



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

IN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE STINSON

INTERVIEWED BY

KEITH LUDDEN

PROSPECT HARBOR, MAINE

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TRANSCRIBER: Meghan Cociu

REVIEWED BY: Keith Ludden

Keith Ludden: It's April 19th

Charlie Stinson: Beg you pardon?

KL: It's April 19th, and we're in Prospect Harbor

CS: Yes.

KL: And I'm talking to Charles Stinson

CS: Right.

KL: And we're talking about the sardine industry, and the sardine cannery in Prospect Harbor.

CS: Right.

KL: I want to start with just a little of your background. Do you mind if I ask what year you were born?

CS: When I was born?

KL: Yes.

CS: November the 27th, 1930.

KL: 1930.

CS: Yes.

KL: Wow, you were born at a rough time.

CS: [laughter] Right? Yes, I was born just about right during the Depression.

KL: Yes. Do you remember some of that when you were a kid; having to get by?

CS: I remember back when I was four or five years old things going on. I remember the first car my father had was a 1935 Buick, but back then Prospect Harbor was a lot different than it is today.

[There is a little mic handling noise here]

KL: How is it different?

CS: It was a busy place. We had three fish plants here, that my father had, we did ground fish in one of them, canned clams in another one, packed sardines in another one. We probably employed somewhere around three-hundred, three-hundred-and-fifty people during the summer; [of] course, during those days everything was seasonal; we didn't have the facilities, the means of keeping your pipes from freezing and all that stuff, so everything was seasonal, your fishing business was seasonal, so back in the late 20's, 30's, clear through to, oh, probably early 40's this place was a busy place. Today, it's nothing.

KL: When you say it was a busy place, there were a lot of people.

CS: A lot of work here. We employed probably three-hundred, three-hundred-and-fifty people [in] those three plants, and a lot of boats here, a lot of activity. [Of] course, my father had a lobster business, besides that, why he bought and sold lobsters. My father had a big pound they build in Hancock, up here, so we had lobster buying; and the lobster fisherman in the summertime used to go, tub crawling, they called it tub trawling, what they call hooking them, they have all these, probably eight-hundred-thousand hooks in this tub, and, it's what I did as a living when I was a kid, eight, nine years old, I started baiting trawls, and we'd bait trawl, and they'd take them out and they'd go fishing, and they'd bring the ground fishing up to the fish plant there, in front of that big white house, where I used to live, and that's what I did for a living in the summertime, bait trawls.

KL: So you baited trawler lines?

CS: Yes, I used to bait them, then the fisherman would put them in the boat, and they'd take them out and throw them out, go ground fishing; that's how they caught their fish. That went on for several years until the draggers started getting in here; so when the draggers got in here, they started depleting the supply, kept the fish broke-up, and the guys, the lobster fisherman stopped tub trawling, then they went back to lobster fishing during the summer. Before, they used to ground fish, then we used to can clams in that other plant, where the town dock is there now; we had a big building there, we canned clams there for years, and that kind of run out, and we started handling ground fish there, we'd process them and ice them in boxes, [There is a clock chime here for a few seconds] shipping them to Boston, and then we packed the sardines in the plant down here, which is different today, it burned in 1963, the old plant did, and we built a new one.

KL: So, there was a clam operation?

CS: Yes, we had a clam operation, one of those docks, that dock out in the middle, there. It was one whole great big building, run the whole length, in fact it ran out in the water, in the harbor, further than this one here does, and that's what we canned clams in there, steamed them, cooked them, and sealed them, shipped them around the country, we did that for years. Then during the war, in the sardine plant, we took piece of that plant there, and we processed mussels; we used to go down to the shores and buy mussels, go down and pick them up in the truck, and bring them back, and process them, and we sold a lot of them during the war [to] the government, the military people, different things, and that went for quite a few years.

KL: Now, you mentioned your father. Was he associated with the cannery as well?

CS: My father?

KL: Yes.

CS: Oh yes. He owned the whole three of them.

KL: Oh, okay.

CS: He owned the sardine cannery, the clam plant, and the fish processing plant, the ground fish plant.

KL: So he passed it down to you?

CS: Yes.

KL: And when did he start operating the plant?

CS: When did he start operating?

KL: Yes.

CS: 1927. When he come out of the military, out of World War I, he went lobstering (inaudible). My grandfather used to have a big schooner, they'd go up and down the coast and buy lobsters, then they turned around and built that lobster pound up in Hancock, and they had that for, well I can't remember now, they had it quite a few years, oh probably back into the early 40's, then they sold it to an outfit in Massachusetts—Consolidated Lobster, I believe it was, and he built another plant down in Addison; my grandfather and grandmother went down there to live down there and run that pound for ten, or fifteen years, then my father decided to get out of the lobster business and sold it to his cousin, (inaudible), which was his father's, sister's, children.

[There is a pause here for a technical check.]

KL: Did the plant exist before your father started operating it?

CS: Oh yes. It was owned by the E.T. Russell Company, out of Massachusetts, and they shut it down, closed it down, I don't remember how many years it was down, but was closed for a period of years before my father bought it, and he bought it in 1927, and he and another guy, named (Wass)—I can't remember, I know his boys name, but I don't remember, Lester (Wass76?) was his boy, but I can't remember their father's name, but they went into business together here, then they bought a plant in 1930 over in Southwest Harbor; they called that the Addison Packing Company, and that went on for about three or four years, then my father bought him out, and the in somewhere around '41 [or] '42, somewhere around there, he bought this property in Bath, up on the Kennebec River, what used to be an old shipyard, what they called (inaudible) shipyard, well he, my father, and another gentleman, had a sardine plant in Belfast, was good friends of Glenn Lawrence, they built that plant in Bath, and processed fish there for years, until we sold out in 1990, and we had four plants going at that time. We probably employed somewhere around eight-hundred-and-fifty people, at that time.

KL: Now, was your father a first generation American, or did the generations in this country go farther back than that?

CS: He's the first generation in my family to be in the sardine business.

KL: But did his parents, were they native to Maine?

CS: No, they come out of Canada. My grandfather, [of] course, he had a pound years ago down in Grand Manan, Canada; then they moved up here to Corea, then after that they finally moved over here to Prospect Harbor, and when my father bought the plant he moved over here, then my grandfather went out and run that lobster pound up in Hancock. But they come from Scotland, England, and Germany, then they came across into Canada, and he had a lobster pound, like I say, down in Grand Manan, and then he sold that and moved up here.

KL: I see.

