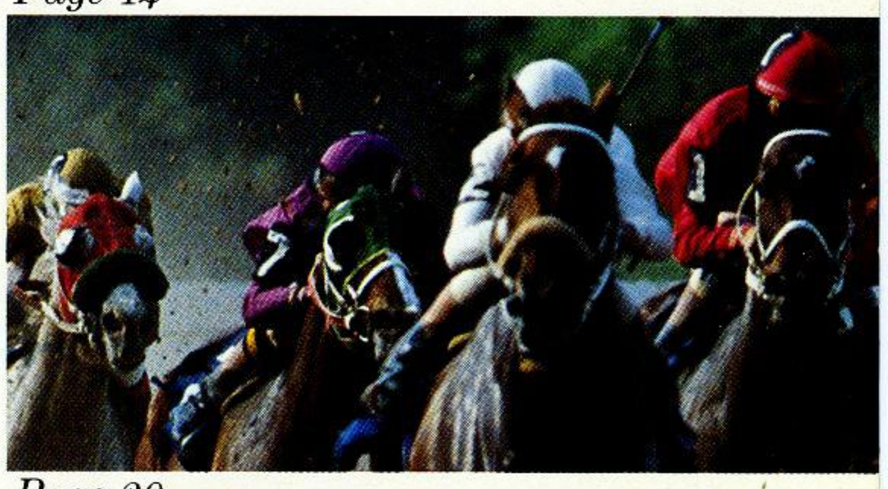

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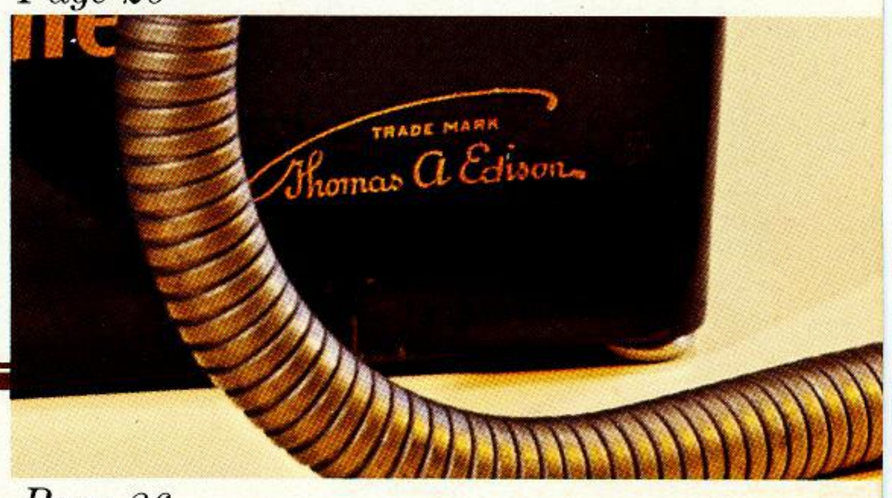

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Nature's disappearing act

By Howard Peacock

Man is trying to shorten the list of endangered plants and animals.

A whole raft of nature-loving kids has grown up underprivileged in Texas and Louisiana during the last couple of decades. They've been denied the opportunity to spend hours or days at the beach watching the antics of the brown pelican.

Once a populous neighbor along Gulf Coast shores, this picturesque character disappeared from Texas and Louisiana in the '60s. Now biologists are trying to bring back the brown pelican by establishing breeding colonies. And that is no easy matter since they can't tell the males from the females.

The story of the brown pelican is one of the puzzles in the unfolding drama of the endangered species, here and abroad. Business and industry are increasingly concerned with this phenomena. Multi-million dollar construction projects have been delayed for long and expensive periods because the habitat of a rare animal might be destroyed.

The issue is no longer strictly an economic one. The big question is human welfare and how animals, plants, rocks and people fit together on a sensitive planet.

"Studies show," says Dr. George M. Woodwell of the world-renowned

ALLIGATOR
Ugly but important member of Southern marsh ecology, the American alligator has made a vigorous comeback under protective laws and today thrives in many wetlands.

WHOOPING CRANE
Not long for this world unless miracles occur to preserve its food supply and habitat, North America's most impressive bird, the seven-foot-tall whooping crane, has dwindled in numbers to only several dozen. The whooper's migration route between Canada and Texas crosses the western edge of Southeast Texas.

Photography Courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.

Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, "that the diversity of species and human welfare are inextricably related." In the conservative vernacular of science, that means the togetherness is permanent. Human concerns are bound up with the variety of plant and animal life, and the more kinds of animals and plants that thrive on earth, the better life can be for humans. The reverse also would be true.

Old timers in the marshlands of Southeast Texas and Southern Louisiana chuckle at the designation of the alligator as an endangered species. It's true that the alligator is on the official endangered list, but it's also probable that it's coming off soon. The alligator has made a superb comeback.

The "skin trade," along with carnivals and roadside zoos, humbled the 'gator to dangerously low numbers in the '60s — about the same time the brown pelican was disappearing — and by 1969 it was illegal to hunt the creature. Thus protected, and being a vigorous breeder, it proliferated prodigiously. By the late '70s, the population of the American alligator had grown so rapidly that any hunter, scientist or nature-lover who waded into a Southeast Texas marsh or a Cajun-country swamp could be in real trouble.

"Alligators are no longer an endangered species," says Floyd Potter of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. There are now about 60,000 breeding adults in the state, upland and lowland. A pair will produce about 30 to 40 young, most of which are eaten by raccoons, coyotes, snakes, and big birds. That still leaves a lot of alligators, though. Louisiana even publicized a 'gator hunt this past September. Allen Ensminger of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries said the goal was between 10,000 and 15,000 'gator skins.

The red wolf, another animal familiar to veteran Texas and Louisiana outdoorsmen, hasn't fared as well. Texas wildlife scientists figure there are about 50 individual red wolves living in the wild in a pocket of Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana. There are another 20 red wolves in the Tacoma, Washington, zoo. Otherwise, the animals reported to be red wolves are coyotes or a mixed breed produced by coyotes and hounds. The red wolf is on the verge of extinction.

Besides the alligator, other unexpected names appear on the official lists of endangered species. The bobcat, for example.

At one time the bobcat seemed so abundant that it was legally labeled a varmint and a bounty paid for its hide. Folks didn't know in those days that the bobcat was a valuable predator, keeping wood rats and other wild rodents under control. In fact, half a bobcat's diet consists of harmful or undesirable animals, such as rats and snakes. But in a few short years, the American bobcat went from plentiful to endangered. European fur dealers in 1975 took a fancy to the bobcat's pelt and offered high prices for good specimens. In just one year alone, 1976-77, more than 100,000 bobcats were shot and trapped to feed that market.

In Southeast Texas and South Lousiana, a significant number of both animals and plants on the endangered species list can be found. That fact is not surprising when one considers the different natural regions of the area — from the post oak belt of Texas, across the piney woods and Big Thicket, to the moody moss-veiled bayous of South Louisi-

ana. To that spread, add lakes in the uplands and more than 250 miles of coastline with its priceless estuaries. Those bays and marshes are breeding grounds and nurseries for shrimp, crabs, oysters, and many kinds of fish, great food and sport crops. The Big Thicket is the last known habitat of the spectacular ivory-billed woodpecker, a gigantic, brilliantly marked tree pounder that may now be extinct.

Science explains that every kind of plant and animal is important to the earth's "web of life" because it occupies a specific place and performs a specific function in the scheme of nature's ongoing order. The globe's entire supply of living energy depends upon plants. Only plants can convert sunlight into nourishment for animals and human beings. But plants are dependent upon microscopic forms of life in soil as well as on certain insects for fertilization which leads to reproduction. "Inextricably related," as Dr. Woodwell expressed it, is not an idle theory.

Since people became civilized, about 200 species of animals have been wiped out. Others have been brought to the brink of extinction. Plants have taken a bigger beating than animals. Being unable to run, hide or fight back, they are especially vulnerable to pollution, urban sprawl and industrialization. Of the estimated 20,000 species of plants in the United States, botanists believe about 1,200 are threatened, some 750 are in immediate danger of extinction and about 100 are gone — erased from the earth for all time.

Extinction happens so rapidly, once the process begins, that Congress enacted a series of protective laws in 1966, 1969 and 1973. The 1973 legislation prohibits trade in endangered species or their products.

What is an endangered species? One pretty comprehensive definition is: "Any species of animal or plant whose ability to survive and reproduce has been jeopardized by man's activities." By that definition, nearly 100 kinds of American animals are nearing extinction today.

Around the world, creatures such as the Bengal tiger — probably nature's most splendid achievement in the animal kingdom — the elephant, ocelot, leopard, the whales, even the giraffe (which took 13 million years to evolve) and other exotic species receive enormous publicity. In a few generations children may see them only in pictures.

The most bizarre story of extinction in history is not the story of the dinosaur, which disappeared without man's help, but the passenger pigeon. Millions of these beautiful birds used to fly through this region. In fact, a stretch of land south of Kountze, Texas, is named Pigeon Roost Prairie in honor of the massive 19th century flocks. But "millions" aren't many when you're talking about the heyday of the passenger pigeon. They were counted by the billions.

A Scotsman visiting America once totaled up a flock of passenger pigeons passing overhead. He timed the speed of the birds and estimated the number of pigeons per cubic yard of air. For an entire day, he tabulated the passing flock. The number in that single flight came to 2,230,272,000 — more than two-and-a-quarter billion birds.

"A loud, rushing roar," was the way he described the sound of the flight, "succeeded by instant darkness." A few years later, John James Audubon counted a smaller flock of passenger pigeons by his own formula, with the total exceeding one billion. No known record exists of the largest flock to visit Pigeon Roost Prairie, but the flocks there were probably gigantic because of the food supply in the surrounding Big Thicket.

All told, how many passenger pigeons flew the skies of America at their peak? Conservative ornithologists put the figure at about five billion. By far, it was the nation's most numerous bird, as well as one of its most beautiful. Eighteen inches long, with a snowy breast and cheerful plumage of blue and reddish brown, it had remarkable eyesight and a gentle, gregarious nature.

How does a country kill five billion birds?

Shooting, netting, and poling were popular "sports" of the time. And it seemed as if the flocks were endless. Thousands of dead and wounded birds were often left rotting on the ground. Markets of the major cities voraciously trafficked in squabs. Still there seemed no end to the supply.

One trick of the netters was to tie a wounded bird to a stake or stool when a large flock was approaching. Its cries of anguish would attract large numbers of passenger pigeons, and as they settled around the crying bird they would be shot or netted. This practice gave birth to the term "stool pigeon."

One by one, states began to pass laws against the slaughter of the passenger pigeon. They were too late. An Ohio hunter shot the last wild passenger in 1900. A few birds in captivity refused to breed. The last of her kind, a proud-postured specimen given the name Martha, survived for 14 more years in the Cincinnati zoo. When she died in 1914, a creation that had required millions of years to evolve and had multiplied to at least five billion individuals living at one time, had been reduced to zero.

