

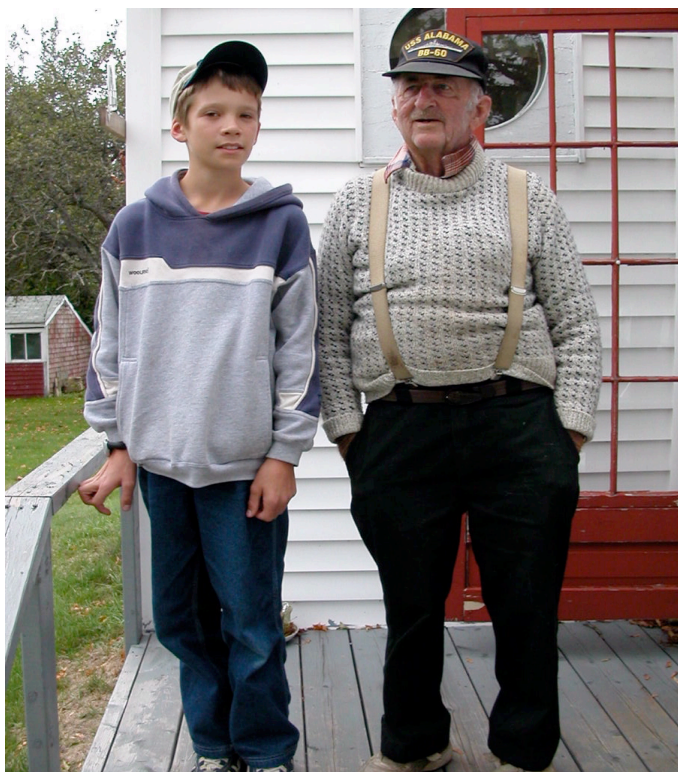
STAN SIMMONS

Interviewer: Randall

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Place: Stan Simmons' home

Transcriber: Peggy Simmons



Stan Simmons was born on February 6, 1917. When he was 11 years old, he moved to Friendship from Bremen, Long Island. He has one adopted child and three grandchildren. He was a lobsterman for 65 years. In addition, he was a pilot and spotted fish for purse and stop seiners for seven or eight years. When he was asked what else he did, he replied, "You name it--everything but deliver babies." He served in the Navy for two stints during World War II in the Pacific, where he delivered guerilla fighters to Japanese Islands, and for two years he was stationed on the battleship USS Alabama, for which he named his lobster boat.

Q: When did you start lobstering?

A: I was as young as five years old. My father set three traps for me on one of the islands where we were living. He and I would pull them every day. That is my first time of trying to catch a lobster. I was only five and six and seven years old.

Q: How long have you been lobstering?

A: Approximately 60-odd years.

Q: Why did you become a lobsterman?

A: At that time there was not much else to do in this area but dig a clam and catch a lobster, and that is what I had to do. I would go lobstering in the summertime, and the rest of the season I would probably grab my clam fork and make a few dollars that way.

Q: What was your job on the boat?

A: When I got big enough to handle a boat, I had my own boat. I was the owner and proprietor, the captain, the engineer, and I went alone.

Q: Do you have someone who lobsters with you?

A: No, I didn't, but the last few years that was the coming thing. You could set more traps and go farther out at sea, so in the wintertime I used to take a man to help me. Other than that, I was alone, by myself.

Q: Who would you get if you wanted help?

A: Anyone who had been around the water like myself, or sometimes I could get somebody who had a day off from other work, and they would give me a hand.

Q: Is lobstering a tradition in your family?

A: Yes, more or less. My brother was a herring fisherman. Sometimes he would go lobster fishing, and if not lobster fishing, sometimes in the winter he would go fishing crabs, which he was about the only one who did it in this area. But he made a pretty good dollar at it, so he did that for years. But in the summer he would go catch sardines for the factory.

Q: Describe your boat.

A: My last boat was 31 feet, and I had two other ones smaller previously. One was 28

feet. The first boat I had was a dory, 12-foot long, and it was powered by a pair of 8-foot oars. That was my first boat. My boat was just a regular lobster boat that they have along the Maine coast to catch lobsters with inshore. That was long before fiberglass was even thought of. Four-hundred horse power Buick engine, which was the fastest boat in Friendship at that time. She would do about 27 miles per hour. It was a plain gasoline Buick engine.

Q: What is the name of your boat, and why did you name it this?

A: *USS Alabama* because in World War II I spent a few years and many months in the Pacific. That's where we were located, almost three years. That was the name of my ship I was on. She got me back here, and I said maybe my little boat will get me back there. And she did.

