Name of person interviewed: Paul Swain [PS]

Facts about this person:

Age	74
Sex	Male
Occupation	Government port agent, former fisherman, auctioneer, lumper
If a fisherman, Home port, and Hail Port	New Bedford/Fairhaven, MA
Residence (Town where lives)	Paul Swain: 24 Acorn Rd., New Bedford 02740
Ethnic background (if known)	Newfoundlander

Interviewer: Janice Fleuriel [JF]

Transcriber: Azure Dee Westwood [ADW]

Place interview took place: 3rd Annual Working Waterfront Festival

Date and time of interview: Friday Sept. 22, 2006, 3pm

INDEX/KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS

Lumper; auction; Auctioneer; port agent; nicknames; Newfoundland; scallopers/ing; Norwegians; interviewing fishermen; taking samples from catch; comradery/jesting on waterfront and at auction; NOAA/NMFS; dealers; buyers; early fisheries management; techniques for lumping; shifting roles of port agents; wood to steel boats; sense of trust; tight restrictions; vessel/permit values; family fishing history; evolution of electronics; exhausting work; "The Grip"; Long Island; new auction less personal; fish quality grading.

INDEX

[44:40] Exhausting work; “The Grip” (common wrist/hand injury from scalloping); new fisherman (greenhorn) treated bad, poor sleeping arrangements.

[47:40] Long Island port sampling, bunker fish processing and sampling bycatch; black workers on LI; enjoyed working temporarily on LI, some descriptions of the place.

[50:43] Taking ferries on LI; used to fill in at auction to replace sick father; horseplay at auction made it fun; special atmosphere at auction; local characters.

[53:58] Auction was where you could see everybody from all walks of society; lumpers would get job assignments there; lumping arrangements to work with less men but get paid more; nicknames for everyone on the waterfront back then.

[56:55] PS and other community members made a list of over 300 nicknames that were used; no longer use nicknames, may be coordinated with loss of live auction; new auction is boring, electronic, less interaction; PS tried new business of fish inspections and grading which eventually failed.

[59:49] Explanation of fish grading system; PS gave birth date; wishes Festival visitors to know working on the waterfront is hard, dangerous work and workers earn the money they make.

[62:26] [End of interview]

[62:33] [End of Audio]

TRANSCRIPT

[Start of Audio]
[00:00]

[JF]: This is Janice Fleuriel interviewing Paul Swain at the 3rd Annual Working Waterfront Festival. Today is Friday, September 22 and the time is 3pm. I know that this is your second time being interviewed as I understand it and you are a retired auctioneer.

[PS]: Well retired, I'm actually retired from the Federal Government. I did the auctioneering on the side. The purpose for me doing it was that my father was very sick and he couldn't do it, so I'd do my government job and then I'd go up on the Board and take in the bids then. And once the bids were over, I'd go back to my regular job. It was kind of a conflict of interest.

[JF]: Well before we get too much into that, can you just re-cap for me what you were telling me, a little bit about your family background and how you ended up in the industry.

[PS]: Sure, my father was a Newfoundlander and they came to Boston and they heard about New Bedford expanding and being lucrative and between 1925 and 1930; a lot of us started coming down here and my father established here – we were all born in New Bedford after that, my father first lived on Sycamore Street and then we moved to Dewolf Street, still the same basic part of the city.

[JF]: What was the second street?

[PS]: Dewolf Street.

[JF]: And how do you spell that?

[PS]: D-E-W-O-L-F. And right in that neighborhood there were Newfoundlanders from one end to the other. There were the Saunders, the Swain's, the Houlahans [?] and the Pennagases – the whole slew of us in the same neighborhood.

[JF]: So was there still a sense of their culture?

[PS]: There used to be at Christmas time especially. They used to do… well, what we're known as is "two-boaters". And two-boaters come from the expression that one trip from Ireland to Newfoundland and then from Newfoundland to the United States. So while they are in Newfoundland, which my father came from there, was born there, they developed this Irish – there are little villages in Newfoundland and you swear to God you're in Ireland because the brogue is so bad.

[JF]: I was there once in a place called Ferryland.

[PS]: Ferryland? Where was that near?

[JF]: Down from St. John's.

[PS]: Well my father was down from St. John's about 15 miles, Cabot [?] which was called Capelin Cove before that.

[JF]: All I remember, we were talking to this man, and we could understand him, he had an accent. But him and his son started talking; I thought I had gone to like Shakespeare days. I didn't know what they were saying but I knew it was some sort of English.

[PS]: [speaks jokingly in the similar accent]. I used to mimic my father and he used to get mad at me. We used to…I had a friend come to the house and my father would say something and "what did you're father say?" Because he was fishing then and the brogue was real thick. But as he got away from it, he slowed down. Because they all talk fast – they talk 30 miles per hour.

[03:16]

[PS]: So we used to have around Christmas time, a big party at somebody's house. Just like – it was very clannish then. And there would be Irish jigging, and a guy on a little concertina – he'd be there. The man had paws on him about that big. And he'd be squeezing that thing and stomping and I swear to God I thought the piano was going to fall over because he was stomping and the floor was going up and down so bad. But I learned the Irish jig from one of those guys and I used to do it but I'm getting too old for it now. You have to have good strong legs and good wind. So that's how we started and Newfoundlanders came down here. Then they progressed and the fleet started getting larger and everything else. You could tell there was a Newfoundlander part of the fleet because all of a sudden the names were Newfoundland names, not towns or anything but the wives names, or something like that. Whereas the other half, the same time coming in, were the Norwegians, so they were the scallopers mostly and the Newfoundlanders were all dragger fishermen.

[JF]: So your father was a fisherman?

[PS]: Yeah, in fact I saw his… his entrance into the United States, he was known as a cod fisherman. That was his title coming into this country. Cod fisherman! Because that's what he was in Newfoundland. Because he came from a little town; a beautiful spot down there in what they call Cabot. I took a picture, one of those pictures where you take three pictures? So I stood over here and it was like a big, huge cove and when I went there, I had lunch with one of my aunts in the house that my father was born, so it was still there, yeah.

[JF]: I won't share all of my stories, when we were there they had those cod jiggers. I still have one.