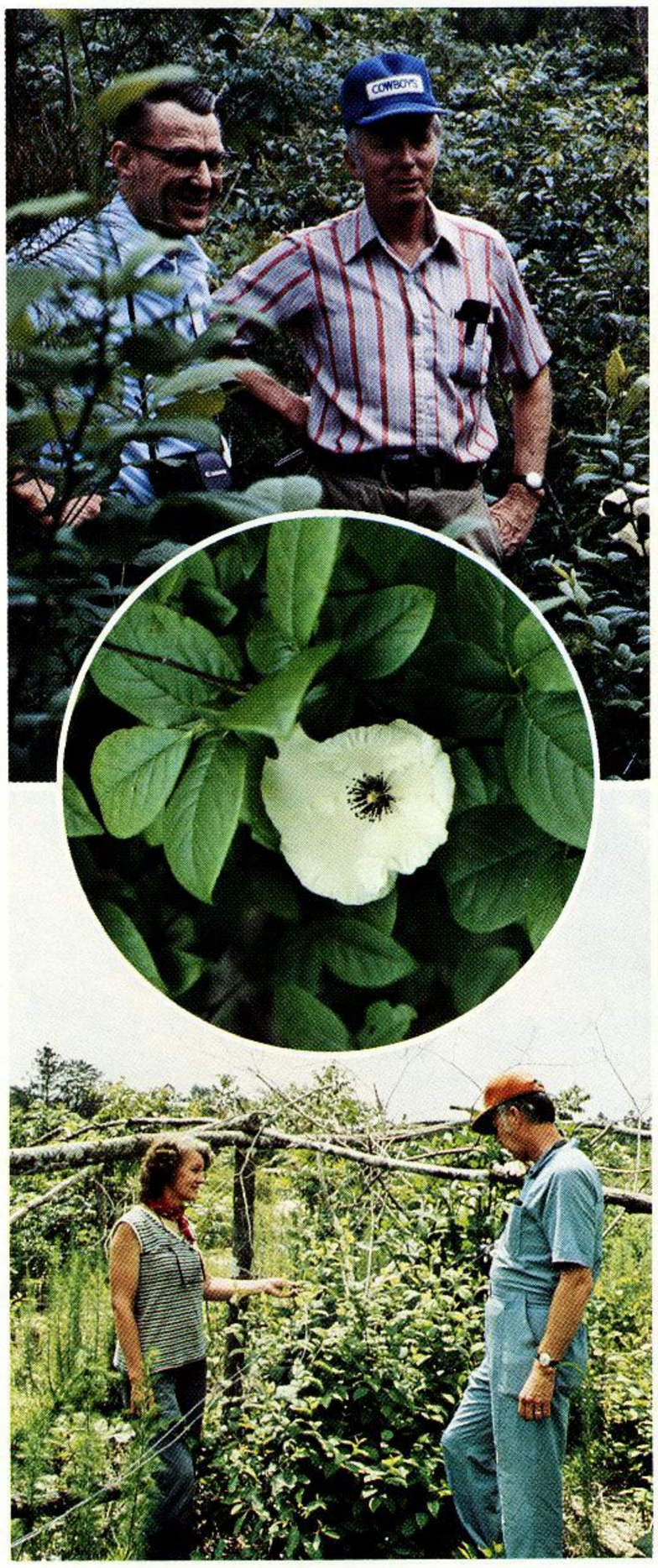
The outlook for the brown pelican, one of the latest in a long list of embattled southern species, is better. This creature has been called

PYRAMID MAGNOLIA
Small "cousin" of the stately Southern magnolia, this rare sprout of the pyramid magnolia was found in Jasper County, Texas. The species grows only to 30 feet high, at its tallest, and produces a beautiful fragrant flower.

BOBCAT
European fur dealers discovered the bobcat's beautiful pelt in recent years, causing widespread killing of the valuable animal and endangering its survival as a species.

RED WOLF
About 50 individuals are all that remain from the once numerous red wolf population. Hunting, territorial destruction through development, and cross-breeding with other canine species have combined to reduce the red wolf to the brink of extinction.

OTTER
Playboy of the animal world, the river otter seems to enjoy perpetual hijinks in wilderness creeks and rivers. Its luxurious fur and man's interference with waterways have placed the delightful otter in jeopardy.



The Rare Plant Student Center at the University of Texas in Austin estimates that about 500 kinds of plants in Texas are now endangered. Operating largely on voluntary contributions, this distinguished center tries to propagate endangered species from seeds and cuttings, thus staving off extinction. In the southeastern United States, including Louisiana, about 400 species of plants are believed threatened, endangered, or already gone.

Among the endangered ones is an elegant wildflower named the wild silky camellia. It has the look of old-fashioned royalty in the floral world — petals of virginal white, borders of crimped silk taffeta, a dash of understated design in the exposed center, all displayed against a background of richest green. Once abundant, this favorite of Texas and Louisiana settlers has been losing its habitat rapidly to the onrush of civilization.

By the 1960's, only one known colony remained in the state of Texas, a small group of shrubs nestled on a knoll in the East Texas woods of Newton County. One day in 1974 a bulldozer with an unknowing operator tore the shrubs from their roots. The whole field was being clear-cut.

While visiting Washington, D.C., Arthur Temple, head of Diboll-based Temple-Eastex, Inc., learned of the colony's destruction from Geraldine Watson, a lifelong Big Thicket explorer-naturalist. Both of them were in the nation's capital to testify before a congressional committee on proposals for a Big Thicket national preserve or park. Mrs. Watson described the location to Temple and asked him if the roots of the camellia grove could be protected against the next step in the site-clearing process, which was burning what remained. She thought the plants might have a chance of reviving from the torn roots.

Temple immediately telephoned company headquarters back in Texas and ordered the speedy placement of an arbor around the area of the former colony. For the next several months the signs of recovery were almost non-existent. But today, the grove is lush with six-foot and eight-foot bushes bearing elegant springtime blossoms, each a seeming tribute to cooperation between a dedicated conservationist and a concerned, quick-acting corporate leader.

the Charlie Chaplin of the bird world. Few if any of its feathered kin can match it for charm and entertainment.

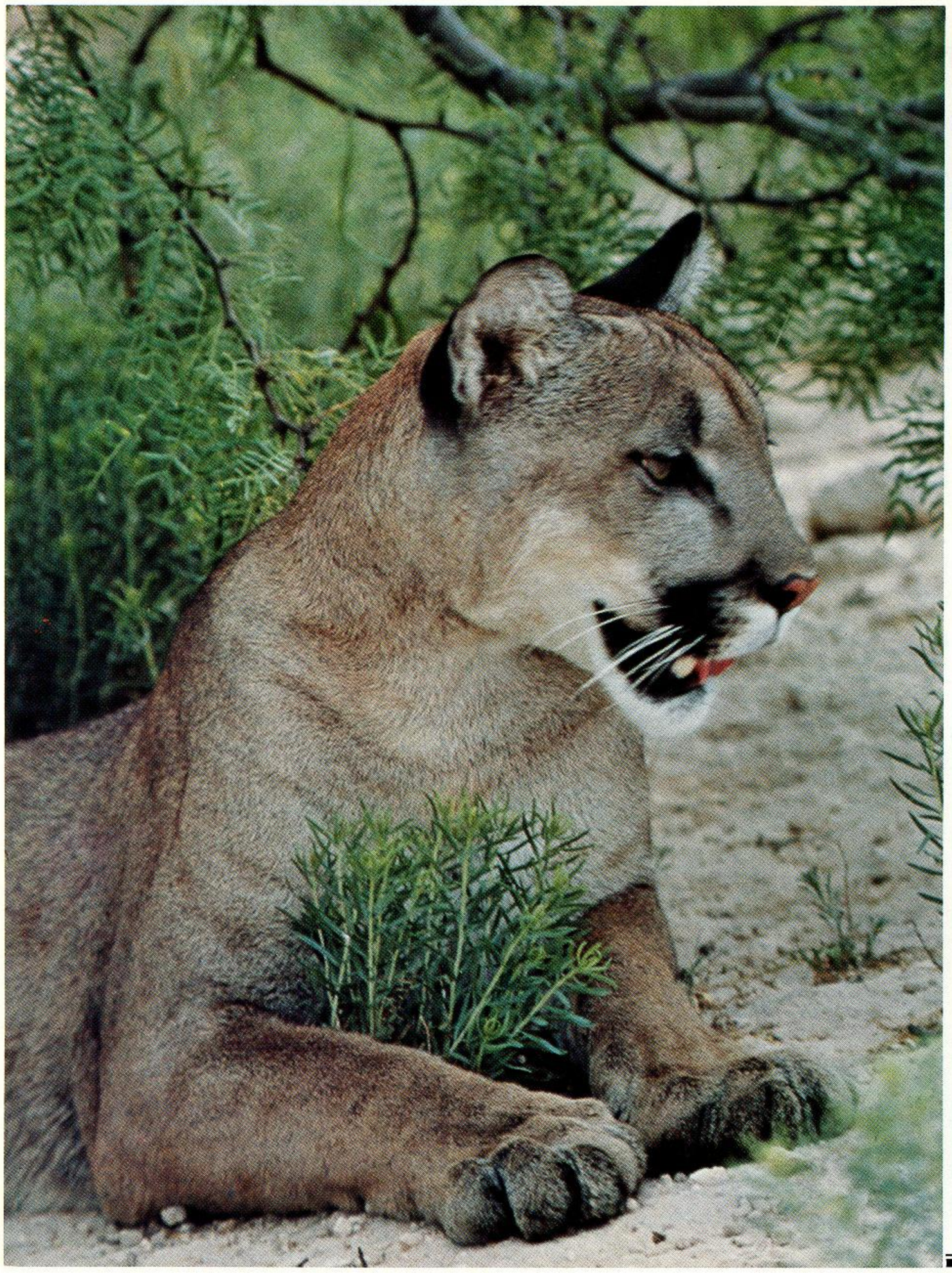
Its trademark is an enormous throat-pouch and its traveling style has a clear Chaplinesque flavor: The bird flaps a few times, then sails with its head hunched back against a body which appears not quite properly designed or put together.

The comeback program for the brown pelican is paying dividends. Larry McNease of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries claims a "good nesting year" for 1979. More than 150 young brown pelicans have been raised. A new colony has been established near the Mississippi border and a colony of mature birds, numbering about 500, thrives north of Grand Isle, Louisiana.

In Texas, there are about 300 breeding birds. The colony at present is at Rockport. Young birds, "pre-fledglings," are imported from Florida, which maintained its population of brown pelicans after the Texas-Louisiana massacres of the 60s. Louisiana once boasted 60,000 brown pelicans and it was honored as the official state bird. Texas had almost as many.

"It started back in the '30s." according to William C. Brownlee of Texas Parks and Wildlife. "Unknowing fishermen thought the brown pelican was competing with them for fish. Actually, the brown pelicans feed on non-game fish. But many were killed and their nests were destroyed. Then after World War II, there was a lot of development along the coasts and consequently the bird's historic habitat was overrun. Then came the pesticides."

Brown pelicans ate fish which were carrying chemicals from pesti-



COUGAR
Magnificent cat of forest and open country, the shy cougar requires a large hunting territory, has been decimated to endangered species status by hunting and development of its hunting grounds.

cides such as DDT. The pesticide residue had leaked from farms into rivers and streams, thence to the sea, and had been passed along the food chain, building up in volume, to the fishes eaten by the brown pelicans. Something upset the reproduction cycle in the species. Its eggs became too thin-shelled to protect the embryos until development was completed. Many eggs just crumpled after being laid. The birth rate of the brown pelican plunged in Texas and Louisiana. In Florida and Mexico, the population of the birds remained stable. It became known not only as an entertaining neighbor but also as a valuable monitor of environmental quality.