CS: So, he started that plant in '27, but before that, like I said earlier, he was, my grandfather run out on a big schooner, up and down the coast, buying lobsters; they'd buy them and put them in that lobster pound, and they'd sell them to different dealers and different places.

KL: And what was your grandfather's name?

CS: John.

KL: John Stinson?

CS: Yes.

KL: And your father's name was what?

CS: Calvin.

KL: Pardon me?

CS: Calvin.

KL: Alvin?

CS: Calvin. C-A-L-V-I-N

KL: Oh Calvin. Forgive me, I have Midwestern ears. [laughter]

CS: Yes. [laughter] That was a long time ago.

KL: What is your first memory of the canning plant?

CS: My first memory of it?

KL: Yes, do you remember the first time you saw the inside?

CS: Yes, I used to go down there, when I was six, [or] seven years old. It was a lot different than it was today, [of] course back then, it would be hard to explain to anybody the process they had back then. It's too bad, I don't maybe some of these museums like, Searsport somebody may have pictures of them, I don't know, but we have pictures, but when the plant burnt, in 1963, we lost all of the pictures, lost all of them, but I got a few, but (inaudible). Years ago they cooked the fish differently. They steamed the fish before they packed them, and they put them on what they call these long flakes. In fact, years ago, they'd bail them out of the boats, they had a big net, and they'd bail them out, dump them out, and they'd run them into the (?) with the water into the fish tanks, into what we used to call the tank room, and there'd be a man there bailing the fish out of the tank into a wooden sluice, that's what we called a flaker, [it] was an elevator flaker, conveyor belt, that took the fish upstairs to the second floor, and there [would] be a guy putting flakes on it, and there was a big drum that dropped the fish onto this flake, which would spread them evenly, that drum would, then they'd put them in these tall wooden, what we call fish racks; it be hard to remember how many flakes there would be on a rack today, it was a long time ago, and they'd put them in what they call steam cookers, and they cook the fish depending on the size of them, the length of time they'd cook them, and then they'd cook them anywhere from ten to eighteen minutes, whatever, then they'd go in this big room where [there were] two big huge fans, and heating coils up to the other end would draw this warm air down through the fish and dry them, and they'd stay in there for maybe half-an-hour or so, an hour, then they'd take them out, wheel them up the conveyor, and the guy would put them on the conveyor, the girls would take them off; there would be two girls to a table, they'd take them off, and they'd pack them, cooked back then, put them in the can, then they'd put them on these trays, then when they got so many trays, like twenty-five cans on a tray, they'd get four of them,

it'd be a case; they got paid by the case, so much a case—piecework, they worked by. Then when they got so many piled up, a guy'd come along and pick them up, punch the card, show that they got a case, tell them how many they got; some of them may get thirty-one, [or] thirty-two cases during the day, a good, smart, fast, packer would.

KL: What would a really fast packer make?

CS: What would they make then? I don't know what they made because of the wages back then was cheap.

KL: How many cases?

CS: How many cases?

KL: Yes.

CS: Oh, she'd make thirty, [or] thirty-one in a day. Back in those days, [of] course eight hours was nothing. They'd work [until] nine, ten, eleven o'clock at night. Back in those days, you got the fish by weirs and stop seines, and you had to wait for them to come to shore. It was different than they did it in the late years, and they had to bring them into the plant, whenever we would get the fish we'd pack, after supper, [at] ten, [or] eleven o'clock at night, many nights. Sometimes we'd pack on Saturdays, whenever we could get the fish. It was a lot of work.

KL: Now, the process you described, was that the way it was done when you were a small boy?

CS: When I was younger? Yes, it was done that way. Then I think it was back in, probably, late '50s early '60s they converted over [to] what they call a raw pack, where you eliminated all those racks and stuff, and where you put the fish on the conveyors, raw, and the girls would put them in the can raw, then we'd pick them up, take them off, a cook them in a different type cart, and we'd cook them in the same cooking box the same way, but we'd cook them in the can, and once we cooked them we'd turn them upside down and let them drain, wash them off, then they'd take them over to the closing machines where they'd put the oil in them, mustard in them, whatever, tomato, oil, and put the cover on them, and that's the way we did it for many, many years and probably the last year or two we had the company we totally automated this plant here, and they had one in Bath, partially automated. The fish would come in, and the girls would just, it was all cut, we had cutting machines, that we'd grade the fish to whatever size it was, like if you want four in a can, or eight in a can, or ten, they was all graded out through these grading



machines, and we'd grade them out, and then they'd go up and cut them, and they'd go to the girls all cut, and all the girls had to do was put them in the can, all cut and that would go to an automatic counter, so they could get counted for so many cans that they packed a day. They went through these cookers, out of the cookers, into the closing machines, and we had a system that was built where after they was sealed, and the oil or sauce was put in them, they would convey them out to the automatic stackers, and put them in the cases that way, before it was all hand work.

KL: And this was the way it was done, what, in the 50s?

CS: This was done that way, probably, the last two years we had the plant, '80, we sold it in '90, we probably had it going, I think, two years, I think '88, '89, '90 we had the total automation going. Before that it was all hand labor.

KL: When did it switch from the hand work to the automation? Around 19...

CS: Well, probably 1988, then we sold it in '89, '90. '90 we sold it, and they continued it, and then [of] course Connors bought this guy out that we sold to, then they took everything out of it, and (Shane ?) took it to Blacks Harbor, and all the cans, [of] course, we used to make all our own cans and covers, down here, and they took all that equipment out and took it to Blacks Harbor, when they bought the company from the guy that we sold to. So that's about the story on it.

KL: Now, the way the cans were made was kind of proprietary wasn't it? [laughter]

CS: Yes, it was made out, way out in the other room. That long building, way out in the back was where they made the cans. And we had the easy open lids, we made those as well, the covers and stuff, we made all those, we started doing that in, probably back in, probably the '70s; we started making our own cans and covers, late '60s, no it was before that, '63? No, I'm wrong. It was before that because the plant burned in '63. It was the late '50s we started making own cans, in the late '50s.

KL: When did you actually start working at the cannery?

CS: When did I have to do what?

KL: When did you actually start working at the cannery?

CS: When I come home from Korea, when I was over there. When I come home I took a month off, [then] went back to work. That was back in what, 1953, somewhere around there, '54. I started working in the plant. My father told me I've had a long enough vacation. "Time to go to work," he said.

KL: [laughter] And where did you start in the plant?

CS: When did I start?

KL: Where? Did you start at the tables where they packed, or did you start in management?

