

Bob Bourguignon
Interviewed by Nancy Solomon
May 30 – June 1, 1997

Side A

Uses sharpies, flat bottom, straight sides, style dates from colonial times. Uses 3 boats – one for crabs, one for scallops, one for clamming. Uses an 18 foot garvey for scalloping. Catches for his roadside stand and sells it himself.

Hard clams are scarce. May have to go to Huntington. Caught three 1000 lb. bags per day when it was good. Now it's half that.

Flanders bay is only open in the winter and if it does not rain.

Tools – hand rakes, tongs, and treading for clams. Does not tread much today. Stays in water under 12-feet. Developed market for butter clams – prefer deep water (8 – 10 feet) in muddy bottom. Moved to Flanders in 1984.

Peconic bay scallop is world famous. Found in same places mostly – “Cow Yard” in Flanders bay. Sag Harbor, Moriches, Shinnecock too. Scallops are now in shallow water. In earlier years it was deeper water. Thinks it changed because sunlight could not penetrate deeper waters. Used to find scallops in Sag Harbor channels – Black Dog Rock, Ferry Channel, Noyac Bay. 10 bushel limit. Used to reach the limit by 10 – 11 am. Now you are lucky to get 2 bushels/day of clams. Scratch rakers wade in water. No full time clambers. Most baymen are diversified. Clams are older and bigger.

Duck farms – one on Route 24, closed 18 years ago approximately. Four or five left. One in Eastport. Many local baymen believe that when the duck farms closed it was the end of good clamming. Clam beds were near duck farms – 4 – 6 acres. Some may be 10 acres. May be coincidence.

Earlier years – row boats and rakes. Ray Jackson in Hampton Bays made “Shinnecock Rake” – hand forged, basket and tooth were one piece. Rakes had 30, 40 or 50 teeth. Bob uses 22-24 tooth rake, factory made. Ray Schmidt in Babylon makes them. Greenport blacksmith made “Greenport dredges” – man who made them died. Rakes and tools were modified by baymen.

Side B (June 1, 1997)

Rakes are named after baymen – German rake named after John German (hard bottom); Spike rake named after John Butarra of Riverhad who started in Port Jefferson. Scallop rakes were 30 inches. Scallop dredges – “designed to scrape over the top of the bottom”. Frame with a blade with chain link bag, bottom and top twine. V in front for line. “Gangs of dredges.” Roller dredges. Has a lot in his barn. Crab dredges for winter. Sputnik dredges – diving pans (holds it down) and roller sweeps. Buys 1 -2 rakes per year.

Hydraulic dredging has hurt the bay. Mostly in Nassau County. Has not happened much in Suffolk County. Resort economy has preserved wetlands. More development now.

Fighting dredging at Shinnecock canal – sometimes they go outside the channel. Are paid by number of cubic yards they dredge. Less dredging recently.

Quogue canal used to have more clams. None today – pollution from Laundromat, pool chlorine. Chlorine is worse than raw sewage. Fertilizers hurt too. Works in Southampton waters. Cow Yard – across from house. No major development.

1991 nor'easter flushed inlet out.

Scallops are on top of bay bottom. Swim and move around to “a spot they like.” Little marsh erosion except near channels. Not severe boat traffic compared to western Long Island. Jet skis scare birds from nests. Ice widens creeks.

Many baymen have left and moved south. Lower cost of living. Price for catch is lower.

End.