[PS]: Oh yeah? I never did jigging but Lennie Roache, he did it. My father never said much about Newfoundland, but my mother come from Tourbay [?] which was just north of St. John's, still on the Avalon Peninsula there. They never met until they got to the United States.

[JF]: In New Bedford?

[PS]: No, in Boston, in Dorchester. 15 miles in Newfoundland is like a thousand miles…. Once you drive out into Newfoundland, you go back in time, I think. My cousins, they all just went back this summer – they all loved it. I have a cousin that goes there every year, Aquafort [?]. Aquafort [?] and Renews [?], they are all down around Cabot. There's some crazy names down there and towns. Joe Bat's Arm and stuff like that. They are crazy. I won't take over here though, I'll let you….

[06:11]

[JF]: There's all kind of interesting directions we can go, but I know that maybe you can fill me in a little bit on – you said you had government work – but what you really wanted to talk about today is the auction.

[PS]: Well, I wouldn't talk about it first, because once the… I moved up in the ranks from my job. I was what they call a port sampler when I first started. That was in '57. I got out of the Service in '56 and I tried fishing but I didn't like it. I took a job on shore. But the following summer, all my friends were making pretty good money – pretty good money at that time was about $7-8,000 – well I was only making $4,500 working for the government. That's per year, mind you. It was $65 every two weeks take home. So I was very jealous of them in a sense so every spring on Memorial Day, I would go out and

make a trip. That cured me for another year! I went back to my regular job, then once – they give you a probation period, once you get over that, they either have to get rid of you or keep you. I had already had some previous time on another government site, so they had to hire me within 3 months or whatever it was. So I came on in '57 and I've been there ever since.

[JF]: And you called that a port sampler?

[PS]: Port sampler. What it was, was a person went down and took all the fish and took the fish scales for age and growth, the otoliths for age and growth, stuff like that. And then as I grew up in the ranks, they called it – they changed it, they changed it three or four times, you know the government, paper work, it changes. We were Fish & Wildlife when it started for five years. Then it went to… I don't know what it went to, but it ended up National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, yeah. What's NOAA, National…

[JF]: Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Yeah.

[PS]: And then I ended up being the fishery reporting specialist. And what that entails is you go to the auction every morning and you have a personal card for each boat that is there and you'd interview the guy. And what you would ask him is when he came in, when he went out, how long he fished, and stuff like that. And you'd write it all on these IBM cards. In the old days they had these IBM cards that had circles all the way around them.

[JF]: The rectangles, the little holes?

[PS]: Yeah, all the way around. You'd do those and then they'd go to Woods Hole after and they'd take care of them over there. And that's how we used to do our interviews and find out about their fishing effort, where they fished and all that. Because when you take that interview, you had to take it back to the office and put it into a 10x20 square so you have what they call Statistical Areas. 526, 529… you still call it by those areas, by these Statistical Areas there.

[09:06]

[JF]: So that refers to a spot of water?

[PS]: Yeah, a spot about 15x20, because the blocks were… I don't know if you've seen the coordinates on the chart, you come down and it will say 41, and this will be 40, and this will be 39, this will be 38. So you'd put in there 41, 39 in block A, B, C, D so you pinpoint it right down to one little block. And this was the honor system. I like to bring that up, because the honor system worked real good until we got the Russians, then we started getting disgruntled guys and they wouldn't give us interviews but they were very few and far between. Everybody else was pretty cooperative. Once in a while you get a bad egg, but when I had that bad egg, I'd make sure that every time he was in, I would at least ask him for that interview because I didn't want to get to a conference or something, put his hand up and say, "They are afraid to interview me in New Bedford." I didn't want that against us.

[JF]: And what would make somebody a bad egg? Just not willing to talk to you?

[PS]: Well, not willing to talk, well, some used to lie a little, even today I don't blame them. If I had a hot spot – especially scalloping – if I had a hot spot, I wouldn't tell anybody. We used to make samples on scallops especially – that was one of the main reasons I got hired – they had these scallop boxes, like an apple box? They would put those aboard the boat, they'd be an orange color and they would say "National Marine Fisheries Service" and the guys would fill it up with the shells and when they came in, we'd have a board about this big and it would have a bunch of counters, 5mm apart, and we'd measure the

scallops and figure the age and growth out of that. That's what they did on that. Sometimes I had in a month's time, over 20 of them, boxes. Let me tell you, they used to stink, because they'd come from the bottom, the smell, some of the guts still in them. So I used to pack them, where I worked, the Custom House, there's a chimney there, I used to pack them there, and people used to be walking down the street and when the wind would come around they used to say, "What in the devil is that odor?!" There's me over there sampling away. To get back to the part of the auction we really liked: I thought it was so unique. You're really close with everybody in that room – you see how big it is? Well imagine that being like this [gestures] with people. Shoulder to shoulder. But they had a position for the buyers to be up there. But they had the lumpers, they had… you'd see from somebody no good to a lawyer or banker in there; just about anybody in the world you'd find in there. All smoking like you can't imagine. It was so thick.

[JF]: Were they smoking everything from cigars to cigarettes?

[11:58]

[PS]: Yeah, no, mostly cigars. That was quite a hectic job because you had to learn the guys by his voice. You couldn't turn around, you had to know him by his voice. You'd be taking these bids, erasing, and then as he would give the last bid, you would give a new initial his – like Tichon [?] would be "R" and Acushnet Fish [?] would be "A" and… LBD, what was he, he was a different one altogether. And they didn't coincide with the alphabet they represented, I think the only one was Acushnet Fish [?]. Everybody else had a different initial. Some guys, they'd get in there, especially on scallops, the boat would be loaded with all scallops and they got their hail and where they go them, and the guy would say, "Give him 550". And the other guy would say, "550 across the board." So you go and erase….

[JF]: So you're writing the initial.

[PS]: So you're writing the new price then you write the initial down at the bottom. Wipe the other guys and put his. You just about get back and the guys would say, "Give him 560." So you'd go back and forth and it was really hectic. And then, the part that really got me was we had a hurricane season. Well that board isn't very big, like a slate blackboard, when there would be a hurricane, there would be 50 boats coming in. And they would have 50 up there, on the board you'd have 3 in one spot, or 4 sometimes. They probably wouldn't have much fish but they still – according to the City contract or the Union contract – they had to go on the board. So if they had 500 pounds or better, they had to go on the board. And you know it's pretty hectic, you go there and most of them have haddock, cod, flounders, yellowtail and so on, all the species there – and you'd have to go down each one as they give you a new bid.