CS: Oh, I started in the plants; I operated the plant in Belfast we had. My father bought out several sardine packers, competitors, so I started in the plant in Belfast, and I run that plant for several years, and then finally, I went on the road, I traveled around to all the plants, and supervised all of them. What we had at that time was four plants, and I used to supervise the four. I'd travel around [to] the plants about every day and make sure everything was going right; if anybody had any problems, sit down [and] correct them, discuss them, and try to develop ways, and [of] course, the last part of our involvement in it, fish was getting short in supplies, and [of] course we was forced to go "pursing", which was probably not the best type of fishing in the world because, unless the guy was very careful, the fisherman, you could waste a lot of fish, if you caught too many, [than] the boat could carry, what'd you do with them, [more] than the plant could take, they dumped them, they were dead, so there was a lot of waste to pursuing.

KL: I didn't quite understand that, I'm sorry. Some of the fish got wasted.

CS: Well, "pursing" is when you make a circle around the fish, you have a radar, and a sonar, your sonar shoots under water, they can see the fish, along with a fathometer, but they have these new sonars out, and you can see outside [how] big the body of fish was, and you'd cast - well the captain would say, "Well, it's a good sized body of fish, so I'll only take a certain bite". And you have what they call a bug boat, a small boat they have at one end of the net, the big boat would make a circle around, well if he made too big a circle, and got too many fish and the boat would only hold so many fish, and the plant only wanted so many, could only handle so many, what was left over was dead, in the bottom of the net, and they'd just open the net up and let them go; and this is why there was a lot of waste, so it really took a good captain, you know, to be very careful, otherwise he'd be better off being a little short, [so] he wouldn't catch too many, so they didn't end up wasting them, that was the trouble with pursuing, but we used to buy, for the last, probably, seven or eight years we had the business, we bought a lot of our fish in Europe. I

went over there and I used to spend a lot of time over there, I'd probably make six, seven trips a year over there to Europe, different places, and I'd buy fish over in East Germany, I bought for several years, and we'd have them all frozen, and we'd bring them over here and thaw them out, and pack them, put them through the cutting machine, the graders and all that, and I finally got hooked up with a group of people over to Ireland, and went over there to Ireland, and I bought the rest of them; so I bought all the fish we handle over to Ireland, all the small fish, anywhere from six, to eight, ten to a can, because we was running short on small fish, and that's where your money was, in the small fish, not in the big fish.

KL: And when did this start? In the '90s?

CS: We started buying fish over to Europe, probably in early '80s. Probably late '70s, early 80's we started buying over there, and we bought quite a few.

KL: Now, originally, the fisherman used weirs, right?

CS: Yes, originally.

KL: Can you explain how those worked?

CS: Explain what a weir is?

KL: Yes, and how it worked?

CS: Well, what it does, they'd put them in a cove, there'd be six of them posted in a circle, there'd be an opening, where the fish would come in, and there'd be a big (wing?) that run out from the weir, it was kind of a circle, there'd be a wing run out this way, and they'd put brush around it, so the fish couldn't get out, and they'd have a net hung inside of the weir, the circle, and they'd drop one end of it down, where the opening was, where the fish come in, they'd hit that wing way out there, they'd hit that and guide them into the weir, they'd come into the weir, in there, they'd pull the mouth of the net up, so they couldn't get out, and they'd leave them in there, then they'd have a small net where they'd call, "purse them up", they'd make a circle around them, purse them up, and they'd have a couple dories inside, it was all done by hand, it was hard work. And then they used to bail them out with nets, the boat did, they'd have a big boom in there, that had a, oh probably, an eight-foot-long handle on it, [and] got a big net, probably it was three-feet in diameter, and they would dip down into the fish, pick them up, they had a chain on it, the guy would pull the chain up and close the bottom of the net up, [and] lift it

out of the water, and when they would get it over the hole in the boat he'd let that handle go, and the net would open up, and the fish would drop down into the hole. Then when they dropped down there'd be another guy that was shoveling, and he'd be throwing salt on them, to salt them. So every time they dumped them, they'd have it back down into the net, in the weir, and then hoist it back up again, and that's how they did it over the boat. And I don't remember the exact year, is when they got rid of them and started using fish pumps, and when they started using fish pumps the quality wasn't quite as good, because they took a lot of the scales off the fish; before they had scales on them and everything, and the quality was better. So, they started using fish pumps; then they started using fish pumps in the plants, before we used to use these big tubs, on a big hoist cable, would drop down in the fisher boat, in the hold of the boat where the fish were, we'd flood the hole with water so the fish would float, and then dip that tub down in there, and hoist them up, and dump them into a big hopper thing, a big water pipe with pumping water would push it and throw them into the fish tanks, into the plant, and as they went into the fish tanks a guy sitting there'd salt them. And they'd salt them again, and when they got the boat unloaded, why, they had one man there bailed them out by hand into the sluices, and they'd go upstairs, I was telling you earlier, they'd go upstairs to the "flaker", they called it, then they'd go to the cookers, on these flakes, what they called racks. I don't remember how many flakes, they used to call them flakes, then they'd spread them on that with a drum that went around, underneath this drum they'd turn and the flaker would have the fish on them, and they'd drop them on this drum; this drum had slots in it, and would drop them on these flakes, evenly, and they had to make sure they didn't get the fish too heavy on the belt coming up the stairs, up to the second floor, so they wouldn't get too many on the flake, because if they did they wouldn't cook good. So, you had to (inaudible). Then they'd put them onto these racks; the racks were probably six foot high, something like that, or maybe seven foot. I don't remember how many flakes they had on a rack, but then they put them in the cookers; I think it was three went [in]to a cooker, and we had something like six [or] seven cookers, and that's how they'd cook them, back in the earlier days.

KL: Now, you said that the work was seasonal.

CS: Yes.

KL: How did the workers know when there was fish in the plant?