McNease and Brownlee are cautiously optimistic.

"We are thinking about extending the range of the brown pelican in Texas by 1981 or 1982," Brownlee says.

"In Louisiana, we're bringing in 100 flightless-young a year," McNease points out. "We trust there is a 50-50 split, or thereabouts, between male and female. But you just can't tell about the brown pelican. The only way to know is to find a dead one and operate."

Although the mystery of sex continues to shroud the life of the brown pelican, there is hope that once again, perhaps a generation from now, youngsters and oldsters in Texas and Louisiana will be privileged to enjoy this star of the bird world, as well as other now-threatened creatures and plants. Scientists are working toward that happy, life-celebrating goal. □

Mr. Peacock, Director of Development for Lamar University, is a regular contributor to Gulf States Magazine.

Q&A:

Edwin Edwards, Louisiana's governor for eight years, is winding up his second term this year. By law he can serve only two consecutive four-year terms. As governor of an energy-rich state, Edwards became a national figure during the times of crisis over the U.S. energy supply. His outspoken views on the energy problem and his numerous accomplishments as governor have resulted in strong support from his fellow Louisianians. And he has indicated that while he will soon be leaving office, his days in public life are far from over. *Gulf States Magazine* recently interviewed the governor about energy and other matters.

Gulf States Magazine: Governor, can this nation find a solution to our energy problems?

Edwards: This depends on the emphasis the people of this country place on producing energy. There are adequate supplies of energy in America to meet our needs, if we're willing to take the steps and make the trade-offs necessary to produce them.

GSM: What kind of trade-offs?

Edwards: The use of coal, shale oil, nuclear energy — as well as oil and gas — all require resistance to environmental pressures. A poll recently showed that 61 percent of Americans was willing to postpone environmental improvements in favor of maintaining an adequate supply of energy. And another point: The days of cheap energy are over. We're no longer able to have energy at a third of the world price — we're forced to get our energy in the world market, at the market price.

GSM: What do you think of the Carter Administration's energy policies?

Edwards: They're improving. There's drilling on the Atlantic Seaboard now, and some resistance to environmentalists' pressures on the Gulf and Pacific coasts.

GSM: What are your views on nuclear power plants?

Edwards: Resistance to nuclear plants will probably increase, but this will only delay and not halt them. The weight of scientific opinion is that nuclear plants can produce electricity safely and more cheaply than fossil fuels. They're indispensable.

Edwin W. Edwards on energy

GSM: Some candidates for governor have supported a moratorium on new nuclear power plants in Louisiana. What is your view on that?

Edwards: It's the same as a moratorium on corrals for elephants in the state. In the forseeable future we won't need any additional plants — other than Gulf States' River Bend plant and the Louisiana Power & Light plant farther down the Mississippi River. These two facilities, along with already-planned lignite and coal-powered units, will meet our electrical requirements for the next 50 years.

GSM: Do you find it ironic that Louisiana must haul coal thousands of miles for its power needs when it is the nation's largest producer of natural gas?

Edwards: Yes, there's a better way to do it. Each region should be allowed to use its own energy sources. This would (1) encourage production, (2) result in the lowest possible price for energy, and (3) eliminate the useless waste of energy needed to transport products such long distances. Whether coal, for instance, is moved in slurry pipelines, by rail or by barges, there's a tremendous waste of fuel involved. Or, in the case of slurry pipelines, a great amount of fresh water.

GSM: How do you feel about federal oil and gas policies?

Edwards: Again, there's been some progress at the federal level. There's less fear of environmentalists. And they're moving to deregulate oil and gas prices. But the administration passed up an opportunity to buy Mexican gas because it said $2.60 per thousand cubic feet was too high. Now we're offering $3, but Mexico wants $3.50 to $4. (Editor's note: In late September, agreement was reached on a selling price of $3.625.) Environmental pressure and federal regulations also drove up the price of Alaskan oil due to opposition to the pipeline. The ill-advised actions of environmentalists cost all of us. They refuse to accept environmental changes to produce more energy.

GSM: What's your position in the dispute between railroads and advocates of coal slurry pipelines?

Edwards: Both coal slurry pipelines and rail transportation of coal will be needed in the future to meet our energy needs. Slurry pipelines are far better — but only if the fresh water is available. And they'll never replace rail cars altogether.

GSM: Are we running out of oil and gas?

Edwards: We still have oil and gas reserves the limits of which have not been found. And as prices increase, it will become economically feasible to develop the technology to get more oil from the ground. Every time an oil field is abandoned and called depleted, two-thirds of the oil is still in the ground. New technology and better prices will reopen old fields, and expensive secondary recovery methods can be used. Also, I see shale oil as providing at least a 50-year supply of energy for this country, starting in the mid-'80's.

GSM: What about lignite?

Edwards: It has application in certain geographical locations, but it has a low BTU, and under old prices was totally uneconomical. In regions where it is mined, it can be used for fueling boilers of electric power plants. But it doesn't lend itself to long transportation or to any activity other than fueling boilers.

GSM: Will energy be a factor in the 1980 presidential race?

Edwards: Yes, it is an indispensable factor in gaining full employment, reducing inflation and the growth of our GNP. None of the major economic problems of the nation can be solved without first resolving our energy problem.

GSM: Leaving the field of energy, what do you feel were the major accomplishments of your eight-year administration?

Edwards: On a long-range basis, I'd say our new constitution. On the short-term, it was bringing our budget into balance and having a healthy surplus each year. And from a crass political standpoint, it was managing to fulfill all of the commitments made in my 1971 campaign for governor.

GSM: Were there any major disappointments?

Edwards: I would have liked to have had legislation passed to prohibit strikes in the public sector — with acceptable grievance methods away from the picket line. I predict the major problem of state governments over the next decade will be how to deal with public sector employees in these sensitive areas. □

Has Success Spoiled Bill Brett?

by Tom LeVrier

"Nah, it ain't spoiled me. I'm just a little bit poorer, that's all. For one thing, my wife wouldn't let it spoil me."

We met Bill Brett at his small ranch on the outskirts of Hull, Texas. He lives down a winding road, in a small, rustic, natural-wood home with a large spread out back. His land and stables consist of about 25 head of cattle, five or six horses, a large barn, and a motley collection of hound dogs. He met us at the door dressed in a khaki shirt, a battered cowboy hat, and wrangler jeans stuffed into a pair of worn, pointed-toed cowboy boots. "This place ain't big enough to call it a ranch; it's just a place."

After an exchange of hellos, Brett sat back in a recliner and lit up a store-bought Marlboro Light.

"A concession to success?"

"Nah, I just ran out of hand-rollin' tobacco. My wife has gone to the store to get some more." Then, eyeing the cigarette suspiciously, he said, "I hear they use real tobacco in these things, but I have my doubts . . . no wonder lettuce is so high these days, I think they put it in these things."

Bill Brett, for those who don't know, has established himself as one of the foremost western writers in Texas. He has written numerous stories and published several books, including *The Stolen Steers* and his latest, *Well He Asked Me and I Knowed So I Told Him.* He is currently working on a book about razorback hogs.

Brett writes the way he talks. He's a natural story-teller. Writing in an almost stream-of-consiousness style, he barely allows the reader a chance to take a deep breath. His style is lent validity by a man who has lived the life he writes about.

"I get most of my ideas from other people . . . stories I've heard all my life. I get a lot of my ideas down at the post office. You'll sometimes find 800 or 900 years of living there standing in line. You'll hear some great solutions to the world problems there, and some of them even make sense. I guess I would take more credit if I had thought up more of my stories myself."

Brett is the archetypical cowboy. Long, lean and lanky, he would appear more at home slouched over a saddle in the rain than sitting thoughtfully at a writer's desk. You get the feeling that if Bill Mauldin had decided to draw cowboys instead of G.I. Joe, he would have chosen Bill Brett for his model. In a world of urban cowboys, Texas chic, and the new hybred, the quasi-Willie Nelson styled "longneck," Brett comes through as a breath of fresh air. A taste of the real thing.

Aside from his literary skills, he is considered perhaps the area's foremost authority on folklore of the Big Thicket. He is often asked to attend various historical expositions and county fairs to tell stories and to prove his skill at the ancient art of weaving horsehair rope.

"I like going to talk to grade school kids the most. They've still got imagination at that age. I don't know what happens to it; I guess it gets driven out by the school system.

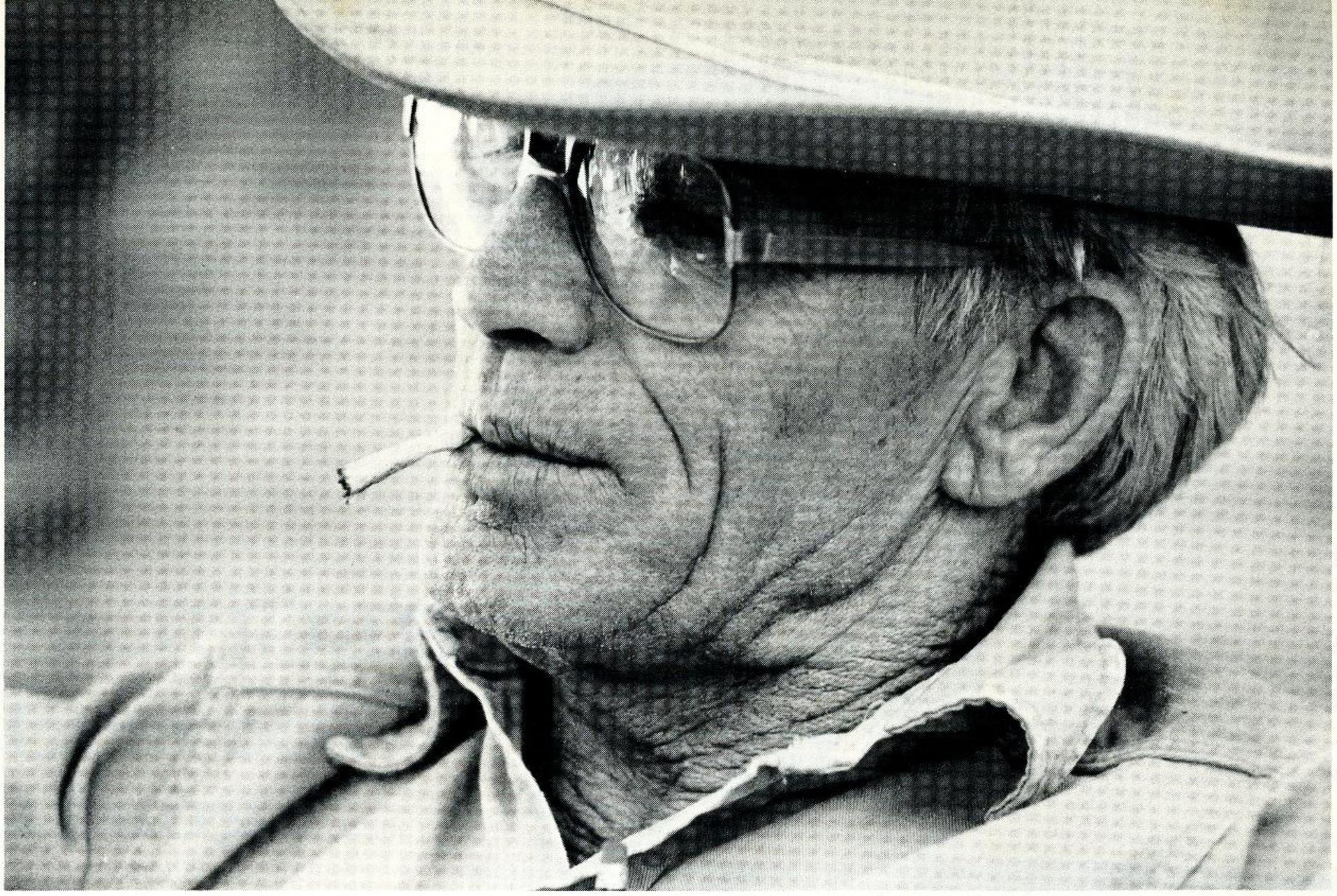
"I don't have any writing habits as such. I just write when I'm inspired, I guess you could say. It don't do me any good to hurry it; it just comes when it wants to. I haven't picked up a pen in six months and I don't worry about it. It don't do no good to worry about it.