[JF]: So each boat would have his own column?

[PS]: Yes, his own column.

[JF]: And each species under there?

[PS]: Then the next boat. So some of those columns had three in there. I know they are still up there in the records in the old office on Second Street, the Custom House. We used to keep them all; I want to go back and find one of those days work that had about 50 boats, 45, because of the hurricane scares.

[JF]: So all that information was recorded onto a sheet?

[PS]: Oh yeah, that was part of our job too – want to get back to the government job – we would have to go and we'd have to take every boat with its hail and the price and the

value, take it back to the office, alphabetize it, the pounds had to equal this way and that way, then we'd call Boston with the landings. At that time it was blue sheet called the Boston Market News, then we'd send that to Boston and they would… it would go all over the country. So we had to do it, places like Provincetown, Newport; we all had to report the landings there.

[15:10]

[JF]: Was that a legal requirement?

[PS]: Yeah, that was all part of the job. That had to be done by 9 o'clock or so, so you were kind of hectic sometimes when got to get them alphabetized and make them agree down and across. It was quite a job there, and hectic.

[JF]: I'm trying to visualize it a little bit. So maybe say there is 30 boats up there and each or a lot of them have some say haddock.

[PS]: Yeah, right, they usually have more than one species.

[JF]: Would the bidders bid on one boat at a time or one species?

[PS]: They could change one species. They could bid on the haddock and say 910 or 950. When they first started, they were in increments of 05. Then they went to 10 finally because guys would say, "Give them 05!" And a guys got 10 there so you have to go 15 so they did it that way.

[JF]: And if they bid say on the haddock, were they bidding on the haddock from every boat or could they chose?

[PS]: No, just that particular boat. That initial was down at the bottom. If you go over into the room – when they rebuilt that back, they asked me and John Linnahan [?] we came over and put up some of the boats with their phony hails so you could see it there. If you go behind everything, you'll see the names of boats there.

[JF]: Ok. And hail?

[PS]: The hail, it's an estimation of their catch. Nobody knows exactly what they had, but them fishermen were pretty good; they knew what they had. If some part of it was missing, they wanted to know the story. And the other part that was comical, when the auction is over, you have say ten boats and you only have so many places to go unload; everybody has different signals, this and that; one means go way down, the other one means go this way, and it was like a race to see them going down there! All the boats ["vroom" sounds] to get there to get the first door, because if you don't get the first door, you don't start unloading until noon time. A lot of the times it was near collisions as they went south.

[JF]: And would it be that say maybe one bidder would get one boat and maybe another bidder would get another boat?

[PS]: Yeah but usually you had two big buyers; they would buy the bulk of it. At that time when I was there it was LBD and Tichon [?]. They used to buy… LBD had four stalls to unload, so if he boat ten boats, you still went down there and two of them had to wait. And back in those days, it wasn't 20,000, it was usually 80,000 or 90,000 and it takes a little time to unload those. So it was really quite a thing. I even lumped; that's how Jimmy Dwyer and I met, because he became a lumper in the early '60's I think it was. And we used to work Saturdays – Saturdays were nice because I had to work every other Saturday and the government wouldn't pay me for that Saturday, they give you compensation, so if you work four hours there, you get eight hours off during the week. But you didn't get paid for it. So that's the day I'd go lump. I lumped quite a few boats over the years. I had my pitch fork.

[18:32]

[JF]: Yeah, was it your very own?

[PS]: Oh yeah, everybody has a style with their pitch-fork at the time. I had a four-pronger which it cut down… four-pronger usually the prongs were about that long, cut them down to about that long, yeah like six inches. If you have them too long, you go through one fish and you go into the other and you rip it. And they don't like to have ripped fish, you know. Almost like #2 fish.

[JF]: And all the species you can do that with?

[PS]: Yeah, oh yeah, the only one I never really did that with was butterfish because butterfish they are small. But most of the haddock and cod and yellowtail and flounders, they are good sizes and you can pitch fork them in. And they are packed in there pretty good. It's really quite a treat when you take all those boards out and there's a fish and they don't call out because it's all packed in ice. So you have to break it. In fact, one picture that's not around here very much, and I've had the lucky part of all this… I'd go get them. I have a picture aboard a scalloper which shows all the pin boards taken out of the stalls, the pens, and there's all the bags of scallops. They are about seven foot high and there's at least 3-4 in front like that but it goes all the way back. So to someone who's never seen those - went down on my brothers boat and took a picture, I had a guy stand there and he was over six foot so you could see the difference between the… so I have those among my collection.

[JF]: I get the impression packing the stuff on the boat is a little like the technique – I mean you have to have the same type of skills that you would to build a stone wall or a wood pile.

[PS]: Oh yeah. Well some are very fussy. Most of the flounder you had to put them white side up.

[JF]: Why?

[PS]: I don't know, they claim the body and the blood drain out. But they all had to be white side up. So you go down there and there's nothing but white everywhere. Codfish usually they would pack them head to sterns, like that, but they'd be all packed with ice all around them, so they were well taken care of. Each day you put in, you had to get ice to throw on top of them. It was really quite a….

[20:54]

[JF]: And when you were pitch forking the fish, were you trying to get them in a very certain place?

[PS]: Yeah, like the head mostly.

[JF]: The head so that you wouldn't destroy the meat?

[PS]: If you got it good into the body it wouldn't hurt it because you break it, you kind of bring the fish out. And you got the basket like this, between your legs. You had to be pretty strong and pretty quick. There's a technique to everything, break it, quite a chore. That's what I did in between but then when I got through with my auction, I'd go in and we'd have to make calls to Point Judith, Boston, and I think New York, one or the other. And report it, then we'd be done for that but that's when I'd go back to being a port sampler, I'd go back and have to go down and they'd want fish caught by statistical areas to get the age and growth of them. So I'd have to go back and take the length of the fish and I'd take the scales off and put them in a little envelope about this big and those scales would

go to Woods Hole, and that's how they used to read the age of the fish was by the fish scales.