CS: They wouldn't know until, before they come up with marine radios, they wouldn't know until they saw it coming down the corner down there. Then what they'd do is, someone say, "Here come some fish", Well the guy in the boiler room, he'd blow the whistle so many times,

and you could hear it from here to Winter Harbor. He had a big, huge whistle, steam whistle, made a loud noise, and they'd blow it so many times for fish, for packers, and then they'd also blow it again if they wanted a different crew, like for the closing machines, and so if they blew the whistle that's how people knew they wanted fish, we didn't know until they came around the corner, down there, or come down that corner, down here. So, after they got radios, years after that they got marine radios, and we'd have a receiver in the building, the office building, plant manager would, and they'd hear the boat man talking on the radio, and he'd call, or sometimes he'd call through the Boston Marine operator, call the plant, say, "I got fish. I'm leaving the twine. I should be there in two or three hours", and that time would give you a better chance to plan and get your crew there, and everything. See, before you had to wait for the boat to show up and it took quite a while to get your crew in, so you lost a lot of packing time. But when they got radios, and they could contact the plant ahead of time, you probably had a three [or] four hour, sometimes a two hour notice, that you're going to get fish. And a lot of time they say, "Well, I'm half loaded, in about another hour I'll be loaded", and they tell the plant manager that. Then he gets the crew there before the boat gets there.

KL: So, depending on the number of times they blew the whistle, they knew whether they needed packers, or cookers, or...

CS: Yes, they'd know, like they blow it eight times for packers, so packers, they'd all get ready, and then we used to have buses to go pick them up. Used to drive around town everywhere [to] pick them up, buses.

KL: Now, some of those buses go to say, Lubec and...

CS: Well we had buses go as far as Jonesport, we did for years. We used to haul them from Jonesport up, a lot of times, and down Millbridge and Steuben, and around Winter Harbor here, and Sullivan, so we used to cover quite an area. But we did that mostly, well, before the war and during the war because people couldn't get gas, [it] was rationed, tires were rationed, and all that, so people couldn't—in the vehicles—couldn't get the gas and stuff, because it was rationed, so we could get the tires, we could get the gas, because we were food processing, and we processed at that time, during the war, WWII, we did a lot of it for the military, and so once we packed for the military we could get tires and fuel; we had no trouble getting stuff. So, this is mainly the reason why we did all the busing, because it was harder back then, you know, gas was rationed, tires was rationed, all that. I remember we used to have stamps to go buy gas, and all that stuff; and we had to have stamps to go buy tires, but once the plant could get them, because they were

employing and treating food for the military. Because the military wanted all the food they could get.

KL: So, some of the sardines went overseas to the troops.

CS: Oh yes. We sold shiploads to the military. We used to get letters from some of the soldiers that lived in Maine, says how nice it was to eat something from my home state of Maine, Beach Cliff Sardines, they'd say, "They were some good". So we used to get letters from them every once in awhile, how they enjoyed getting some food from home.

KL: Did you ever save some of those letters?

CS: We kept some of them, yes. Lost a lot of stuff when that plant burnt, [a] lot of pictures we used to have. We used to take pictures with the old process in the old plant. I got pictures of the old plant and everything. The process, I don't have pictures of, we lost those when we had the fire.

KL: Did a lot of families work in the canneries?

CS: [Were] there a lot of families?

KL: Yes. Brothers, sisters, moms, dads.

CS: Oh yes. Whole half the town worked in the plant. This town, most people lived here worked in the plant, fathers, mothers, some of the kids worked there. Back in the olden days, why, you didn't have to be eighteen [or] twenty years old before you could work; you could work when you were fifteen [or] sixteen. So, you didn't have all these so-called child labor laws back in those days. I think it was a mistake they have anyways, they kept the kids busy [and] kept them off the street. I worked in that fish plant down here, where I lived when I was eight or nine years old, pumping out boats, baiting trawls; I'd make four dollars a day, that was good money back in '35, '36, '38, so we thought we were rich when we made four bucks a day, baiting trawls.

KL: And that was when you were nine?

CS: Yes, that was my first job, baiting trawls. And when I got a little older I went down and worked in the plant, worked down there. Then when I was in high school, why, grade school, got

to be a little older I went on the sardine boats. I used to spend all summer on the boats, right on the boats where they kept the fish, (inaudible) and watch them. I used to spend a lot of time doing that.

KL: What was it like on a sardine boat?

CS: What was it like?

KL: Yes.

CS: Oh I enjoyed it. In fact my father had to get after me [to] get off it when I got out of high school, because one of the captains he'd ask my father when I was coming home from school, because I went to a private school up in Charleston, [of] course it's closed now, and he wanted to know when I'd be home, he said, "Well, he'll be home late this afternoon", so he said, "Well, I'll wait". So I sat in the back of the car, with the boat, took off in the boat, out to Castine for two weeks to get fish. In the spring you had to go early and you had to wait, you know, for the fish [to] come in. So every spring, there used to be a guy named (Orton Merrick?) used to go up to Castine, up around Sunshine, [and] them places, used to go up there, always got fish up there early in the spring. So, we used to go up there and wait until they caught fish, then they used to go over there at night and watch them catch fish. They used to go in this boat, (?) they'd have a piece of twine with a lead weight on it and they'd use it as a feeler, feel how thick the fish were, how many fish was coming, that's how they'd tell how many fish there were, they'd feel that, hit that, and judge how many fish. And sometimes, you know, during that time of year, they'd, what they call, "firewater". You'd see them firing into the water, they'd boil the water, you could see them fire into the water, they used to do that at night and we'd watch them. It was interesting, but it was hard work; you pull those nets all by hand, all of them.

KL: There would be a crew of people pulling the nets in?

CS: Yes. They'd have a crew of probably, with the (inaudible) there'd probably be, oh probably, six, I'd say at least six [if] not eight people, crew, pulling the nets in. There was a lot of work to it. The same thing with the weir. The weir didn't take quite as many people because with the weir you had to have a guy, with the boat who did the cooking, then you had to—used to go out and chase the fish with a—somebody'd go paddle the boat, they rode it, and went out and see if they could see the fish before they come in, they go out with those feelers, they'd row around and they'd feel, the guy up in the bow with the feeler, and he'd say, "Go this way". He'd feel them more harsh as we get into some fish, so they'd get going then they'd follow the fish around,

so the guy sitting in the boat waiting, put the net across the cove, they'd watch him going, see where he was going, so they'd know when to put the net across, so the guy said well, "I got a good bunch of fish going. "Now", he said, "I feel less" he says. He'd motion for him to run the net across the cove. So, there'd be another guy with a row boat, pull the net, from like, across this cove here. They'd row across with the boat [and] pull that net clear across there. Thing would be about eight to ten fathoms deep.

KL: These were herring?

[There is a technical check here]

CS: Yes. These sardines, small, small fish. So it was interesting, then they finally come up with, after that they invented outboard motors, so that made the jobs easier, and took less people.

KL: Did they scare the fish?