"I write at 10 to 12 hours a stretch for a book and about an hour for a story." He then types it in his own idiosyncratic typing style, the two-fingered method he learned in the Air Force.

"I spend most of my time reading, sometimes 12 to 16 hours a day, more than I need to keep up this place."

What does Bill Brett read? Zane Grey? Louis Lamour? Jack London?

"Nah, I read mostly science fiction. They've got more imagination. I like Issac Asimov. I don't like many of the western writers; they don't write it the way it was. It's hard to take them seriously when they're writing about guns that weren't even made at that time, ones that didn't come until 10 years later. They didn't even write about the right kinds of saddles used back then. This show-down stuff just wasn't true. The



Photographs by Rick Campbell

sheriffs would sneak up on outlaws in any way they knew how. The outlaws were tough and they had to be tougher. This Bonanza stuff is for kids.

"Zane Grey was good at description. He could describe landscapes in a way that you could see it yourself, but he constantly had the gunslingers in gunfights and showdowns, and that's just not the way it was. I've only been able to get through one Lamour book. I like J. Frank Doby and I've read everything he's ever done. I also like Mark Twain, particularly, *'Letters From Earth.'* "

Brett dropped out of the eighth grade. ("They said I spent three months in the eighth grade, but I'll be damned if I remember it"), to work in the oilfields. Aside from his roughnecking, he drove a truck and worked as a farmer, deputy sheriff, rancher, ranch foreman, and cowhand in a time before there were fences to block one's path. He recently retired from his position as postmaster of Hull. ("If I would have known retirement was going to be this good, I would have retired a long time ago.")

"I didn't do well in school. I didn't like being inside all the time. I suppose if they would have had it under a tree somewhere, I probably would have stayed. They told me I quit once I had read every book in the library.

"I started writing in 1954 and people saw it and said I should send it off. When the Texas A&M Press started up I decided to send it there. They now arrange a lot of radio and TV shows for me. I go mostly to help 'em sell the book. I figure it's the least I could do since they went to all the trouble to publish it." He recently appeared on a segment of the "Ron Stone Show" on a Houston TV station. Towards the end of the show, Stone asked if he had any comments. Brett replied dryly, "Yes I'm glad I did this show. I wanted to find out if there really was a Ron Stone."

"I've got enough information now to write a book on razorback hogs. They were a very important commodity in their day, the most important source of food around here. They got everything from them — soap, grease, cooking oil. You didn't have vegetable oil then. The Conquistadors valued them more than their horses. The settlers used to drive them hundreds of miles to market. Next to the grizzly bear, the wild boar is probably the meanest animal on either the North or South American continent. They've got those tusks and they know how to use them.

"They're very fast; you got to know how to handle 'em. They band together in a group to fight. I've known one man killed by 'em, 10 horses hurt, some killed, and there's no tellin' how many dogs I've seen killed or wounded by hogs in the Big Thicket. I even heard of a black bear being killed by 'em down here.

"Yeah, I'll get started on that book one of these days. I guess the world won't miss anything if I don't. I won't be missing any meals if I don't write it. To answer your previous question, I would say the only thing that's changed drastically in my life due to writing is some of the people I've been able to meet, people like John Henry Faulk. I never had the chance to meet writers, professors, and artists before and this gave me the chance. I've always had somewhat of an inferiority complex around these types of people. Someday I would like to go to college. It don't matter what I study, maybe literature."

At this, he got up to feed his horses. "I don't miss riding much anymore. I had to stop after I got both knees butchered (operated on). It's like the old fella said: It was fun while I was young, but that's what made me old."

We left him there to finish his chores. As he closed the wooden gate and fastened it with a clack, he said: "You bronchos come back anytime, just make yourself at home. If I'm not here, just come on in the front door. It won't be locked."

Yep, one would be pretty hard-pressed to say success has spoiled Bill Brett. □

REGULATION: Too much of a good thing

by Kim McMurray

In his first inaugural address, Thomas Jefferson said that "a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned."

How "wise and frugal" would Jefferson consider the federal government today? Consider the following:

- In March of 1979 the Federal Register reported that 61,000 pages of government regulations were issued in 1978 — a 305 percent increase in eight years.
- The Council on Wage and Price Stability said in 1977 that the steel industry is subject to 5,000 separate regulations churned out by 29 agencies administering 57 programs.
- The American Hospital Association estimates that in complying with just eight health care regulations in 1976 its member institutions spent $800 million, which added $22 to the average hospital bill.
- Fifty cents of the cost of an average prescription drug made by Eli Lilly & Co., the pharmaceutical concern, goes for compliance with federal rules and regulations.
- It is estimated that, out of the 12 monthly electric bills you pay annually, one is devoted entirely to defraying the cost of government regulation.
- Even hamburger vendors have a legitimate beef: A one-year survey by United Press International found 200 statutes, 41,000 regulations and 110,000 court cases associated with federal, state and local control of ground beef. They added more than four cents per pound to the price of hamburger meat.

In Jefferson's day, no one had heard the phrases "red tape" or "can of worms." The federal government hadn't coined them yet.

Today government regulation, especially at the federal level, is one of the nation's biggest industries. More than 100,000 workers staff the 41 regulatory agencies which have a combined budget of more than $3 billion. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. The heaviest cost is borne by the private sector, which must comply with the many rules and regulations that flow from the nation's capital.

There is nothing wrong with regulation per se. The size and complexity of the nation's economic system makes some governmental intervention desirable. But the kind of arbitrary interference that has been characteristic of Washington in recent years has crippled business investment, stifled productivity, blocked the creation of new jobs and increased consumer prices significantly.

There are any number of studies which show how pervasive and expensive the regulatory machine has become. One of the most-quoted documents was prepared by economist Murray Weidenbaum

for Congress' Joint Economic Subcommittee on Growth and Stabilization. Weidenbaum, a former assistant Treasury secretary, estimated the total cost of regulation in fiscal 1979 at $102.7 billion — $4.8 billion for administration and $97.9 billion for compliance.

Chase Manhattan Bank economists estimated in 1978 that regulation was costing $100 billion — which comes out to $470 for each person living in the United States. To put the figure in perspective, $100 billion is 25 percent of the entire federal budget and is nearly three-fourths of the total annual investment made by the private sector in plant and equipment.

The Business Roundtable released a more specialized study in March, 1979, showing the impact made by the regulatory policies of six federal agencies on 48 major corporations representing nearly two dozen industries. The firms reported some $2.8 billion in directly measurable effects from the regulations in question. This compares with capital expenditures by the companies of $25.8 billion, research and development costs of $6 billion and net income after taxes of $15.5 billion.

One of the most regulated of all industries are the public utilities. Since they are so-called natural monopolies, regulation is designed to keep prices fair and service reasonable in the absence of competition.

The utilities have accepted regulation as a fact of life for many years. In recent times, however, governmental controls have gotten out of hand in the utility business as they have in other areas of industry and commerce. This trend has roughly paralleled the growth of the environmental movement.

A few electric utility companies have made in-depth studies of what regulation means to their customers' monthly bills. Texas Utilities, for example, found that out of the 12 monthly electric bills each customer receives annually, one pays for government regulation.

When Texas Utilities began building lignite plants in 1968, its member companies had to receive one federal approval, one federal inspection, five state approvals and three state inspections. Today the same work involves six federal approvals, eight federal inspections and reports, 11 state approvals and seven state inspections and reports. (They also can expect at least two lawsuits by citizens opposing some phase of any given project.)

Texas Electric Service Company was forced, under the Clean Air Act, to put scrubbers on its lignite plants despite the fact that air around the units would meet ambient air quality standards for the state even without the scrubbers.

Carolina Power and Light Company found in 1977 that it spent $39.5 million to comply with the dictates of five federal agencies. All but $3.5 million of that total was traced to the Environmental Protection Agency.

As of December, 1978, Gulf States Utilities Company had

spent $99.2 million complying with, and responding to, various governmental directives, regulations and pronouncements involving its generating facilities. Another $59.9 million was due to be spent. Most of those amounts are for air and water pollution control.

In 1978 alone GSU devoted $48.8 million to environmental facilities, bringing the company's total investment for anti-pollution activities to $113 million.

Much of this money would have been spent regardless of whether there had been governmental directives. Too often, however, Washington requires costly pollution control equipment that has not been proven effective or even necessary.

One utility in the Midwest was ordered to install scrubbers on a coal plant at a cost of $630 million, with annual operating costs running more than $115 million. This alone would result in a 15 percent increase in the price that the company's customers had to pay for electricity.

Ebasco Services, a company which builds power plants, said recently that regulatory changes were responsible for 78 percent of soaring nuclear and coal plant costs. The remaining 22 percent was attributable to inflation.

National Economic Research Associates said in late 1978 that, in 1990, electric utilities would have to collect an estimated $116 billion in revenues to pay the base costs of electric generating plants. To meet federal air, water and nuclear regulations, the firm said, utilities would have to shell out another $19 billion-plus — about 16.6 percent of the base costs. (And that figure did not take into account the costs for disposing of scrubber sludge and flyash, probably several billion dollars a year.)

Before adjourning last year, the 95th Congress took several steps that will tighten Washington's regulatory grip even more. Lawmakers approved a raft of energy legislation that, once transformed into regulations by the bureaucrats and put into practice by the companies, will increase the cost of electricity and other forms of energy. Lawyers and bureaucrafts were given plenty to do, all at the expense of the beleaguered consumer.

There is widespread agreement that the regulatory process needs to be overhauled. There is **not** widespread agreement as to how that should be accomplished.

Some 200 bills designed to reform the bureaucracy are now before Congress. Whether a consensus will emerge remains to be seen. Public opinion polls show Americans want the regulators brought under control, but lawmakers can't seem to agree on the best way to do that.

If only Thomas Jefferson were here . . . □

Photographs by Ken Haynie and Henry Joyner

Government Regulation Spurs Inflation

By U. S. Senator Lloyd Bentsen
Democrat of Texas

There are few pursuits the modern-day American is free to regulate for himself. Government regulates many facets of our lives these days and the trend is toward more of the same.

