

Charles Broward
Interview by Nancy Solomon
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Was 15 years old when he started fishing. Taught by father to cod fish. Broward Avenue named after great grandfather. Descendant of fishermen/baymen. Net fishermen among ancestors. Lived on fish. Shipping industry too. No bay houses. Mainland houses were originally bay houses until the marshlands were filled in – years ago.

Trips on boats. Father was a net fishermen – gil net. Describes gil net. Square – 5 inch mesh. ¼ mile long. Made for him. Bought at hardware store in Baldwin which is no longer standing. Lead lines.

Difference between gil and seine nets. Half moon trawl pattern. Went into 30-40 foot water. Why it is called a gil net. Season started in May and end in September. Caught bluefish, weakfish. Cod fishing in winter.

Cod fish – prepare hooks and lines. 3-4000 hooks placed. Used cork. Started using this 20-30 years ago. 2-mile long lines. Not today. Main lines had one hook every 8½ feet. Use verity skiff. Today they use garveys. Prefers garveys. Fiberglass boats are too light. Centerboard and tiller.

Season started the week before Thanksgiving and end in March. January was the peak time. Started fishing at 4:30 am, set lines for an hour. Finished at 12 pm. Then returned and bait the lines for the next day.

Started early so that they could sell their catch. In morning fish exited towards ocean. Lines originally made of cotton. Today they use nylon. Lines were tied. Started preparing lines in the fall. Lines are used over and over today. Earlier years had to make new lines every year. Took a full day to make one line. Had 5 lines.

Bait - clams – skimmer clams. Cod fishermen would tong for clams. Went to sandbars in ocean. Cannot catch skimmer clams in bay. Would bait the lines after they returned from fishing. Washed clams.

Was 15 years old when he started working. Old Lenny Koch used cloth lines which worked. Others copied this technique. 30 other cod fishermen. Other people he worked with – Seamans, Carmans, Whites. Dick Abbot (died). Most fishermen lived off the water. Dick Abbot lived on the water. Bay house owners – recreational owners.

Father taught him. Need to have a lot of common sense. Had to know how to read a range – landmark on shore. Used to go lobstering too. Trapped eels. 9 inch by 10 inch by 3 foot traps. Made of wire and wood. Used lathe, 1 x 2 foot boards – bought. Dipped wire in tar. Galvanized wire. Throw eel pot in water to age it – eels did not like a fresh pot. Sat in water for over 2 weeks. Horseshoe crabs for bait. Horseshoe crabs mate in May. Kept crabs in pens in water near the docks.

Nobody stole crabs, even today. Docked boat – was safe, years ago. Went eeling in spring and fall. April 15 season started. Warm water is not good. Soft crabs shed on sandbars. Eels hibernate in winter. Used to have a winter spear. Jabbing. In cold weather.

Side B

Guess jabbing – term. Combing. Started 25 years ago. Other harvesting activities. Harvested clams – treading, raked, tonging. Describes tonging. Tong design. Worked in garvey. Rough and calm waters. Treading accident. Doctor repaired damage. Was 18 years old.

Had own boat when he was 35 years old. Served in army. Had planned on retiring in the army. Returned to Baldwin – father had passed away. Had to start from scratch. Likes the water. You are your own boss. Could depend on himself. Hard to learn. Nobody taught him anything. Know where you are going. Getting lost. Hears on radio people who are lost.

Once got lost in fog. Turned around and came back home. Worked with partners – Billy Granau. Self made millionaire. Comes from Sheepshead Bay. Charles ran a skimmer boat. Other captains. Worked for Granau for 8 years when he was 45 years old.

Rum runners – father was involved. Dick Abbott. Fred Stenzel, Austin Verity, usually the guys who owned the boat. Taken to New York City. Speakeasies – rod and gun club in Freeport. No hotels on marshlands – in east rockaway.

Born in Baldwin and raised in Baldwin Harbor. Lived on Pacific Street, two blocks from Atlantic Avenue. Street names changed. Webster Avenue. Does not know when first Browards arrived. Browards were always baymen.

Never a boat builder. Does not hunt because he does not like to eat them. Prefers rabbit hunting. Pheasants lived on Long Island. No photographs. Library has photographs from Albert Smith.

Mother came from New Suffolk. Machine for cork lines. Shucking clams – comes naturally – had to live around baymen. Would help shuck skimmer clams. No trouble learning. Everything is luck.

Changes in the bay – closing areas off – started in East Rockaway and going east. Merrick was closed for a while. Pollution has increased. Used to be able to clam in the creeks. Needs to have different sewage system. Earlier years – gutters – used stones. Gutters used to filter water before it entered the bay. Sewer lines empty into the bay.

Bay is not scary. Feels more at home in the bay than at home. Too many boats today.

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