CS: Not bad. It didn't scare them too bad, they was careful of it, how they did it. They used to make sure they go out around them. They'd have a guy out in a row boat, checking them, see where they were. They'd go out around, kind of help, like chasing a bunch of cows in a pasture, they'd go around with an outboard motor, kind of circle a little bit, and kind of push the fish into shore quicker.

KL: You say you liked being on the sardine boats. What did you like about it?

CS: Oh, I just liked being on the water. And [of] course we didn't have radars back when I was a kid going out there, [it was] years before we had radars, and there was real captains back then. You had to look at that map, and then every so many [minutes] you'd blow your whistle, make sure if there was another boat they could hear you, you figured how long it would take you to run from this buoy to that buoy earlier. You'd call the old man on the (inaudible); you'd figure your time, your course on your chart, you'd mark it off; you'd figure how fast your boat went, you'd say the tide there, before tide, you'd have to consider that, take that into consideration, calculate that in, and you'd say, "Well, I should be at that buoy at a certain time". So, he'd set his clock, and when he set down, and he'd get almost to what he thought the time was running out, he'd tell the second mate, he says, "Get on the bow." He'd get on the old bow and set there, then they'd shut the engine down so they could hear the bell ringing. They could hear the bell ringing, [There is a clock chime here] He'd say, "Oh, well we're on target." So, we'd hit the buoy, then they'd take the course to the next buoy, clear across Frenchman's Bay, which is a long run, and you'd



have to figure the tides in, you know, if it was flood tide, it would set you in, put you off course, so you always had to adjust for the tide, and all that stuff.

KL: What happened after you could hear the bell ring?

CS: You'd hear the bell ring, you'd just sit down and you'd say, "Well good, I'm on course". Now, I've got to go from this bell to the next bell, so he'd have it marked on his chart what course to do, he'd have it marked off, and he'd say, "Well I've got to go west, which would be going from (inaudible) clear across to Frenchman's Bay, he'd be headed west, so he'd mark on his chart, which would be the next buoy off, I can't remember the name of the place now, this was long ago, but going over to Southwest Harbor somewhere, Cranberry Island, you'd be another buoy, you'd mark from this buoy to that buoy, and he'd figure his course, then he'd have to figure in, well, now, is it flood tide, or ebb tide? [Of] course going that distance the tide could set you off, see? So you could be off quite a bit, because you got no radar, you've got to go by strict course, so you'd say, "Well, it's so many degrees from here to that next buoy". So now the tide runs so many knots, so that means I've got to adjust a degree or two, or two degrees to adjust for the tide setting me off course, so you had to be pretty good. And they were good. They were good captains. And then they got radars after that, and that spoiled them. [laughter]

KL: [laughter]

CS: Today they're really good, the electronics they have on the boats today is unbelievable.

KL: When was the peak of activity in the cannery?

CS: Beg your pardon?

KL: When was the peak of activity in the canneries?

CS: The peak at one time, I think it was back in the '20s, the sardine industry was the biggest employer in the state of Maine. And I think it was somewhere around twelve-thousand people employed, the industry did. And then, during my lifetime, probably I believe there were somewhere around sixty plants up and down the coast, that I could remember. It was along the whole coast, from clear down to Robinson, clear down to South Portland, probably sixty plants; at one time, then had, I don't know how many they had Downeast, [in] Lubec they had probably thirty [or] forty plants down there back years and years ago.

KL: And do you know how many were employed at the peak here in Prospect Harbor?

CS: How many there was here? Just this one, only sardine plant.

KL: Pardon me?

CS: There was only just this one here in Prospect Harbor.

KL: Yes, do you know how many people were employed there at the peak?

CS: Oh, probably we employed back, years ago, which took a lot of labor, what I was telling you earlier about handling all that stuff about flakes, probably [we] had, oh gosh, I don't know, 180 people.

KL: Eighty?

CS: one-hundred-and- eighty.

KL: Oh, one-hundred-and-eighty.

CS: Maybe two-hundred. Time you figure your packers, and your hourly workers, yes, probably that's at least 180 people.

KL: And how big was Prospect Harbor then?

CS: How big was it? The plant?

KL: The town.

CS: Oh, how many people?

KL: The village, yes.

CS: Oh, I don't know, I would have no idea, I think probably there was, [of] course less than there was today, there's a lot more people here today than there was back then.

KL: Yes, okay.

CS: A lot more people. But there's less work here today. All they got now is lobster fishing, that's it.

KL: What was the town like?

CS: What was what?

KL: What was the town like?

CS: Oh, it was different. You had less houses, and a lot of houses back years ago were sea captain's houses, so you had more, farms; people had cows, horses. When I was a kid growing up that's what you lived on. You lived on—you had pigs and chickens; people did a lot of farming, gardening, and back during the Depression, when I was born there, about that time, 1930, that's how people got by. They saved a lot of money on their own. [They had their own] cows, pigs, chickens, garden, and people lived on a heck of a lot less than they do today. We had a lot less.

KL: Did the cannery and the local business do a lot of business back and forth?

CS: Oh yes, because there was nothing here except just these three plants, that's all that was here when I was a youngster, and [of] course we had a store here, down on the corner there, in the cove was a store, then we had one up here, that deli I was telling you, up here across, from the library, that used to be a big store, and then up there where that real estate place is, where you turn off where the flagpole was, that used to be a post office. Then it used to be a country store too. So, they had three stores here, sold a lot of grain, corn and stuff for the chickens, and for horses and cattle, so there's a lot of farming done around here back then, people lived on that, [of] course, during the wintertime people did nothing; you didn't lobster, you didn't do anything.

KL: One of the things I noticed when I read about some of the sardine industry was that there seemed to be a lot of fires.

CS: A lot of fires?

KL: Yes, in the plants. A lot of the plants burned down at one point or another.

CS: Yes, some of them did, yes. Downeast they had a lot of...

KL: Was there a particular reason for that?

CS: I really can't say. I really don't know. It could be anything; it could be the wiring, back in those days, you know, electric wiring wasn't all that great, and there was quite a few plants that burnt. But, ours burned, but it was done because it was—what was it, May '63, we were sanding the floors; we had hardwood floors in the plant, so we sanded the floors down. We did it every spring, we would sand them down, and varnish them, and there was a great big sander, and they had that bag that catches the sand, the residue, and it gets hot. Well, the guy [that] was doing didn't think, he turned around and put the thing in the paint locker, where the paint was, well I just got home; I was in the shower, my wife came in and holler, says, "The plants afire". By the time I got my clothes on it'd gone from the other end of the plant, the whole length of the plant, matter about ten or fifteen minutes.