[JF]: And how long – when you started doing the job – had they been collecting that kind of data?

[PS]: I think it goes back to 1938, there are some records in the office that go back to '38. The sad part about all this is we go down there and we'd have personal interviews then the government started getting automated and I noticed as the job went along, I went up the ladder, I ended up state supervisor so I wasn't in any port actually; I was registered in New Bedford but I made sure these other people worked out of Gloucester, and Boston, Sandwich, Provincetown. That was my job; to go around and make sure these people did their job. And then the first thing they came up with was log books. First of all, it wasn't mandatory then the government made it mandatory. So we lost that part of the job. Since then we're losing more and more of the job. As I said, we used to sample and we don't do that anymore; they cut that by contract. Now the latest thing is, the biggest thing of all is when we worked there, we used to go down twice a month, each dealer, and there'd be a slip there for each boat that landed in New Bedford with his catch pounds and value. And we used to take that back to the office and hand-tabulate it by dealer. And then it would be the same thing, down and across and they'd have to agree. And we used to do it, have like a monthly landings, tell what was landed in New Bedford because of these slips we picked up. Now, each boat has a permit number and permit number is on the log book. The permit number is on their slip. The slip is now taken care of by the office where they unload. So that eliminates another part of the job. So you get down and you don't have too many… the most important parts of the job, I thought they were the best part.

[24:10]

[JF]: Well, it occurred to me to hear you talk, the way you were saying it, the relationship between you and the fishermen was still pretty good.

[PS]: Yeah, it was very good.

[JF]: It sounds a lot different from today maybe?

[PS]: When I first started I knew a lot of them because of my father. And they put up with me maybe at that stage. I got along with everyone else. I made a mistake one day when I first started; I'll never forgot, a boat called the *Molly & Jane*. And I was talking to the guy and his name was Sunny Nickerson – Sunny or Herald, one or the other. I said "Hi, How are you doing?" He starts talking to me and he gives me the information. I said, "Are you a Newfoundlander?" And that was like I had kicked him. "No I'm not, I'm a Nova Scotian and you remember that too!"

[JF]: I had relatives from Nova Scotia, so I know that.

[PS]: I never forgot it after I saw that guy; oh boy was he ticked off at me. That's when you first start. Then I got to know everybody and they say, "Here comes Swain guy, the government guy." That was the other thing nice about it; you go up there sampling the fish, you get cold, you take a break, you go down aboard the boat and there's always a cup of coffee there. You go down and have a cup of coffee and the cook is there because he usually – back in those days, he washed the pin boards; that was his job. So then you sit down and talk with him: "You want a piece of pie?" Home-made pie and everything, couldn't believe it. The guy says, "Next trip, I'll have a whole pie for you!" I thought he was kidding. I go down there the next trip and there's a whole apple pie, just for me, just cooked. They were the greatest bunch in the world and the hardest workers; I really

enjoyed that part. My wife used to say to me, "How can you enjoy going to work?" I said, "Well, there's always a new trick you hear about that day.

[JF]: A new trick?

[PS]: Yeah, something different that happened to you. You go down in there, you can always ask for fish. Maybe once in a great while the guy refuses to give you fish, but you'll get a fish – you'd yell down to the guy and they'd send you up the most beautiful haddock you ever saw; put aside today, that they were going to take home and then, "Ah, you take it." Always had… never bought fish in my life, until I quit then I had to buy it. And this guy said to me, "How many years did you have on the waterfront?" I said, "About 40." And he said, you have a long time to catch up, paying for fish!" [laughs]. That was the only time I bought it – I went back and got some other connections.

[JF]: I remember hearing something from somebody last year or the year before where that's a problem now; if they try to take a little out on the side.

[PS]: Oh yeah. They are very… they scrutinize you very closely. But if you take a box of fish now, you really have to….

[JF]: Because it's an income tax thing?

[PS]: No, no, it's just… well the fish are so scarce they don't have that many. When you take a box of fish now and it's $2/lb and you have 200lbs in that box, you have a pretty good amount of money. So they're not as lenient as they used to be. I used to work, lumped the boat as I said, and they call them Boston take hold baskets [?] and they are made out of canvas… about that high, that big around…

[JF]: So about 2-3 feet high maybe?

[PS]: About that high and they would hold 200lbs or better of fish and you'd be able to walk off with that. They might say something to you, but you keep on walking with it. Except for once in awhile a guy tried to fool a guy and you can't fool a fisherman. The guy's been fishing and he's looking out the window and he knows what he's caught because it's all on deck. So I'm going to pull this thing behind me, and it's quite a bit of weight and all of a sudden I get a tap on the shoulder, he's a Newfoundlander and he says, "Swain boy, what you got there?" I said, "A basket of Pollock." Yeah, a basket of pollock, so he gave it a kick and pushed it over and there was about 3 pollock on the top and all the rest was haddock! He knew what I had, he just wanted to show "don't think you're pulling the wool over my eyes." Well they tried. Lumpers would try anything if they could get away with it.

[28:21]

[JF]: How long did you do lumping for?

[PS]: Up until I got serious on the job and then I didn't have the time to do it. So I'd say at least 20 years lumping. Another thing I used to do was paint boats. Be down here, see me 6 o'clock at night I'd be painting a boat down here.

[JF]: The outsides you mean?

[PS]: Yeah, the outsides, like the pilot house, even the mast and everything else. And that's another change too. From steel boats – it was all wooden boats back then, every one of them. They were all Eastern rigs. Now you'd be lucky if you'd find half a dozen Eastern rig draggers.

[JF]: Those are the ones where it was out the sides?

[PS]: No, yeah, out the sides and they'd tow from forward, and the wheel house was aft. To find a wooden scalloper – there's one left in New Bedford. Last one was built in '78. It

was one of the last Eastern rigs. And when I worked on *Ambassador* I worked there all the time, on maintenance and things.

[JF]: Do you still?

[PS]: Yeah, I've been doing it now for ten years, that's what keeps me going, painting and sanding. I even help unload it now. Yeah, my brother and I, who just passed away, we worked together on this boat for I guess eight years. He just died the month before last. I kind of miss him.