Q: What equipment did you carry on board?

A: Everything that the regulation book calls for--horn, lights, everything you were supposed to carry at that time.

Q: Describe your lobster traps, size and weight.

A: When I first went lobstering, they were all made of wood--oak, spruce wood--and you had to go in the woods and cut the spruce yourself. And then you would make the trap and bore holes and put it together, which required more holes, and then, of course, you had to buy your laths at the mill. They were also oak and spruce-- I mean spruce and pine--and then the sills. The boughs, you had to go in the woods and cut smaller boughs off bigger trees and bend them and make your own traps. Unlike the traps today, these were square and round on the top, and that was quite a job, and you would have to work all winter to make a hundred traps.

Q: Describe how you set your traps and where.

A: Years ago when I first started until the time I quit, you used to know where the hard bottom was. There was a lot of mud on the bottom, acres of it, and rock piles in shoals, and we had to pick out the hard bottom and set our traps on the hard bottom because in those days if you set them on the mud, you'd get nothing but little small crabs. I don't know why, but today they don't have to set them on the hard bottom. They can catch lobsters on the hard bottom, but I think there are so many lobsters crawling around, they're everywhere. You can go out now and dump a load of traps most anywhere and be in the lobster business.

Q: Did you lose any traps?

A: Oh yes, we would lose some in the hurricanes. One year back in 1930 or so, I lost

about 60 in one place. In September we get these strong winds, hurricanes, and we didn't call them hurricanes, we called them a line breeze in those days. Finally we got educated, and they told us they were hurricanes, but that was the worst one I can remember.

Q: When did you pull your traps?

A: In those days we pulled the traps every other day. If we were in deep water, we sometimes wouldn't get them pulled more than once a week. It's according to how the weather was, but in shore in the summer we could pull them every day.

Q: How did you tell which traps were yours to pull?

A: Well, each person has his own color, and you try to be creative because you would want to know to paint your buoys a different color from other fisherman. That was how you could tell it, and also you would have each buoy branded with your name and number supplied to you by the state. My buoy color was red and orange, but another fellow moved into this area and took a color like mine, so instead of having any difficulty with him, I changed my color to white and orange, so then we didn't haul the wrong traps.

Q: Did you use toggles? Explain how they work.

A: Yes, we usually used toggles. Some places they don't, but I don't understand how they don't get fouled up. The reason you use a toggle on it is because it keeps the rope from sliding to the bottom and getting fouled up with the rocks. The buoy will hold the rest of it up to the top of the water so none of it drags on the bottom. That's the object of a toggle.

Q: What do you use for bait?

A: Like today the most standard bait would be herring. But some people--I've done it myself--we'd go in the coves where there was a shallow channel, and you could see bottom, with a spear and spear our own bait--flounders, sculpins--and we would spear our own bait and use it for the next day to haul with.

Q: Describe a typical day.

A: Well, if I couldn't get aboard my boat and be started to go down the river by sunrise, I was late. And if I ever had trouble with my engine and she refused to start in the morning and the sun was up, I was pretty disappointed, so I rowed right back to shore and tried the next day. I never liked to go late. In the last of my going I used to go about six or eight miles below Monhegan, which is about 20 miles from here. In the

wintertime and in the summertime I used to go just from the mainland and around the islands. That would be about five, six, seven miles from home.

Q: Describe what you do when you catch a lobster.

A: Well, you haul your trap, lay in on the wash board, pick out the little ones you might see that you know won't go, and then you pick out the big ones that you know are legal and put them in a little box where you used to plug them by putting pegs in the claws. They outlawed that, so now we use rubber bands. So we would put them in the box, and the ones we were in doubt about (if they were big enough or not) you would measure them and throw the short ones overboard; so when you got done, you kept just your legal-sized lobsters. You would put the bands or stick the plugs in the claws, which we haven't done for eight or ten years.

Q: Explain notching lobsters.

A: If you get a lobster and it's covered with eggs, which are on the bottom--a mass of fine shelly things, semi-shelly--that's a female, and you're supposed to throw that one overboard. And when you do, you cut a little v in her tail and throw her back, so she can reproduce some more lobsters.

Q: What other kinds of fish get caught in your traps?

A: I have caught at times scallops, sea urchins, flounders, small codfish, other types of fish, but mostly just crabs.

Q: What do you do with them?

A: We would clean the boat up with plenty of water on each side of us, of course, and then go into the market and sell to our local dealer. We usually stood by one dealer. For about all of my going, we sold to one place.