KL: That was in the '60s?

CS: 1963. Yes, it burned. A guy took a picture of it; he come in from down here on vacation from New York, he come down [and] took a picture of it. One day, either two or three years later he dropped into the office one day, he says, "Maybe you'd like to have a picture of this"; he showed me a picture of the fire, and he had to be driving through the town that night, and caught, it was a nice beautiful colored picture, so he gave it to me. And he says, "I happened to be driving through town". He says, "And this is the first time I've been here since then" he says. He says, "I thought you might like to have a picture". So he sat down and talked to me quite a while. It's a great picture, showed the whole thing, lit the whole sky up, quite a fire.

KL: And you still have that picture?

CS: Yes, yes. That thing burnt May 5 of '63. And we took the thing, and we had, December that year we had this building up, and we put fish through this plant before the end of the year.

KL: So the plant burned in September?

CS: In May.

KL: In May.

CS: And we put fish through it in December.

KL: Wow.

CS: We rebuilt it. Built as it is right now, it's a little bit bigger right now [than] it was then. We put fish to it before the end of December, that year.

KL: Yes, that's a fast building job.

CS: It was. We had to do a lot of blasting, and we blasted all that rock wall you see over there. That was all water, and that was all plant out of the water then. See, the plant was built out of the water. We blasted nine-thousand square yards of (?) rock, we filled that whole cove in with it. [Of] course, today they'd never allow you to do it; back then they didn't have those laws, they got all the foolish laws they got today, so we filled that whole cove in, and put that plant on part of it, so we'd have enough room to add on to it if we wanted to.

KL: Where there any characters in the plant that you remember?

CS: Any what?

KL: Any characters?

CS: Characters?

KL: Yes, people who could can faster than anybody else. People who were stronger than anybody else?

CS: Oh yes, you had a lot of women that was faster, yes. Some was real fast. Lela Anderson, over in Corea, [of] course, she worked there, she was, gosh, in her late '70s, in fact she stayed there, along with the plant until they closed it, she was there.

KL: What was his name?

CS: Lela Anderson

KL: I'm sorry, Lela?

CS: Anderson.

KL: Anderson?

CS: Yes.

KL: And is she still here in Prospect Harbor?

CS: She lives in Corea.

KL: She lives in Corea.

CS: Yes, she must be what, in her late 70s. And she worked there for a good many years. Then we had another lady that worked when I was a youngster in there, [and] used to go down and pick up fish down at the packers, you know, you'd—four trays, that's a hundred cans, you'd punch them a hundred cans per case, so when they got four of those trays you'd punch a card, so I used to go down picking up fish and she was another, Crowley, what the heck, I can't remember her first name. She lived over in (inaudible) on Crowley's Island, Adley Crowley, or something like that; I couldn't remember what her first name [was], but she worked there until she was in her eighties, packing fish there.

KL: And what was her name?

CS: Her last name was Crowley, I can't remember if her name was Adley, Adley Crowley, or what her first name was, I don't remember. That was years ago, when I was a youngster, back sixteen or seventeen years old, sixteen, and she worked there for many years. I think she probably retired when she was 84, 85, she stopped packing, and we had a lot of good workers. In a small town like this it was basically like a family. You knew everybody, what school the kids [went to], and you know them all your life, so it was like a family, really, when you stop and think about it because you knew everybody, most of them lived right here in town, or surrounding town area, so we always had a good working crew, always had a good crew.

KL: Was there ever any Union activity at the plant?

CS: Any what?

KL: Any Union activity?

CS: Union?

KL: Yes.

CS: No, we didn't have any trouble [from] Unions, no. No, it was mostly seasonal, the type of work, [of] course then after a while we got packing year around when they started pursuing. You got to the point where people couldn't go to work, say, at least by June, they'd go somewhere else, [of] course, lot of tourist around, they'd go around [and] work in these motels, and some of these summer people's homes and all that, so we kind of was forced into going purse seining, not that we liked the idea, but the fact in order to get year around work. Got to the point you just couldn't live on seasonal work anymore; you had to work year round. So we had to start finding a way to supply fish year round. [Of] course, the ideal way to have done it would have been, but of course they didn't have freezers back in those days, would have been, you know, to try to get smaller fish and freeze them. That was during the summer months, what you couldn't pack, so to say, "Well, I can't use that many today, I only want half of them, I'll take them all but freeze what you don't use". So [of] course you didn't have freezing capacity, you know, that was adequate enough to freeze fish back then, but that [would] have been the way to do it. That's the way they did it over in Europe and Norway; they used to take when the fishing season was at it's peak, they'd take the stuff they didn't can and they would freeze them, they'd just throw them in the freezer and pack them during the winter. And [of] course over here you don't get the small fish during the winter, they just come in in the summer. So, the only thing you could do is take what you didn't use during the day, can, freeze the surplus, and you could have done that and got by, but we didn't have the freezing capacity.

KL: I want to stop and just make sure I'm not wearing you out with all my questions. How are you doing? [laughter]

CS: [laughter] Okay.

KL: Am I wearing you out?

CS: No, I'm doing alright.

KL: [laughter] Oh, okay, good. When did you start seeing the cannery business decline?

CS: When [did] we start seeing it decline? Oh boy, that is hard to say. Probably for the good-sized sardines, probably in the, probably '70s.

KL: '70s?

CS: Yes, late '70s.

KL: Why did it decline do you think?

CS: I think the different ways of fishing, purse seining, kept the fish broke up, and [of] course the year that, a lot of our fish came out of Canada, some of it, they'd migrate back and forth, and they just kept the fish broke up, the purse seiners did.

KL: There were fewer fish?

CS: Yes, less and less fish. Good fish. That's why we were forced back in the late '60s and '70s, going over to Europe and buying smaller fish. In fact, we used to buy them first, we bought them out of Norway, all canned, but we stopped doing that because that didn't give our employees any work. Oh, I had these people I knew, I used to go over the Europe quite a bit, I always went to this food show, and I happened to meet these people in Sweden, and that's what they dealt in, buying [and] selling fish all over the world. So, I got hooked up with them, they've got an office in Gloucester, and so I started buying through them, buying out of East Germany, and surprising a lot of those fish that I bought in East Germany, was caught off of Georges Bank. So, I used to buy them and I bought out there for four or five years, and then I got hooked up with this bunch of people from Ireland, that I met in a seafood show over there, and they wanted to know what I did in the fishing business, and I told them, they wanted to know why I was over there, and I says, "Just looking around, see what I can do, looking at the new machinery, different things." And they said, "You ever buy frozen fish?" I says, "Yes, I buy quite a lot of it." He said, "Well, we have a lot in Ireland, but we have nothing to do with it. We don't have any plants in Ireland." I says, "Well," I says, "You give me some names, some people I can contact." I said, "I'll go visit them." So I did; I went and spent a month in Ireland, and hooked up to buy fish from over there, frozen fish, and I bought thousands of tons over there every year; I'd probably buy three [or] four-thousand tons, metric tons, bring them over in a big freezer ship, went to Winterport with them. They had a big cold storage freezer up there where we kept them. I don't know if the place is going anymore now or not, I don't believe so. And that's what we did; we did that until we sold out; we bought them over there.