[JF]: I bet you do. Were you close with him the whole time, growing up?

[PS]: Growing up, he was a fisherman so he kind of went his way and I was on shore. So he spent 40 years fishing and I spent 40 years on shore. That was another thing; they now have observers aboard the boat. We were the original observers, us port agents. I used to go out, for the government, and do the same thing they're doing. You scrutinize their catch. We did it before they finally come out with a more progressive or tighter way of doing it. Now they have the firm up there and they train – most of them have to have a degree in Biology.

[JF]: I wonder what you think of that change? The impression I've got from some people is when somebody like you who truly understood the culture and hard work, it wasn't so much tension, whereas when you get somebody who's an outsider and trained at a desk….

[PS]: Well I did have one who worked in the office. And he hated to go down among the fishermen. Once in awhile you'd get a guy who would give you a hard time to get an interview, but you go down to him. Of course you approach him, you use a little foul language and the guy laughs at you, you come into the wheel house, and all of a sudden he spills it right out to you. But you have to make that extra effort and kind of get back on his side – and there were a few like that, not that many of them. Because they knew I came from a fishing family, so it wasn't like here's an outsider. I wasn't an outsider. I had that one advantage over a lot of people.

[31:40]

[PS]: So I did that; we used to go out and make those trips like that and they finally got those full-time observers there. And another part of the job was that you would fill in for somebody somewhere else; like I'd go to P-town for two weeks, I'd go to Boston for two weeks when they went on vacation. I even went to Long Island, way out there. In fact I went the other day, we went to Foxwood. People in front of us in line said they just came over from Orient Point, so there's Orient Point and Montauk Point and you can't go this way, you have to go all the way back to Riverhead and come out. She lived in Riverhead, so it's a small world, I said "Oh, Orient Point, in Orient Point there was cabbage and Long Island ducks." And you'd go out the other way and there were potatoes. I don't know what's there now, it's probably all houses.

[JF]: I don't know, I've never been out there.

[PS]: Ah, it's pretty out there. Fishermen out there used to fish off spots. One of them was a four story building, it was high. And they said, "Where you fishing?" "Off the building." That would be their mark.

[JF]: You mean they were in the water marking them selves by land?

[PS]: Yeah, they knew where they were this way, but the distance this way, they knew… they were in deep enough water, but they would say, "Oh, I'm right off the office building." And that was a very interesting, before they got Loran's. Fishermen never used to give

you Loran's because a lot of them… we were just breaking into it when we started, but most of the time you'd get a name for a place. Like it would be Outside Hole, Deep Hole, Second Hole and so on. Everything was by a nickname or something, some place. When we finally got them all, we put them on a piece of paper, it was so much easier to code them out because we'd say, "He was out at Deep Hole or Second Hole."

[JF]: And did you put them on a map?

[PS]: We had them next to the map so when the guy would give us the interview and we'd bring them back to the office and say, "Oh, alright, he was in 4061 B1" or something like that, Statistical Area 526 or something like that.

[JF]: And did they have some other kind of navigation too?

[PS]: Oh yeah they started… that was the thing. When I first started fishing, they had the WWII Loran's, they go like that, and first one goes like that, and then bing bing again and there comes a square one and so on. Well now they just sit back and press a button – Christ some of them have got that big with the Loran's and everything else. What is costs for electronic gear on some of them boats, is $100,000 anyway. You built the boat in late 1950 for the same price, $100,000.

[34:31]

[JF]: For the gear that you pay now?

[PS]: No, for the whole boat! And what you pay for gear now is $100,000.

[JF]: I couldn't believe it when I heard what boats cost.

PS]: Oh yeah, a guy that bought one the other day; $1.7 million and he has to spend a half a million to fix it up. But the license is worth something. There was a few guys a couple years ago, they started buying all the boats up and destroying them but he was keeping the license. So as time went by he would build another boat, it would be on one license and build another boat which would be on another license.

[JF]: And that's OK to do?

[PS]: Oh yeah, that was OK. The only thing you had to watch on that was horse power at one time. If you bought a boat with 700 horse power you couldn't get one with any more than that, or probably ten percent supposedly. But fishermen… the government, one thing I found was they always thought the fishermen were dumb. They always did.

[JF]: Even when you started?

[PS]: Oh yeah, they were really dumb then, according to the government. Because I went for a meeting down there one day in Woods Hole, and the guy said, "Dumb fishermen." I put my hand up and said, "My brother is there, he graduated from high school and I don't consider them dumb." They got chastised and they never used that again. That was their idea, but if they ever came up with a regulation, the fishermen found a way to get around that regulation.

[JF]: So they weren't so dumb!

[PS]: No they weren't. There's some in that fleet there that have college educations. That one Danny Eirlertson [?], he's a Civil Engineer. There's a few of them. One from way back, Donald Canalin [?] he graduated from NBIT before it was UMass Southern.

[JF]: Oh, before Dartmouth?

[PS]: Yeah, when it was on Purchase Street, we used to call it the Millmen. That's what it was called years ago. He graduated from there. There's a few guys around that have some education that the government didn't plan on. They always found a way to get around…. One guy, the beeper was [Italian farm] but the minute he went inshore, inside Long

Island Sound, his beeper went off, that meant he wasn't out on the fishing ground. So that time didn't count. So he would come back out, fish, go back, because he got a deck load and go over there and work on it over there. Some of the guys had some idea how to get around what the government was doing.

[37:18]

[JF]: I'd be curious from the experience you've had, I know today a lot of the fishermen and captains feel very stressed out by the regulations. What do you think of all that?

[PS]: I think it's just a little too much, I really do. Poor guys have 40 days to fish or whatever it is, I don't know the exact count. My brother's boat is a scalloper, it's a beautiful boat. They spend more time ashore now than they did 20 years ago – it was just the reverse; they used to stay home maybe 60 days a year, now they fish 60 days of the year. And luckily the boat is paid for in that sense.

[JF]: I was going to say, that's not that many days to get your investment back.

[PS]: You'd get $100,000 stock. Some of the boats have done real well, they've $300,000 stock on a trip, but they stay out a long time, but my brother's boat, the gang's a little older. My nephew's are still fishing, they're on boats with the young guys. Well, they can bring in 30-50,000 whereas my brother's boat, they bring in 30,000. They only have six men and they're all 40-50 years old, whereas my nephew, they're in their 30's.