In 1955 some 10,000 pages of regulations were published each year in the *Federal Register*. By 1970, 15 years later, that had doubled to 20,000 pages and by 1977 the number of pages in the *Federal Register* had grown to 70,000!

Last year I presided over hearings by the Joint Economic Committee into government regulation. A study prepared at Washington University in St. Louis for those hearings revealed that regulation by the federal government costs consumers, taxpayers and businesses over $102 billion a year. That amounts to almost $500 for every man, woman and child in the country.

Following the hearings I formed a task force of JEC staff members and instructed them to seek out legislative initiatives I could take to root out excessive regulation and lay it to rest.

As the new chairman of the Joint Economic Committee this year I am continuing the work of this task force and have instructed its members to redouble their efforts.

Last year, I introduced a legislative program of six separate bills in the senate. Three of my bills were passed by the Senate and two of these were given final congressional approval and signed into law by the President.

One of the measures signed into law is designed to eliminate overlapping demands made by individual federal housing agencies which lead to an incredible amount of unnecessary paperwork and drive up the price of homes. The other new law reduces strains on the resources of local governments by lessening demands made on them under the Comprehensive Education and Training Act.

So far this year, in the new Congress, I have introduced four anti-regulation bills. They are:

- the Regulatory Cost Reduction Act, which for the first time would require regulatory agencies to meet their objectives through the most cost-effective regulations possible;
- the Independent Agencies Regulatory Improvement Act, which would require independent regulatory agencies of the federal government to comply with a presidential order reforming the process under which proposed new regulations are reviewed;
- the Federal Regulatory Budget Act, which would force the President and Congress each year to put a cap on the amount of regulatory costs each agency can impose;
- and, the Regulatory Conflicts Elimination Act, which calls on the President to seek out regulations that are in conflict or that duplicate each other, then eliminate the one that makes the least sense.

This last Bentsen bill was approved by the Senate last year as an amendment to the Sunset Bill. Although the Sunset Bill did not receive final congressional approval at that time, I intend to pursue its passage vigorously in the new Congress, and I am optimistic about the prospects.

Excessive government regulation fans the flames of inflation. It is one of the four or five key reasons why the cost of living keeps going up so rapidly.

In addition to that, it was just never intended that government in this country — the land of the free — should control our lives to the extent that it does today.

In the words of the late Justice Louis D. Brandeis:

"The makers of our Constitution . . . conferred, as against the government, the right to be let alone — the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized men." □

The Name Of The Game

by Rick Harvin

What's in a name? What's **behind** a name? Buzzard bait . . . persimmons . . . a large skull . . . dreams inspired by "brownies" . . . a woman's name, first *or* last.

Geographical names in Southeast Texas and South Louisiana do have some interesting origins. What's behind a name leads to what's **in** a name . . . and in this region, that leads to some good stories.

Both Texas and Louisiana yield some "name stories" area residents may or may not have heard. Gulf States Magazine doesn't necessarily support or deny these tales, but they all have been passed down by written word and/or word of mouth. If you've heard a different account, let us know.

BATON ROUGE. Most people know about the labeling of Louisiana's capital city, from the French words for "red stick," the boundary marker used to divide the territories of the native Houma and Bayou Goula Indians.

However, after the English gained possession of Baton Rouge as one of the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and made the town part of West Florida, the settlement was renamed. New Richmond, inspired from an English town called Richmond, was the name, but only while the English had possession of the area. When they moved on, the town once again became Baton Rouge.

BEAUMONT. Everyone living around this Southeast Texas city knows the name comes from the French words for "beautiful hill." However, in countryside that is generally below sea level, residents may have to look long and hard to find an honest-to-goodness hill!

There are two name stories surrounding Beaumont and Henry Millard, an ambitious member of a land company during the 1830's.

Millard came to the area and purchased 50 acres of land from Noah Tevis in 1835. A town site was laid out and Millard, in honor of his brother-in-law Jefferson Beaumont, named the site Beaumont.

For the romantically inclined, there is yet another version involving Millard. As the agent was busy working on his new town, he fell in love with a visitor from New Orleans, a young lady named Annette Beaumont.

The love-struck Millard wanted to name his new town "Annette", but a demure refusal from Miss Beaumont, and a firmer negative vote from some of the area's newly-established influential citizens, prevented that possibility. However, there were no objections to using the lady's last name, and the site was dubbed "Beaumont."

CARENCRO, north of Lafayette, Louisiana, supposedly got its name from an Indian belief that a monstrous animal died and attracted many buzzards, or carrion crows, to the area.

CHINA. This Texas town, near Beaumont, has the railroad to thank for its name tag. Just east of Nome, the railroad had erected a water tank and depot.

When the necessity of naming the stop arose, a large clump of chinaberry trees surrounding the depot inspired the name China.

CUT 'N SHOOT. This colorful name was the result of a slight religious dispute among residents of the area, situated not far from Conroe in Montgomery County.

It seems that in July, 1912, a Preacher Stamps of the Apostolic belief wanted to hold a prayer meeting at the local Community House. However, as some of the area citizens claimed to have seen the preacher dancing and visiting saloons, controversy soon arose, splitting the inhabitants into two factions.

The two camps began their showdown on July 20, showing up at the Community House armed and ready to do battle for control of the hall. In the midst of the heated arguments over whether the preacher would have his meeting, legend has it that an 8-year-old boy, the son of Stamps supporter George King, became frightened and exclaimed, "I'm scared! I'm going to cut around the corner and shoot through the bushes in a minute!"

As it turned out, no cutting or shooting occurred. Preacher Stamps held his meeting by some nearby shade trees.

DIME BOX, near Lake Somerville, may have acquired its label from the practice of resident snuff-lovers leaving a dime in their mailboxes in exchange for a container of snuff left by the postman. So it was a "dime box" that lent its name to the town.

DOBBIN, west of Conroe near the Montgomery County line in Texas, got its name, so goes one story, from a term any farmer would know, "ol' Dobbin." *Webster's Dictionary* defines dobbin as "a farm horse; a quiet, plodding horse." So, area animal lovers named the town after a farm favorite, the reliable old work horse.

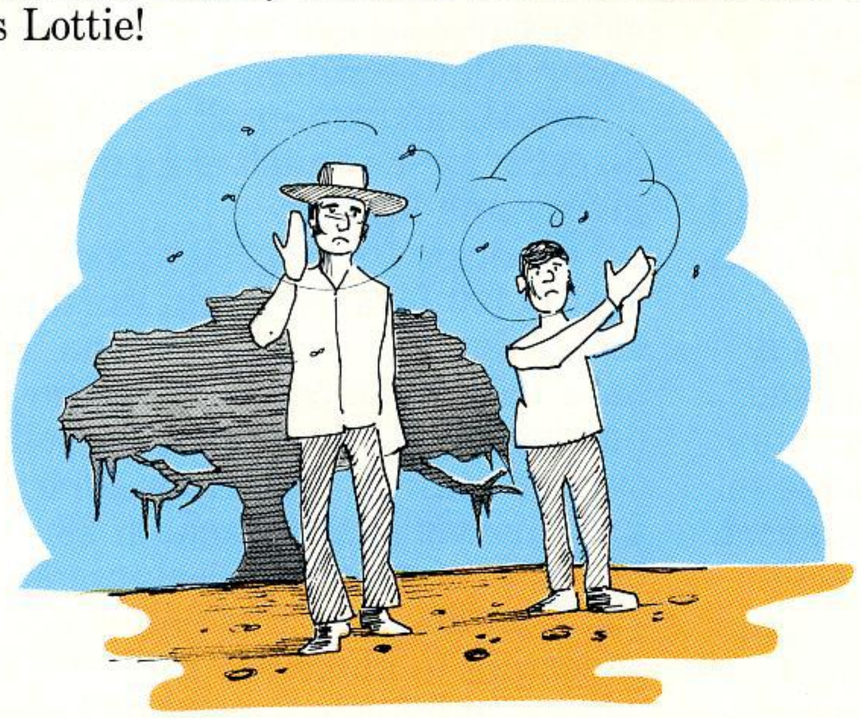
GROSSE TETE. Southwest of Baton Rouge, this Louisiana town got its name from the French words for "big (or fat) head." It seems French explorers found a large skull of an undetermined species and thought it noteworthy enough to name the location after their unusual find.

LACASSINE. This Louisiana town, located just off Interstate 10 between Lake Charles and Lafayette, supposedly got its name from a favorite habit a local Indian chief had. It seems the chief was fond of a drink called "cassine," which was made from berries. Cassine grew to "la cassine," and the area had a label that stuck.

LOTTIE. This Louisiana town, located in the southern part of Pointe Coupee Parish, got its name because of an argument among its citizens.

Residents couldn't agree on a name, and the postmaster-general decided he had to have something to insure people got their mail. So he asked each resident to submit five possibilities in a letter.

After each choice was written on a slip of paper, the postmaster calmly selected one in a raffle. The winner was Lottie!



MARINGOUIN, in Louisiana west of Baton Rouge, gets it label from the common French word for mosquito. The standard French *moustique* is used to designate a small black gnat prevalent in the area.

NOME. The Texas town, not the Alaskan version, had its name changed several times. For various reasons, either natural or man-made, this site was called Wolf Point, Tiger Point, Petry Woods and Carter Woods.

With the coming of the railroad, which delivered many passengers to the resort of Sour Lake, this depot was temporarily called Sour Lake Station. But the railroad wanted another name, so as to avoid confusion, and thus began a town-naming contest involving its employees.

One day a slightly disoriented lady passenger asked if the depot were Sour Lake. "No'm," came the reply. A nearby conductor overheard this and submitted the reply in the contest.

The railroad liked it, changed the spelling a bit and came up with Nome. On May 18, 1903, the post office officially recognized Nome as the name.

PORT ARTHUR. This thriving Texas port got both its name and very existence from one Arthur E. Stilwell.

A man who believed in hunches and supernatural creatures he called "brownies", this wealthy New Yorker knew he needed a Gulf-area terminal for his Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Gulf Railroad line.

Stilwell claimed, in dreams inspired by his brownies, to "see" a town in every detail. So he traveled to the area and, in 1895, had a town site surveyed. Naturally, he named the town after himself, calling it Port Arthur.

Stilwell later wrote it was the only city "ever located and built under diretions from the spirit world."

ROLLOVER. "Merchants" trying to beat that age-old foe, taxes, gave this small Texas community its tag.

Just up the coast from Galveston, on one of the narrowest points of the Bolivar Peninsula, this location was a strategic one for all types of people bringing goods in by ship. Instead of going the regular water route between Galveston and Port Bolivar, where customs officials waited to put a tariff on incoming goods, many of these "merchants" stopped farther up the peninsula.

At that narrow portion of land, these seafarers would take their merchandise — much of it in barrels — and roll it over the ground to the other side. Later, they would pick it up, without having to pay any tariff. The name "Rollover" became a natural for the area.

And then there's Moscow, North Zulch, Cheek, Colmesneil, Pointblank and many more. Never mind that some of the yarns have been embellished, polished and otherwise amended.

After all, these kinds of tales don't have to be historically accurate, only interesting. □

Ils sont

Horace "Toto" Lacombe dined on shrimp stew at Lafayette's Diners Inn as he talked about Cajuns and racing.

