

Fishtales, Saturday, September 28, 2013
Working Waterfront Festival

Interviewer – Markham Starr
Interviewee – Peter Olson

MS And so that we get all that down and then we'll go into the story. Ok so what is your name sir?

PO Peter Olson

MS And where are you from?

PO Well, I live in Carver right now, but originally I'm from Hingham. That's where I grew up and, uh, I went to Marshfield and I was living in Marshfield, myself and another guy bought a lobster boat in Maine and we brought it back to, actually, we brought it originally to Hingham and we came through the Annisquam River and so forth comin' through Maine and we actually got um, dirt and stuff in the gas line and this boat had just been put in the water like a few days, a day before we brought it from Maine actually. And sox when we were coming by x headin' across to Nantasket Algut(?) area, the engine conked out, we killed the battery trying to re-start the engine and the fuel line was clogged and we had to anchor about three miles off of Nantasket and that's when those lightships used to be out there. This was back in 1962.

So we had to spend the night out there and that boat was leakin' a little cause it hadn't sweetened up, you know, it hadn't been in the water but overnight. So, we had to stay out there all night and it was in the middle of May, about May 15 and we had a probably a fifteen mile an hour, fifteen knot east wind and we were worried about goin' ashore down in Cohasset, but finally when daytime came, a pilot boat came out which was actually a schooner, they had a diesel engine in it, but they just had a staysail between the two masts. And they came out and they came over near us and this was kind of neat because we had a flare and it was just a hand held flare and they came over and they got about a hundred yards from us, the guy had a megaphone, about what a cheerleader would have at a football game and he hailed us and asked, he asked if that was a distress signal and so forth, but he held it up to his ear and we answered him and told him what our problem was, that the fuel line was clogged and so forth so he said he'd notify the Coast Guard for us and so he did and probably a half an hour later they came by in a Coast Guard picket boat and they came over and they were headin' out to the lightship to deliver the mail to the lightship and they said they'd come back and tow us in and that's what they did.

Then of course when they towed us in, I thought they were gonna pull the sampson pulls out of the bow of the boat 'cause they were goin' about twice as fast as we could have gone under our own power and the boat was vibratin' and shakin' and so anyway they brought us in to Hull, the Hull Coast Guard station there, course they boarded us and made sure we had all our safety stuff and whatnot, so that was all cool and so on. Anyway, that's not the whole story though, the ultimate story is after it got uh, eventually

we built a lot of lobster traps that we made ourselves, right? We got in with this guy that cut trees and his father had a saw mill in Norwell his name was Vinny Lincoln at King's Landing Boat Yard and his father was Lyman Lincoln who lived in Norwell, had a saw mill.

So we built a couple hundred traps and we cut stalk for around four hundred traps but we were gettin' ready to fish out of Cohasset, it was one of the Cohasset fishermen. We got, we were just in our twenties at the time, like you know young, and we got to meet a lot of these old time guys which was really helpful for us in gettin' into the whole thing. So anyway, after I had the boat a couple of years I refastened it, had to put in a new transom. So we had now built a transom out of white oak, but it was green and we had to bend it 'cause the transom was curved, it was a really nice boat, the boat I had, it was built in '39 and it was much nicer, I mean it was a beautiful boat but it needed work on it. Anyway because the green oak shrunk up, right? So that was all fine, but in December, it was towards the end of December, probably a week before Christmas, we went out to haul the traps to shore. So there was two other guys and myself went out and we were probably a couple of miles off the north river and we were loadin' gear aboard and we got quite a bit of gear aboard and I noticed the boat was gettin' kind of loggy and it wasn't movin' very fast and I went down in the cabin and there was a couple of feet of water in there and it turned out that all the weight in the boat had put the water line down and it was one of the seams in the transom was probably open a quarter inch and the water was just comin' in there. So we had the bilge pump goin' and right off the engine and we started headin' for the river right? And I was down in the cabin with a five gallon pail and we had a galvanized wash tub, we had to fill that up with the pail and the other two guys would dump it overboard. Once we got headed towards the river and we got that seam out of the water and we were movin' so eventually we got in the river and you know it was an off-shore wind so when you're a couple miles out there's a pretty good sea out there. But the closer we got to shore, the flatter it was. That's the story. And I didn't know if we were gonna make it at first you know. I though it was cold and all that so, but we survived it.

I have another story I wanna tell you if you want another story. I can tell you another story. After I got rid of the lobster boat, we built 50 traps by hand, we used shoots from off an oak tree. You know, someone cuts down an oak tree and you've got suckers comin' off it. So we used those to make bows for the frame of the traps. And we used oak trees that were probably like two and a half three inches in diameter to make the sliders and we built these round traps and we split the lathes out of trees that were probably eight inches in diameter, we split them and they use a trowel (?) to split lathes. We knitted the heads; we used splints of oak to make the head rims.