[JF]: So your brother is still, you have a brother?

[PS]: I have one brother who's still at it. And I think this is his last year – he's ten years younger than me. He's 64. I don't know if he's going to quit this year or just quit next year, because there's a trick to this: if he doesn't retire, he just gets laid off because the boat's tied up, he can collect for the rest of the year until the boat goes back out again. If he doesn't go out on the boat, then they cut him off, then I think he's thinking of retiring then. They get $450 a week. Not bad. You don't even have to go down, "Oh, I'm laid up this week, put me in for the week."

[JF]: Now is this unemployment?

[PS]: Yeah, unemployment, yeah. So they do pretty good. But then there's guys who are crazy; they'll take advantage of that too. There's a couple of them that I see in the paper there; they got nabbed. They kept on fishing and kept on collecting. Couple of them owe the government $20-30,000 now. They're dumb – they don't think they're going to get caught.

[JF]: That's too bad because those are the ones that give everyone the bad reputation.

[PS]: Yeah, a bad name. Same with the guys that are allowed 800 lbs and they'll try to sneak in 1000. It says 800 lbs you're supposed to have. It's kind of tough. See, my brother is out now, they only had ten days left so they could catch whatever they want, but they're all done for the year unless the government gives them more time which sometimes they do.

[JF]: So they go right through hurricane season and hope for the best.

[PS]: No, he'll be all done; this is his last trip. They are usually done by October anyway. They are pretty smart, with the electronic gear; you're crazy not to use it.

[40:26]

[PS]: Christ, you can sit there and press a button: Take me home. Plug this in and the boat will take them right home. It is; simply amazing. This thing blinking over here, there's a buoy over there, something in the sky over there; it's all recorded, all over the place. Electronic gear is unbelievable on some boats, some more than others. But the wheel house back in

the '50's was about this big. And the wheel houses now, that board there. It's unbelievable, what a difference the years make.

[JF]: Now is the *Ambassador* your brother's boat?

[PS]: No, he's the mate; he's been the mate for ten years. My other brother who died, he was the cook therefore ten years. And my job was to work on the boat – when I retired; I retired the end of '94. So I've been working on the boat ever since then.

[JF]: I wanted to ask you if you want to tell me; what didn't you like about the actual fishing; you said you tried it and didn't really like it?

[PS]: Well, the days got long. See, back then, they had a strong Union which is too bad they don't have today. But a strong Union and you could fish up to eight days and you had to come home; you couldn't fish over eight days. Catch whatever you could… no, then they were on 1000 lbs per man too, so you could only bring in 11,000. So you might catch that, if they were plentiful, in three days and that's, I thought… one of my trips I went out; we're going out today, Friday and we'll be in Monday, with a trip, three days, I said. Well we came in 4:01 Monday. The guy says, "The Union says you can fish eight days, I'm fishing eight days." So we went from catching 11,000, we had 35,000. That is the kick. We left the port, the price was $0.47 and when we came in, we got $0.27; flooded the market. So you work twice as hard and get almost half as much. I could never understand that. That's one thing they do wrong, it's greed I guess, it's bound to be there. Eight days fishing, I couldn't believe it – I finally saw the deck when we were coming by Butler's Flats, and that cured me for another year for sure. "There's the deck; I haven't seen that since we went out!" Because they were scallops, the whole time. The whole time they were scallops. One trip, the scallops were so plentiful – I didn't have a camera and I wish I had – and that's what happened to a few boats. There was a plank that went from here to the wheel house, which is quite a… forward to the wheel house. And you walked across this plank and underneath that plank were scallops, from one rail to the other rail, and I mean about that deep.

[JF]: So you were walking on the plank over the scallops.

[PS]: Over the scallops, yeah. It was unbelievable. That's what happened to a couple boats, they did that right quick and they rolled over because they didn't have anything in the hold, so all the weight was on deck and they lost a couple boats. Nobody admits to it but everyone is pretty well sure that that's what happened. There was a boat out of P-town and one out of New Bedford.

[JF]: Now why… was it just a matter of "we don't have time to go put them down in the hold?"

[PS]: No, they just didn't have time to cut them. It was still the meats, you used to have to fill a basket, dump it, come back with it. My father said you had to have a strong back and weak [recording skipped]. Because you had to be strong to lift these things. You'd get a two bushel basket about this big, chocked full of scallops, bring that back, come forward and then when you clean the deck up, you'd go back and shuck then. But in the mean time, the drag is still working, and he brings on more. So in that trip I tell you I… it was a long trip… I heard that winch start up and I was ready to throw up because I was all broke up already. I went to bed, in my bunk, I really slept I tell you.

[44:40]

[JF]: It sounds exhausting. I don't think exhausting really begins to get at it.

[PS]: You get so many things that can happen to you. A lot of the guys loose the fluid in their wrist. It happened to me; I went like that and I could hear [makes squeaking, creaking noise]. So you're lying in your bunk like this, and you can't move your wrists because it will wake you up, and the guys come over and says, "Swain, wake up!" And Christ, it's like putting an ice pick into you. Ah Jesus, that's what it was, The Grip. Some of those guys they worked hard, they were so used to it they didn't get The Grip, but a new guy like me. One I forgot to tell you about. When I first went scalloping, I was looking for a site and at that time there were none available so my father found one for me. So I report to the boat over in Fairhaven and we get ready to go, a couple guys go up and get a beer, and send a couple guys to get those two, and them two come back and those two stayed there, so you keep going back and forth. So I'm sitting there talking to the mate or the skipper, I don't know which he was. He says, "What's your name?" I said, "Paul Swain." "Not related to the Union guy are you?" I said, "Yes I am, that's my father." "Well I don't think he thinks too much of you to put you out on this old sled!" I said, "Jeese." I was scared stiff after that! And then, when you're a greenhorn or a recruit, you never get a good bunk. You got the bunks for the regular men and they put you up in the peak.

[JF]: Up in the bow?