"The tracks today that race thoroughbreds, like Evangeline Downs in Lafayette and Delta Downs in Vinton, stem from the bush tracks that operated in this area for years," he said.

"To understand the popularity of tracks like Evangeline Downs, first you have to see a bush track," he said.

Toto knows about both tracks. Although he's been a consumer services representative for Gulf States Utilities for more than 26 years, he's also been active in horse racing as a behind-the-scenes official.

"I used to work on weekends on the Carencro Raceway, a bush track near Lafayette," he says. "I'd either tend bar or barbecue. There were always a lot of people there who'd just bring their quarter horses and wait for somebody to offer them a match race. Then those old farmers in their overalls would start pulling out the bills, and the action would start."

Toto tells of one famous quarter horse, Clyde, who could win races without a jockey.

"They'd tie a rooster and a can of beer on his back, and Clyde would take off, with that rooster just crowing his head off," he says with a fond chuckle.

Toto also tells of a horse owner who stationed his small son behind one of the track's big oak trees with a BB gun.

"He'd tell the boy, 'Son, pass a BB on that horse when I tell you.' Then when they opened the gate, he'd have the boy pop his horse in the rump with a BB shot. In a short, straight race like quarter horse racing, that's usually all the jump you need to win."

The Carencro track runs by a row of stately oaks, providing shade for the spectators. The barn is rickety, and there's a non-descript old bar. But when the quarter horses or the sulkies are running, it's a busy place.

Evangeline Downs is also in Carencro, but it's along the four-lane Highway 167, not the quiet two-lane of the other track.

For 14 years, Toto has been gate-keeper at the track, keeping tabs on admissions and seeing that the state of Louisiana gets its 10 cent per ticket tax on admissions.

The track is an institution in the area, and a larger business than many might realize.

Bob Henderson, public relations director for Evangeline Downs, gives some figures:

"We draw from 3,500 to more than 5,400 fans per night during our spring and summer season. We have more than 500 employees during the season, with a payroll over $1 million. We stable some 1,000 horses at the track, in 23 barns. Last year the track made $33.7 million, and this year we're expecting to make $35 million. We pay $1.4 million to the state in taxes. And one percent of all our Exacta winnings go the state for dispensing to various charities."

Toto gives the visitor a guided tour of the "backside" of the track, the area where the horses are stabled, exercised, groomed and kept happy before the races.

"Sometimes you have horses who need company, so the owner puts a goat or a dog or some other animal

Photographs by Ron Berard Courtesy of Evangeline Downs

by Smiley Anders

partis!

in there with them. It can get so that you have trouble with the horse if its companion isn't around," says Toto.

Some of the grooms live in the backside area. One is Chin, a burly Indian who goes from one track to the other in the state as the seasons change.

"This is his life," says Toto as Chin trudges by on his way to the backside kitchen.

On the side of the grandstand is the area where the horses are saddled and the building where the jockeys stay. Floyd "Red" Ardoin presides over the jockey room. The jockeys are generally young, slim and serious about their work.

"They start out in the bush tracks, and develop in six months to a year," says Toto. "We've had some good riders come out of the Lafayette area."

Charles "Chuck" Comeaux, 23, rides two to four horses each night. He sits reading a racing form prior to the race, calm and experienced.

Vicky Smallwood, one of the few women jockeys at the track, chats with nurse Francine Rhymes before the race. She's been riding at the track just six months, and has a few winners to her credit.

Outside, the grooms and handlers are bringing the horses in for saddling. The first race of the night is due to start soon, and the crowd is gathering.

John Domingue walks by in his red vest, black cap and black leather boots. He's the bugler at the track, playing "Assembly of Trumpets," the traditional call to the post, twice before each race — first to the north and then to the south. He also teaches band at a local school, but for seven years he's been a familiar figure each night to race fans.

As the horses parade out to the starting gate for the first race, Toto takes the visitor backstage to see what makes a racetrack tick.

There are the TV cameras on the roof which provide instant replays in the case of a close race, and the press box filled with sophisticated communications equipment, presided over by Henderson and his crew. There's the booth of track announcer Jay Townsend, who starts each race off with "Ils Sont Partis" instead of "They're off."

There's the complete kitchen, presided over by chef Charles Berzas, turning out steaks and seafood platters for the clubhouse and hot dogs and po-boys for the general admission customers.

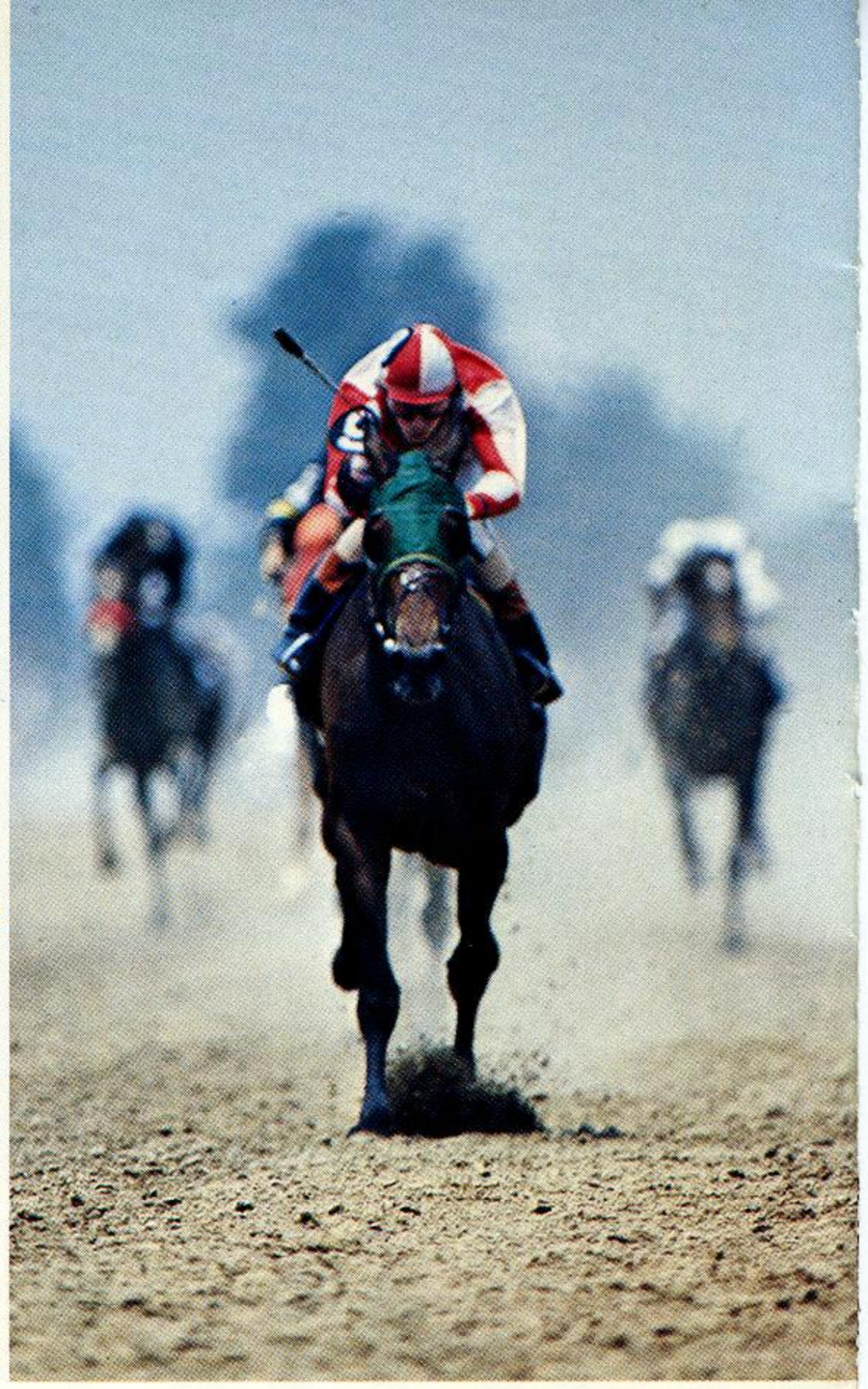
"We don't serve fast food — we serve good food but we serve it quickly," he says of the kitchen operation.

And there's the money room, where the money is counted, and the computer room, where an impressive array of electronic equipment keeps up with odds and betting before each race, flashing the information on a giant board for the bettors.

Toto goes through the clubhouse, glancing at the well-dressed crowd dining at tables facing the track. It's air-conditioned and pleasant, a supper club that just happens to be at a race track.

"Now let me show you where the action is," he says.

Below the clubhouse is the open area where the general admission customers go to sit on wooden benches or folding chairs, watch the races, drink a little beer — and bet.



"You see those guys there?" says Toto, pointing to a couple of gray-haired men in overalls and straw hats. "They're two farmers from around here. They go to the races at the Carencro track,too. Got plenty of money, and love the horses."

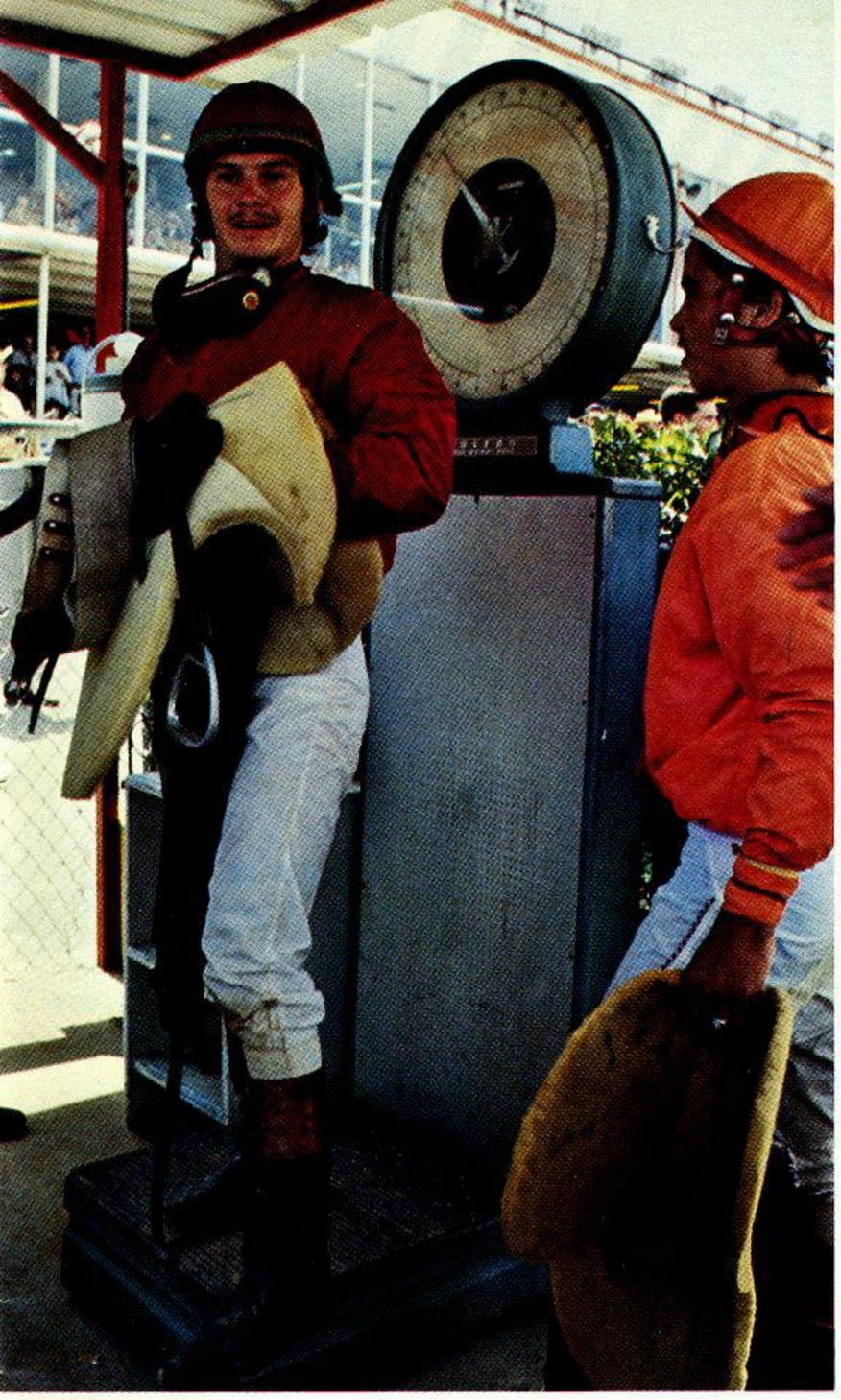
A large black family strolls by, clutching beer and hot dogs. Three young girls in jeans chatter excitedly over a racing form.