KL: Do you think the fish will ever come back?



CS: Will they ever come back? They got to do a better job than their doing now managing them.

KL: Pardon me?

CS: They've got to do a better job managing than they're doing now. I guess what I understand from the manager down here that they had quite a hard job here the last year the plant ran to get what fish they wanted. In fact, they had trouble getting enough for lobster bait, and what caused it, I don't know. I don't follow it that close, so I really don't know, if they don't go far enough off shore, or what the trouble is. Now it's very obvious it's being over fished. I don't know what the new rules are this year, whether they're going to put a shorter season on them, or quotas on, or what they're going to do; they had quotas anyway, and this is why Bumble Bee said they had to get done because the quota was too small, and they couldn't get enough fish, so they had to close the door.

KL: What kind of label did you use on the fish?

CS: What label?

KL: On the cans?

CS: We had lithograph covers.

KL: Pardon me?

CS: They was painted, lithograph, what they called lithographing.

KL: What did it look like?

CS: Oh we had, when Beach Cliff was our main brand there [was] a lighthouse on it. Then some of them we had pictures of sardines on them, and some of them would have a picture of a lighthouse, like this one over here or something, to indicate the state of Maine, the shore, or show a picture of the sea shore, the picture of the water on them, and different designs, different things, but you know, you might, if you're really interested going further with this thing, you might be interested in going down to Lubec, or down to Jonesport, down to that museum they have down there.

KL: I've heard about that, yes.

CS: Well they got one they started, Ronnie Peabody got that one in Jonesport, but it's a lot closer to Eastport than Lubec is, but one of the best ones that I've seen was—I don't think he's living anymore, Barney Ryer, down there, he used to have a museum, and he [of] course had the old seining machines, and different equipment they used years ago, all the flakes, and all that stuff.

KL: And where is that?

CS: Down in Lubec

KL: In Lubec.

CS: Yes, he had a good one; I don't know if it's still there or not. I imagine his kids, probably his boys are running it. I doubt if he's alive today, I doubt it, but that Ronnie Peabody, down to Jonesport, he got a place he built here, what, two, three, four years ago. So he has a small museum down there, and he may have some of these old covers. You know people used to have brands they had different ones with the state, and I'm not sure, I haven't been down there, he may even possibly have a video that people can watch and look at. I don't know what he's got down there, either that or Lubec, either place you could get a lot of information. But they have quite a bit up here to Searsport, they have that little place they opened up in the summer time, where you can go in there. I've never been in there, but people have sent me cards, pictures. Once in awhile, friend of mine go by and they see a picture of the sardine plant, or some boat or something, and they'll send it to me, write the name on it, and I'll file it away, keep it. [laughter]

KL: [laughter] Are most of the people around here Scotts Irish? Where did most of the people around here come from?

CS: Where did most of them come from?

KL: Yes.

CS: Well, when I was a kid, most of them come from Downeast, Jonesport area, down Beal's Island, down those areas. And when my father first started living here there were very few people in this town, and like I say, mostly was a few sea captains that were in and out of here, had a few houses here, but most of the people—they brought a lot of people in from down—When he started his fish plant up here he started bringing people in from down Beal's Island, Jonesport. In fact he built several houses, my father did, back then, for them to live in. And they

used to have camps down here, cottages, he had several, eight, ten, fifteen of those things up and down the (?). In fact where those buildings are back there, we used to have camps out there.

KL: What were the camps like?

CS: Oh they were little wooden cottages, people lived in them, stayed there year round, worked in the plant, then they come down from Downeast somewhere. Most of them did, from Beal's Island, Jonesport, the wives worked in the factory, and the husbands went fishing. And that was the way it was back in those days. It was a small little town.

KL: Yes. What was the town like on a Saturday night?

CS: Oh, we always had our share of people drinking too much at night, Saturday nights. That was always a riot. Some of them got started drinking Friday night and they wouldn't sober up until Sunday. [laughter] So we always had a few of them around.

KL: [laughter] Was it pretty wild?

CS: Well, no not that bad, it wasn't. It's wilder than it is today, today is much quieter and calmer than it were back in those days.

KL: You know, something you just occurs to me to ask about. Please don't be offended by this, but I used to hear stories around Milbridge during the '30s; there was a certain amount of bootlegging going on, boats from Canada coming in.

CS: Oh yes, there were rum runners.

KL: Did that go on around here?

CS: Yes, though not so much here, [than] they did down in Milbridge. There wasn't that much of it here, a little bit of it, not much. Mostly in Milbridge area they had, most of those guys down there, can't remember what the heck their names was now, oh that was years ago, they used to do a little bit of that. Can't think of their name, they used to run rum from Canada up here. One of the fastest boats they had, what they called the Red Wing, which was one of the fastest boats they had, and I'm trying to think—King, one of them was King, his name was, and his brother had that little building there, now they buy lobster there. Over there, that white one over there, on the shore there; he used to have a store there, that used to be a store, and his father

was one of the rum runners, and I think his name was Phil, Phil King I think it was. He had that store there, had a little snack bar in there, and he'd feed the girls, you know from the factory, from the plants, used to go in there and eat, get lunch, and he'd stay there, I don't know, he was there quite a few years, but he was a part of that family, that used to be in the rum running business. The Kings, they were big at it.

KL: [laughter]

CS: Their mum would talk about the Red Wing, she was one of the fastest boats around here, they couldn't catch her, and they'd run that rum back and forth out of Canada to the United States. Most exciting days I guess, back in those days, but no, the towns quieter than it used to be, it's a different clientele here than it was back when I was growing up. Most different.

KL: What was the town like during WWII?

CS: WWII?

KL: Yes.