[PS]: Yeah, up in the peak. You're up in the peak; they didn't have fans back in those days like they got today, so the smell of the food, the linguica, the bacon, you'd be smelling it and you'd want to… couldn't wait to get up and out of that bunk because the smell of food, I couldn't take it anymore.

[JF]: Probably a method to their madness. You wouldn't want to stay in and sleep.

[PS]: That was the only bunk available, so they'd give it to you. Unless you wanted to sleep on the floor. And I did that on one boat. They put a mattress on the floor in the engine room and said, "This is where your bunk is." It kind of cured me. At the time I was still young, only 23. And I was playing football, pretty active around the city of New Bedford. So I enjoyed that part of the life; I didn't like fishing at all. So I finally got a good site in April, so from April to August I was on the same boat, so I was in tune to what was going on. I thought that was it, I'm here for life, but when I applied for the job, I got it, so I quit in August and took the job ashore; went into my new life.

[JF]: And was that, your job, was it the Northeast region that you worked with?

[PS]: Yeah, we were called the Northeast region. And that included… where was it breaking off…Rhode Island and up. We had, like me, we had a port agent in each port, then they had senior port agent and he was in charge of the guys.

[47:40]

[JF]: So was Long Island technically part of your area?

[PS]: No, that was the southern part. What happened there, in the spring of the year – way back, they don't do it anymore – they used to follow the "bunker boats" up, poggie boats, whatever you want to call them. "Bunker boats" they used to call them back then. They would follow them, they would come all the way from… Louisiana or something; big boats, they used to suck the fish aboard once they brought them in. Because of the oil in it. And they would bring it to a place in Long Island. And I would go down there, while they were getting ready to set the operation up – they called it "trash fishing" then, although there's no such thing as "trash" anymore. They used to bring in small yellowtail, eels, and everything and take them out over there. And my job was to go there, get a composition of the catch. I'd go down there, I'd scoop up a two bushel basket, and I'd

have to go through and say what everything else it. And I'd use a common name. And a guy came to replace me, came from Beaufort, North Carolina, he had them all on their Latin names. They called me up and chewed me out, "What the hell is this guy doing using Latin names?" Half the people in Woods Hole know them as yellowtail, monkfish or something like that. It was funny as hell. That was really a treat to go down there. But the first [year] I went one [week] and the second [year] I went two [weeks] and the third [year] I think I went five weeks. They kept giving me more time down there, to train somebody and stuff like that. But they would be all blacks coming up from Beaufort, North Carolina, and the guy that was head of it, big black man, and he was called a Deacon. And he'd say, "Go to work!" And they would run to go to work. He'd say, "Come on with me, Swain, we'll go get a cup of coffee." They had a mess hall for them then. I'd look around, and I'd be the only white guy in the whole place; there were all these black workers there then. And that was Long Island, prestigious land down there called the Promise Land down there around East Hampton. But it was in the middle of the thing, not the outside but the inside, and quite an odor from the vessels when they'd cook up the fish to get the oil out of it; I don't know what the routine was, I forgot now. The stink; the neighbor would complain; "You don't like it, how much do you want for your land?" They'd buy it. So all of a sudden it was pristine all the way around it, everywhere, all the way around it. It was beautiful; there was a nice little beach there where I used to go, sit there, wait for the boats to come in. Quite unique. That's what I found out about Long Island, I found out why they go the name "Long Island." It's 125 miles long. I didn't know that at the time. My brother lives in Mineola [?] and I said, "I'll be in to see you." I thought I'd be there in 15 minutes; it was about 3 hours to get to him alone, down to Jericho all the way.

[50:43]

[JF]: I've been on that; my brother lives down there; you don't get anywhere very fast there in the crowed traffic season.

[PS]: Well, I don't know about now, but we used to be able to go into Riverhead and then come out to Montauk. But then there were these little island ferries and I used to like to take those because they would take you through Snug Harbor and a couple of those little islands along the way and you'd cut off driving all that way. If you hit the ferry just right; if you don't hit it as you're going by, it's not worth it the wait; I used to try and plan it to be there. Used to be an old LST that would take me back and forth from New London, CT to Orient Point. That thing would shake and rattle and roll all the way over, WWII.

[JF]: What does LST mean?

[PS]: Landing Ship, or something like that, Transport Landing Ship or something like that.

[JF]: Was it an old WWII boat?

[PS]: Yeah, and they had the front door drop down and they guys went out in the tanks. That's what it was, and it rattled and shook and everything else. Now they have beautiful ferries. Quite a deal to go through that; every spring; '60, '61, and '62 I went down there.

[JF]: I wanted to go back to the auction. You had told me before the tape was on that you did it because your dad was sick?

[PS]: Yeah, my father had heart trouble, that's why he was ashore because he had his first heart attack at only 48 and there were nine of us. The Union job was there; to represent the Union, so he got voted as an agent, port agent. So when he got sick, they needed somebody to fill in for him, so I would do the filling in for him so he wouldn't lose his

job or anything. I enjoyed it; they used to make me laugh some of them. That time the guy grabbed me by the arm, boy, I was doing my thing there, and I didn't happen to hear this one guy, there's a pipe here, and you're over here on the board, there's about this much width, so you got your hand on the board, and you're going like this, then you erase it, you put your hand on the board, so you basically know where you are. All of a sudden this guy grabbed my arm and pulled me over to the pole and I said, "Jesus!" I thought I was going…God, that frightened the shit out of me; they used a real [?]; it was unbelievable. That was very interesting. I really miss that part of the whole auction.

[JF]: I get the impression everybody does. There was something special about that whole atmosphere.

[PS]: Yeah, there was. They had a bell that rang. We had a cop there that couldn't hear for shit. An old Irishman and he'd say, "Eyes on the board!" Everyone was making noise. Then they finally petitioned it off so the buyers were all inside one room and they had another room; they put glass in there to keep the noise down. You'd see Spider Gomes from the bank, you'd see Harvey Nicholson, a lawyer there, you'd see some scum bum, wino's, anything in the world you're liable to see in there.

[53:58]

[JF]: It was really the like the heartbeat of the community?

[PS]: Lumpers and everything else. You'd go around, "You working on such a boat today?" "Ah yeah, where are you working?" And they make sure everybody gets a site. Some boats needed seven men to unload, some needed three, some needed a couple, it depended on the poundage.