It's crowded, sweaty, smelling of beer and smoke. But when the horses dash around the track, there's electricity in the air. And when the race is over, there are whoops of glee from the winners and much larger groans from the losers, as losing tickets fly into the air like a snowstorm.

Toto surveys the hectic scene with satisfaction.

"You watch this a while, and you'll get caught up in it," he says. "You'll learn why Cajuns love the races." □

Mr. Anders, a Baton Rouge business writer, is a frequent contributor to Gulf States Magazine.



Ponies bring millions into Louisiana

Just to say that horse racing is big business in Louisiana doesn't begin to tell the story.

For the facts and figures behind horses and racing in the state, we went to two people — Alan Lavasseur, executive assistant to the Louisiana State Racing Commission, and Buddy Abadie, secretary-treasurer of the Louisiana Thoroughbred Breeders Association. Both are headquartered in New Orleans.

"We did an impact study with a Tulane professor a couple of years back, and found that an ultra-conservative figure on the value of the industry to Louisiana was $500 million," says Lavasseur. "This includes value of the racing plants, the horses, etc."

The study also found that racing attracted out-of-state people into Louisiana who spent $200 million a year, both in betting at the tracks and on hotel rooms, food, etc.

He said that during the 1978-79 fiscal year, ended June 30, bettors at Louisiana tracks had spent $358 million. And the state collected $13.5 million in pari-mutuel taxes alone — not counting license fees, fines, etc.

To encourage the breeding of Louisiana horses, the state Legislature annually appropriates funds to be added to race purses if the races are by Louisiana-bred horses. Last year the commission paid out $1.3 million in such awards.

"We license 20,000 people a year to work at Louisiana tracks, as jockeys, trainers, owners, grooms, etc. And three or four times that many more are employed in the racing industry and the horse-breeding industry," said Lavasseur.

Abadie said an economic survey by his association indicated that the thoroughbred horse breeding industry in Louisiana was a $460 million business, with 9,400 horses involved.

"We had 1,364 foals registered as thoroughbreds in 1978," he said. "That figure should hit 1,700 this year."

He said that supplements to all purses by Louisiana breeding associations and the state totaled $7 million last year, a real incentive for Louisiana horse breeders.

"We're truly growing by leaps and bounds," he said. "Louisiana is becoming a major breeding state, thanks to the incentives given to those who raise thoroughbreds here."

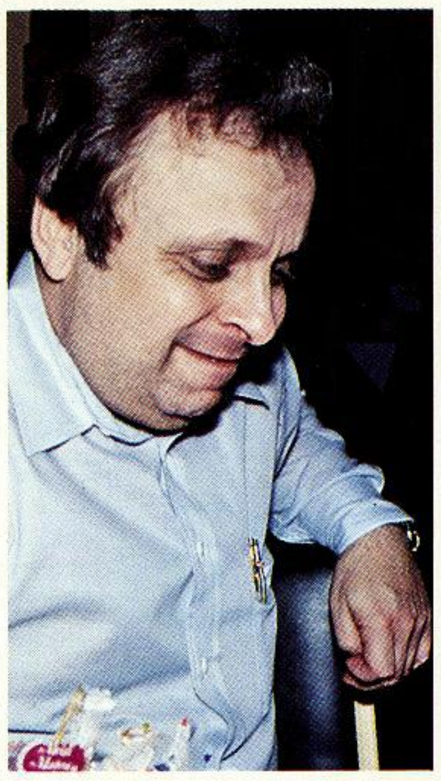
He also estimated that horse racing resulted in $23 million of tax revenue to both state and local governments.

Both men termed the state a hotbed of horse breeding and racing, and predicted it would continue to grow rapidly.

The tracks in Louisiana range from the vernerable Fairgrounds in New Orleans, which opened its 108th racing season this year, to five-year-old Louisiana Downs in Bossier City. But it's significant that the new track, in an area where racing is new to the populace, now rivals the Fairgrounds in revenues.

Other thoroughbred tracks are Evangeline Downs in Lafayette, Jefferson Downs in Kenner, and Delta Downs in Vinton, which runs both thoroughbred and quarter horse races. Linzay Downs in Eunice is a new quarter horse track. □

Pulling The Plug



When I was in radio, a consultant came in one day. He said, 'I know how to make the program better.' I said, 'How?' He said, 'We'll do this, this and this.' I said 'You're right, it may mean more ratings, but how will it make the program better?'

"Then he said, 'I didn't mean better, we're looking at it in terms of dollars.'

"I told him, 'I don't care about dollars, when it comes down to dollars, I'm leaving', and I left."

Bob Ruby was sitting at a table in his Houston steakhouse, talking about his mid-life career change. Bob, like many millions of Americans felt the tug at him for another kind of life, and when he grew tired of what he was doing, he responded.

Ruby is not the picture of someone with a cavalier attitude toward life. If you walk into his restaurant, you'd think he was born to the business.

He directs his staff, worries about a leaking ice machine, answers the phone, and is always with his customers.

Just over two years ago, he had the top-rated talk show on New Orleans radio, *Ruby in the Morning.*

Singing telegrams to the Queen of England, telephone interviews and traffic reports from a mythical Indian named Levi-Prairie-Chickenshoe were parts of his show. He dispensed his views like the world's most opinionated man, which he just may be.

Bob leaned back, crossed his arms, and talked about consultants. "Two greatest businesses in the world, consultants and franchises. I have a third business that I've been thinking of starting.

"It would be a chain called 'Bob's Doctor Stores' because the third good business is referrals. Consulting, franchises, and referrals.

"If you kept a record of every doctor you've ever visited who charged you $20 to send you to a specialist, you'd have thousands of dollars in referrals."

He grinned and went on, "A girl inside has the yellow pages turned to physicians. A guy would come in and say, 'I've got a pain in my shoulder.'

"The girl would say, 'You sure do, I'm going to send you to a shoulder doctor, that'll be five dollars, and I'll call him for you.'

"And they'll say about my business, 'If you want a good doctor, go down to Bob's Doctor Store.' Why the hell should you give a doctor a referral fee? Why not pick up the fee myself? Do you know how much money there'd be in Bob's Doctor Store?"

Bob's arms were spread expansively now, "Franchises, consultants and referrals, three of the most amazing businesses in the world. No investment!"

He paused, ordered more coffee for us and continued: "Living good is the only revenge you get any more; work isn't going to make you wealthy. But you have to do what makes you feel good first. I tell you, I'm 42 years old and this is the first thing I've done that I've really liked. That's a long time!"

Bob stopped, placed a cigarette in a holder, lit it and continued. "What's that old saw? Most men lead lives of quiet desperation? They're fools to do it! If you don't like what you're doing, MOVE!

"They had a big strike in Detroit. The autoworkers say, 'Gosh, times are tough.' Move from Detroit! Go to Colorado!"

Bob was called to the telephone. On the way back, he was stopped by a customer who wanted to introduce him to a client.

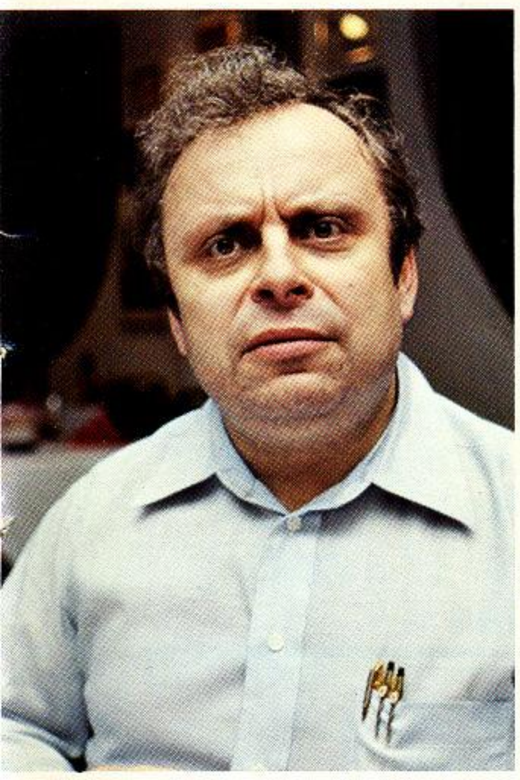
He sat down. The smile he had flashed to his customers was replaced with quiet thoughtfulness. "People are afraid. You're afraid, I'm afraid, everybody's afraid. They say, 'Oh God, I can't move.' It's human nature. How many people have you known that didn't take this job, or that promotion or didn't transfer because the 'kids were in a wonderful school and we didn't want to pull them out.'

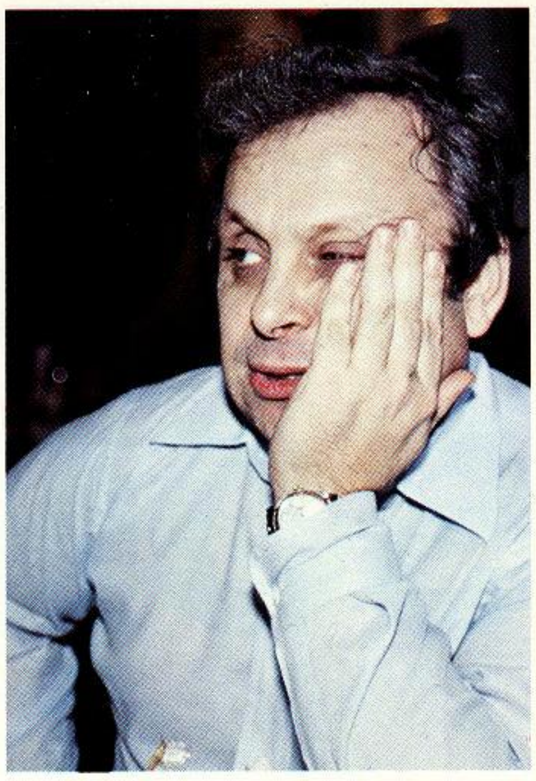
"To hell with that! It isn't going to kill the kids! You make life better for your kids. Sure you pay a price, a terrible price, but you come out with more than you went in. You're going to make a profit personally.