MS Wow

PO The only thing we bought were pot nails and like box nails, galvanized nails to put these together. I figured it cost about fifty cents a trap. This was around 1970 that we did this. And we fished these, it was in the summertime, out of two canoes lashed together, right? And we brought off the beach with the canoes with the gear and we had 50 traps. It was me and these two kids that were just out of high school. I was like 30 years old

myself and these guys were around 18. We built this stuff and we did better actually fishing per trap, fishing with the canoes right, than I did when I had the boat and a couple hundred traps.

And these guys would get down with a snorkel and a mask and they'd swim around and we'd be probably a quarter of a mile off-shore and water was like 15 feet deep. And they'd actually swim down and make sure that the pots didn't have their heads clogged or anything like that so we did that and that worked out pretty well, you know? We did that for a couple of years. We used to fish a couple of perch pots, right? And we've out of the two perch pots, every, we'd go out every two or three days, haulin' perch pots, we'd get like a bushel of perch out of the two perch pots, we'd go to the Marshfield highway bar, and we'd get rock salt and we'd salt down the perch for the next time we went out which would be two or three days later. So we didn't have to buy any bait, and we didn't have to, you know every day, so the only expense we had was goin' like from my house down to the river, you know to the beach right to do that.

And we used to fish the gill nets back then too. I bought a gill net and we'd fish that probably in February and March, well let's say from the end of February through to May and so I learned somewhat about fishin' gill nets and how nasty they are. And that's a bad, that's really a bad way to fish, you know? In the old days when they had nets that were made out of ?? and they tarred 'em, if they left those nets out there they'd end up rottin', you know they'd only last so long and the tar would leech out of the twine. And the things would rot, but when you have monofilament nets and if you fish 'em, I think at the time the nets that we had, had a six and a half inch mesh, I think that's what they had to be. So if you flatten out the mesh it would be six and a half inches right? But that is what we were using for cod, right? You could put that net out in the afternoon just before sunset and we'd let that set until the next morning and we'd go out in the morning and we'd haul it right? And the cod we'd get in there, we'd get like probably three hundred pounds of cod, right? This was just fishing probably within a half a mile of the beach, right? In the spring. And you'd get the cod and the ones you caught early in the evening would be all black and they'd be stiff as a board, they'd be dead, and the ones that got in there just before daylight, they'd be in good shape and they'd still be alive, right. But as we got closer to May and April and May, we'd actually catch like alewives in there that were schoolin' up to go up the North River, you know, to go up the river, we'd catch them, we get some shad, we'd get Tautog, not a lot, but we'd get all kinds of fish. But once the Cod got in the net, right, they'd twist the net all up, then the meshes get smaller, then the smaller fish got caught in there and they got drowned in there 'cause they can't work their gills and stuff, they get caught, you know what I mean.

So anyway, we did the gillnet fishing thing, we did that for awhile and so forth, you know. And I saw the lobster thing go from when it cost ten bucks in the 60s, it cost ten dollars for unlimited license, you could have a thousand traps if you wanted, you didn't have any limit on the traps you could have. Or you could get a, like a family permit so it cost ten dollars, you could have ten traps. Or you could get a commercial permit for ten dollars. And the guy had the license and if you had the boat, the boat wasn't licensed, it was the guy. If you had like a sternman, he had to have a ten dollar license too, like

anyone who worked on the boat had to have a license. And it was in the period that I was fishin', in the 60s, they changed the law and they put the license on the boat right so the boat had the license and I know if you had a boat, I don't remember what the restrictions were, but a certain sized boat, it cost like fifty dollars for the license, then if you have a bigger boat I think it costs like a hundred dollars, I'm not sure about that. But I know it was all out of proportion to the size of the boat, you know what I'm sayin'. If you've got a thirty-five or a forty foot boat, right, you figure the volume of that, then say you get an eighty foot boat, an eighty foot boat is like four times the size of a forty, it's not twice the size, 'cause it's longer, beamer, deeper, everything about it, so it's much, much bigger boat. You know, so what can I say? Is that a good enough story?

MS That was great! Before you go can we grab a picture to go with it?

PO Sure.

MS Ok, I gotta get your name, too.

PO Oh Peter Olson.

MS That was great.

Engineer O L S E N?

PO O-N I'm a Swede.

MS If you would put your phone number there. Thank you for stopping. [Asks Peter's companion] Do you have any fishing stories? You have other stories though!