[JF]: So the auction was where the lumpers would go to get their assignments?

[PS]: Yeah, they usually, when they go in there, there would be a boss lumper. And he was in charge of that boat. That's where your personality would come in; if you were stiff, you wouldn't get hired. But if you were a pretty good guy, you'd get a job. "You don't want him, he's a stiff." It got so that you'd work pretty good and you'd have a boat that would need seven men, and three men would take the boat out, it would be 3 for 7 or 4 for 7; you'd spread out the other extra pay. Of course you worked your butt off. Jimmy Dwyer will tell you; you'll work your butt off. You'd get all through, you'd run up for break, the bins board would be there, everybody would be scrubbing bin boards, get those all ready, go back down in the hold when it was your turn. It was really interesting. When you'd have 80,000 you'd take out with two tackles, the baskets are swinging forever. There's about 60-80 lbs in each basket. I unload, *Ambassador*, there's a 120-140 lbs per basket. That you dump because there's three bags of scallops in there which are about that big, with 42 lbs in each bag. You don't want to drop one of them overboard, because the skipper would let you know about it. My brother was telling me one time, they lost one overboard and he said, "They don't float either!" Because they were all looking over the side.

[JF]: That's when you need to hire the scuba divers, right?

[PS]: Yeah, some guys used to do that. Some guys used to have hooks and they would snare it after the boat left and they made out alright. They were pretty good at it some of them. That was another thing, Jimmy will tell you; we had nicknames all over the waterfront back in those days. Everybody had a nickname, I don't care what it was. Most of the time it was because of some incident in your life. There was Broken Arm, Hard to Port Leo – Hard to Port Leo had one leg longer than the other. There was Big Eared Mike, because

he had big ears. Scar-face Jack, he had a scar across his face. So everybody had a nickname back in those days. We had Grave Digger – his full-time job was digging graves in the cemetery and he used to come down to lump on the weekends. He'd come down with a – I don't know if you remember way back they used to have pal bearers, they used to have the grey gloves and then they would throw them on the casket? Well, that's what they used to do - So this guy would grab them all, he'd come down and that's what he'd be using!

[56:55]

[JF]: And he'd use them for lumping?

[PW]: Yeah. More nicknames. Jimmy and I got together and that's how we… we'd ready them off once in awhile, last couple of years. We started out, you sit down and write down every nickname you remember. And I sat down and wrote down every nickname I knew. So we got together, we had over 200 names. So then we ran into someone who'd been down on the water, and he said, "Oh, I can add to that!" And he would add 5-6. We have over 300 names of waterfront people. Today they don't have nicknames like that.

[JF]: I wonder when that stopped and why?

[PS]: It seemed most of them just died off. There was a guy, Punchy, because he always punched you. Everybody, their nickname fit them. There was a guy names Fingers, because he had no fingers, he had a couple, that's all. We called him Fingers. Hard to Port Leo, he limped along and stuff like that. And Offshore Whitey.

[JF]: I wonder if it had anything to do with when the auction changed and how everybody wasn't gathering and knowing everyone else?

[PS]: No, this was before hand, all those nicknames.

[JF]: I wonder if that helped; like everyone felt that they knew each other?

[PS]: Well, everybody knew each other. It reminds me of the bar there, Cheers, everybody knows you by your name. Everybody knew everybody.

[JF]: But not today?

[PS]: No, because you don't have that auction to meet the guys, so it's altogether different now. I went to the new auction.

[JF]: What did you think of it?

[PS]: I said this is boring. All you got in front of you is a little monitor, and it's there and you press a button and put a price in or something like that. Because after I retired – we had a good thing going, myself and another guy. When they started the new auction, hardly anybody showed up. They were in their own office, doing the computers. So what they did, they came up with the idea of maybe we should have someone there to inspect the fish for us. So myself and another guy gave them a free [three?] month trial, and we inspected the fish, they let us, we were sanctioned by everybody to do it. We inspected the fish and we gave it a grading and we would mail it out to all the different fish buyers. So then we'd give them a freebie for a couple of months. And then we said it's going to cost you $10 per day. Well, it was fine, then the fish got scarce. The guy was paying $10/day for no fish being landed. So we lost it. We got going, we did about six months. And we lost it, then we stayed at it, we came back and still had a couple of guys, then the guys said no. 20,000 lbs, the chance of getting enough to pay for us to be there that day… but I thought it was very unique. Down on the waterfront, you call it, we used to call it #1 fish and #2. Number two meant it was bad.

[59:49]

[PS]: We didn't have that, we got smart. After being on the waterfront, we know we shouldn't have that, so we had, 1, 2, 3, and 4. So, just to say it quicker, 1 would be real fresh, then not so fresh, well, not too good and bad. We had them and when we categorized them, we` sent that dealer what we give for grading and he'd know what we were talking about.

[JF]: When you were doing this, you were doing this while the fish were still on the boats?

[PS]: No, they'd come in at night and unload; they're in this huge cooler. The display auction was there. I don't know why they have that term "display" because you don't actually see it unless you walk in there; there's no window to say that it's there. But "display" means you can go in and look at it I guess. So they'd have it up in tiers there, and some days when we started there was about 150,000; that's quite a bit to go through and get it all done by 6:30 to get ready for the auction at 7 o'clock. So we had to do it and send it off by….

[JF]: [Someone comes in the room] Oh, I guess we'll wrap this up. I just wanted to get when you were born if I can.

[PS]: 9/6/32. Just turned 74, I made it.

[JF]: I feel like you could still talk more to people; we should have you come back next year.

[PS]: Well, if I'm around, if I'm available.

[JF]: And I always like to ask people one last thing: What is it you would most want visitors to the Festival to understand about the working waterfront?

[PS]: Well, maybe a couple things: how hard they work and the dangers they go under. I don't begrudge them making thousands of dollars because they work for every cent of it. That's my idea, because it's been in my family – some people don't look at it that way – but it's been in my whole family my whole like, fishing, everything. So I have a different outlook than I think a lot of them. That's all I would say: it's hard work; don't go if you're a wuss you'll never make it.

[JF]: Well thank you so much. It was nice to meet you.

[62:26]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[62:33]

[End of Audio]