"If you are going to be no good, then no one around you is going to be any good. Everyone is afraid that major change is going to upset everybody around them. Of course it will!"

Ruby admits the notion of bringing a New Orleans steakhouse to Houston is akin to taking coals to Newcastle, but he's making money and credits Houston's prime attitude.

"I always kept my family in a turmoil because I left lifetime occu-





Photographs and Story
by Sonny Carter

pations. I went to New Orleans, not expecting to stay in the radio business for more than a year. I had no experience in radio, but it turned out so well that I stayed.

"When I left Montana to go to New Orleans, I was much younger, I could gamble a little bit. I knew that if I got out of radio, I would have to be able to land on my feet. When the opportunity to open this restaurant came along, it was a chance to give my family something permanently.

"It's difficult to describe the nature of this town. It may be the only boom town left in the country."

A busboy came by our table with an overloaded cart. Bob stopped him and explained that two smaller loads might prevent breakage. It was the lunch hour now, and Bob surveyed the crowd.

"When I finished college in 1959, it was in the middle of a very bad recession. I had a job repossessing cars. When JFK was elected the following year, the stock market rebounded, and it stayed up.

"People were so happy, I think even his enemies were happy. People felt so good, and this is sort of the way it is in Houston."

Bob pointed out the younger crowd in his restaurant than in the New Orleans locations.

"People **believe** Houston is the land of opportunity. Young men, twenty-five, thirty come to this restaurant in Mercedes carrying gold American Express Cards. They came to Houston and they've made it. It's incredible.

"I think one of the hardest choices anyone has to make with their life is whether or not you want to do your very best, or you want to do something that is good where you can slide most of your life.

"It's a hard choice because if you do your best you're going to spend every day in agony. If you slide a little it isn't too bad. When you're young you have to make that decision.

"It comes down to the two types of ambition that I believe there are — that raw ambition, which is strictly self-centered, or that kind of ambition, that kind of vanity that makes you say 'I must find out.'

"It's like going into a cave with a bear. You may get in there and find out you're not what you thought you were, but you must find out, you must measure yourself."

There was a crash from the kitchen. Ruby rolled his eyes, chuckled, and continued, "I have always wanted to do the best at anything I did. You say, 'What the hell is that guy doing in the restaurant business?' I'm sliding now. I'm fading away into a kind of wonderful financial oblivion. I have no pressures on me.

"I've been lucky. Every time I've gone somewhere, it seems to turn out. When we were kids and went to sing in New York in a certain fashion, being in show business, having agents, the whole ambience . . . that's exactly how it turned out.

"I have this half-baked theory that doing the best you can does reward you financially and otherwise.

"Many people dream of a restaurant when they think of changing their career." Bob has this advice, "You have no idea how hard you can work until you get a restaurant. People come in and say, 'My wife says I make a good barbecue. We're thinking about opening a little place.' I say, 'Yeah, that's great, what's going to happen when the dishwasher doesn't show up?' "

With nearly five different careers behind him it seems possible there may be another. Ruby says there may be another restaurant in his future.

"I will do this someday. I'll go to West Jellowstone Montana and open a breakfast place and I'll close at eleven o'clock. Everyone washes his own dishes and I won't make any money, but I won't lose any money.

"I'd love to have a place with about ten stools. Everbody would have their own plate. I'd set up a dishwashing thing, and I'd serve a piece of ham about an inch thick, get triple A large eggs, and I'd cook 'em in the center of a grill where I could stand and shoot the breeze with everybody.

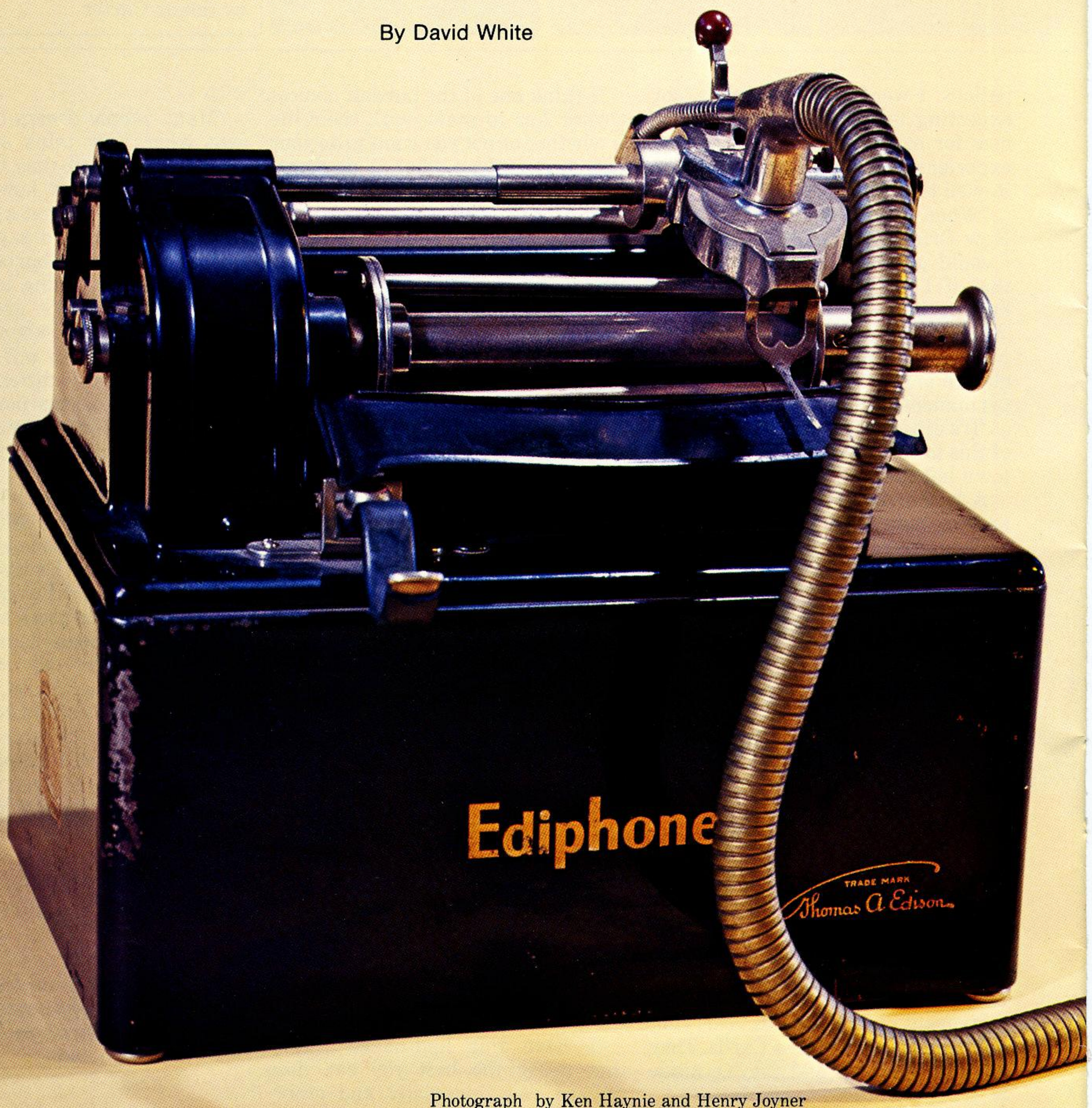
"And I won't have to worry about the dishwasher not showing up!" □

Mr. Carter is a New Orleans-based freelance writer-photographer whose work has appeared in a number of national magazines.

The Other EDISON

Thomas Edison looms larger than life, especially during this Centennial of Light year. But America's greatest inventor also had the soul of a poet and a very human wit.

By David White



Photograph by Ken Haynie and Henry Joyner

As with most people who are dragged from their normal lives and ceremoniously set upon a public pedestal, Thomas Edison has become bigger than life. Eccentric, brilliant and driven by his work, he has been set in the mold reseved for few Americans — Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin and a handful of others.

But the human Edison was exactly that, very human and given to flights of fancy. Sometimes self-effacing and rarely depressed by repeated failure, Edison shows his wit and humor in brief passages from interviews, his ever-present notebooks and a short-lived diary.

For instance, while musing in his diary about the relative literary merits of Hawthorne's **English Note Book,** he wrote, "I don't think much of it. Perhaps, I am a literary barbarian." But in the next sentence he suddenly becomes infatuated with freckles. The scientist Edison says, "I think freckles on the skin are due to some salt of Iron, sunlight brings them out by reducing them from high to low state of oxidation. Perhaps with a powerful magnet applied for some time and then with proper chemicals these mudholes of beauty might be removed."

To the relief of freckle faced people everywhere, Edison's concern changed in the next sentence which dealt with his 12-year-old daughter's parrot that was consuming vast portions of food and remained incapable of uttering a single word.

Shortly after the light bulb went commercial, Edison's staff was charged with the adrenaline of success and was running wildly into new projects. His glassblower, William Holzer, was experimenting with an electric incubator for chickens. When Holzer explained his plans, Edison suggested starting with one hen and one rooster. Holzer balked at the rooster idea. Edison later wrote, "He being a scientific man with no farm experience, I explained the necessity of having a rooster, he saw the force of this suggestion at once.

"Just think electricity employed to cheat a poor hen out of the pleasures of maternity — machine born chickens — what is home without a mother?"

Edison's attorney John Tomlinson enjoyed a special place in the inventor's life and while the two had to present themselves as business-like and upright, they enjoyed sniping between themselves at pompous and aloof associates. One was a telegraph company employee they had come to know as "Prepositium" because he had gotten off that word in a business conversation. In a second meeting, Edison waited outside while Tomlinson met with Prepositium. After a lengthy meeting, Tomlinson staggered out and Edison later wrote, "(Prepositium's) eminent respectability so impressed Tomlinson that when he came out of his office (Tomlinson) asked me to take him quickly somewhere disreputable so he could recover."

Besides his occasional zest for irreverence, Edison had an engaging manner of writing that brought out little witticisms that belonged more to a writer than an inventor. While once discussing a family outing with the children, he described it as "all our folk and a lot of smaller people sailed around for an hour, returned and landed the abbreviated people."

In describing several hot July days, he wrote "Hottest day of the season, Hell must have sprung a leak." That comment was a follow up from the day before when he noted "If this weather gets much hotter, Hell will get a reputation as a summer resort."

Not reticent to slip in a groaning pun, Edison noted on one ocassion that, "Patrick went to the city to get tickets for Opera of Polly, we can comparrot with Sullivans."

Perhaps, most at odds with people's perception of Edison would be his occasional reveries in his diary about nature. Like a Victorian poet, he would write, "The weather being cool went out on veranda to exercise my appreciation of nature, saw bugs, butterflies as varied as prangs chromos, birds innumerable, flowers with as great a variety of color as calico for the African market. Then to spoil the whole two poor miserable mortals came, who probably carried the idea that this world was created for them exclusively and that a large portion of the Creator's time was specially devoted to hearing requests, criticisms and complaints about the imperfections that regulate this mud ball."

Thomas Edison — one of a kind.□

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