Q: Where do you take your lobsters at the end of the day?

A: I would bring them into Friendship Harbor and sell them to the same dealer or the same place about all of my going. I supplied him with lobsters like several others did.

Q: Who determines the price you get for them?

A: The price was very, very low. I have sold lobsters for 12 cents per pound, and then they'd go to 12 and 17 cents. In the summer if they were 25 cents a pound; it was a good price. And in the winter, if you got 40 cents a pound, that was a good price. Quite a bit different than it is today.

Q: What is a normal haul for a day?

A: I had 300 traps, and I would haul 150 a day and 150 the next day. Then I'd have to wait three or four days for the lobsters. I'd go out clamming so that I could pay for fuel and bait. But today with these modern things that they have, you could haul 250 a day.

Q: On a really bad day?

A: Oh, I've seen a bad day when you would get 20 pounds.

Q: A really good day?

A: I have got as high as 741 pounds. That would be small, compared with what they get today.

Q: How does the weather affect your fishing?

A: When it's been awfully rough with a heavy sea on, the lobsters don't seem to crawl as well as when the sea is moderate.

Q. How has lobstering changed since you began fishing?

A: It has changed tremendously. If people could come back to earth and see how the fishermen were operating and what they operate with, they would be some awfully surprised, just the difference from the time that they went. Instead of a row boat with oars, they have boats with 600-horse power motors in them and go 30-miles an hour and go 25 miles from port. They can have 800 traps instead of 150.

Q: What do you like most about lobstering?

A: To tell you the truth, I never was in love with it. But I had to do it. I have done other things that I liked a lot better. I had to do it to make a few dollars to get by the year with. I never was all wrapped up in it. Some of them live lobstering night and day. I never was that wound up with it.

Q: What do you like least about it?

A: That I had to do it. You'd get done hauling and look in the bucket and find out you had just about enough lobsters to pay for your bait and gas. I didn't like that. But when I could haul and found out I had a pretty good catch, I felt kind of pleased with myself.

Q: What happens when it's foggy?

A: Well, I didn't have a compass for twenty years. I went around the shoreline mostly.

Finally my mother bought me a 3-inch compass. I remember she gave \$18 for it. I don't know as I ever referred to it too many times, but I had to have it aboard; that was part of going lobstering. Sometimes it was mighty handy.

Q: What kinds of problems have you experienced at sea?

A: My engine has stopped. Usually I had just a little simple engine. Sometimes you had spare parts aboard, and sometimes you didn't. If you didn't, somebody would come across you and tow you into port, four or five miles.

Q: What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you while you were lobstering?

A: I don't think I've ever run aground. I might have chipped my keel two or three times. I've never made a bad miss or run aground. At times in the course of a year, I would lose from 10 to 40 traps.

Q: Describe your most memorable time fishing.

A: One early winter I was broken down by Monhegan, and it was blowing real hard, so I had my jigger sail up. A jigger sail is a little sail that you stick up in the stern of your boat, and it kind of steadies your boat, more or less. She broke down, and I didn't have a spare one with me. It broke in two--it was the rotor inside the distributor. Instead of being in one piece, it was in two pieces, so I rolled around awhile. And not having anything to wrap it, not tape or anything, but I finally unwound a piece of rope and made a little rope that was just as big as thread--like you sew a piece of cloth with. I took that thread and put the two pieces together and wound it around there and knotted it so that it would hold and stuck it back in my distributor again, and it seemed solid. And, by George, I put the switch on, and she went. She ignited and at a low rate of speed, but I didn't dare to give it any more throttle, afraid I might put too much pressure on my motor. So I come in at about two miles an hour, but I got in after dark.

Q: Do you lobster in the winter?

A: Yes, I did. I liked it better than summer. I used to go where I didn't have much company, in fact, no company at all for a few winters, all by my lonesome.

Q: How often do you eat lobster?

A: I would get a lobster everyday when I was lobstering. And I wish I could afford it today. I love them.

Q: Do you have a favorite way of preparing it?

A: No, just cook them up and put them on the table, and I will do the rest. I took crackers and milk on the boat and have a lobster. I wasn't too fussy whether he was legal or illegal, and I know they taste the same. I would break his tail off--I didn't hit him over the head and stun him--and his claws off, and would lay him on the hot manifold of my engine because she being a gas-burning engine, so the manifold was hot, and they would cook in their own juice. And I'm telling you, if I was at it today, I think I'd try that same recipe. It's lovely.