CS: Not much [different], quieter because a lot of the younger fellows had gone to war, and I think people was little more serious, and paid more attention to their work, because they knew we was fighting a war, and whatever we did was helping the soldiers out, so they kind of had the attitude of, you know, the more we can do, the more we can help out the soldiers, the better. So I think people was a little bit more serious back in those days. [Of] course, everybody had rations, you know, food was rationed and gasoline was, tires was, [of] course people didn't go that much back in those days.

KL: Now what happened to the workforce when the soldiers came back from WWII? Were some of the women displaced?

CS: Were they misplaced?

KL: Were some of the women displaced? Did some of the men come back from the war and take jobs that had been done by women before?

CS: No, not really, no I don't think the workforce changed that much. We used to employ, you know, some of the veterans when they came home. In fact, some of them worked here before

they left, when they come back, they come back they'd go to work, and it was a little tough, after the war.

KL: In what way?

CS: Well, people finding jobs and, you know, it's always when a war gets over with you got a whole military getting out of the service, and so it was a little bit hard, and [of] course, they had the big shipyard in Portland, that slowed down quite a bit, after the war got over, so it was kind of a lull after the war was over there for a while, but our business kept going. We never slowed down at all. We just kept plugging away, and expanding and building,

KL: What kind of jobs did the men who came back from the war take?

CS: Oh they'd go to work in the plant there. Some of them would drive trucks and work in the machinery, in the closing machines and different things, and do different jobs around the plant. And some of them we'd hire for maintenance. A lot of them had mechanical experience from the military, different things, and so it was, I don't think things changed too much here in Prospect Harbor too much. I think the biggest change was when they closed this plant down, first time it's been closed down since 1927.

KL: Tell me about that day.

CS: Beg pardon?

KL: Tell me about that day.

CS: Well, before they closed, like two days, two or three, I can't remember which, they had a sort of a get-together down here, out in the back warehouse, they invited me and my wife to go down, so I went down and it was kind of a nice get-together, and kind of a sad day, you know, it's something that you grew up in yourself and kind of grew up with it, and all of a sudden you see the end come. And [of] course I saw a lot of the girls, the packers that was there when I was there when we had the plant going, they'd all come up and give me a big hug and all that, and I enjoyed the business. It was a tough business, but like I said earlier, it was kind of a family thing anyway, but you kind of, it was like most businesses, you knew everybody personally, and so it was kind of a personal set up, and you know everybody there, individually by person, and like I said earlier, it was more like a family affair situation, and a lot of the kids you grew up with in the families, but I never thought I would see the day it would close, to be honest about it. I

thought it would probably keep going, but just the way things was going, the way things was operating, the way the fish was managed hasn't helped any, made it tough.

KL: Now, when did you leave the plant?

CS: I leave it in 1990.

KL: You left in 1990?

CS: Yes.

KL: Okay, and you were the owner.

CS: I was an owner, right, yes.

KL: So you sold it then in 1990?

CS: Yes. It was a family business. I had a brother, older than I am, and two brother-in-laws in it, and so everybody decided they wanted—time to sell out, so we sold it in 1990. January of 1990 we sold it. So now she's no longer, so it's quieter.

KL: Yes.

CS: Seems odd not to look across the harbor and see no lights, no activity going on, and...

KL: I can imagine that does seem odd, doesn't it?

CS: It is odd. Very much so. Seeing boats, in fact, on my computer screen, I got a big thirty-inch screen, I got a picture of the boat I took coming across here loaded with fish that was caught over here in Sand Cove. I got a picture of coming across here, that's what I got on my screen, on my computer, and that reminds me of back in the days, the good old days.

KL: Do you remember some of the names of some of the boats that carried the sardines?

CS: That used to have sardines here?

KL: Do you remember some of the names of the boats?

CS: Oh yes.

KL: What were they?

CS: Oh we had the Ida May, and the Joyce Marie that ran here. We usually had two carriers to each plant, then [of] course when we got into purse seining then the purse seiners would haul fish too, as well as the carriers. So we had four [or] five purse seiners, and we had two carriers to each plant, so we had probably, eight, probably had four—when we sold out we probably had ten, twelve boats, we had operating at that time.

KL: You were operating ten or twelve boats at one time?

CS: Oh yes, in four plants, yes.

KL: That's a lot of fish.

CS: Yes. We used to haul a lot of fish out of Gloucester, by truck, pile of them, in fact we got into the herring fillet business for years, we did frozen, what they call, curing herring, they cure them in barrels, we did a lot of that down here, and two, three other plants, because over in Germany [of] course, they're great (inaudible) herring eaters, and their supply of fish was overfished, and they didn't have fish for several years, so I produced a lot of fish and shipped them to Germany. A lot of them I shipped to Finland, different places. So they used to have the cured herring, I used to cure them down here, put them in plastic barrels, and every so many days you had to roll them, so they'd keep them mixed up, they put some kind of vinegar and something else in there, then you had to roll them every so many days to make sure they kept mixed up, and then we'd ship them out in a container, [by the] truckload, put them on a ship, [and] ship them over to Finland. And what they did, they'd eat those pickled herring during the potato harvest in Finland every year, so we used to ship a lot of stuff over there to Finland for the potato harvest. But they was great, and Denmark was great; we used to ship a lot to Denmark, Germany, and we'd freeze them; we'd ship them over in frozen blocks, over to Germany and Denmark and places. But Finland we put them in barrels, cured them; they wanted them all cured. It was a big market. Spent quite a lot of time doing that. We did that for several years. And then we was in the shrimp business for quite a few years; we did a lot of frozen shrimp, in three of our plants we did frozen shrimp for years. We'd freeze them, ship them out all over the country, different places.

KL: Do you remember your peak output? What year you packed the most fish?

CS: Oh, probably back when we had, I think it was when I first came home from Korea, probably back in mid '30s, mid '50s. Probably—well we owned at one time, I think it was ten plants we owned at one time. We had one in Robinson, two in Lubec, one in Machiasport, one here in Southwest Harbor, Bass Harbor, Belfast, Bath, Portland, South Portland, we had plants, so we used to pack a lot of fish at one time. And it seems time, as like anything else, as time went on you get modernized and you get more efficient ways of doing things, and so then you eliminated plants, gradually one at a time, because we did a lot of trucking back [then], the reason they had so many plants along the coast was they used to have boats that didn't have much speed, no power, they couldn't go very far. [Of] course, then they got faster boats, and then we got trucking fish with ice in them, different things, and so that way you didn't need as many plants to do the same amount of production. But then when you started packing year-round, why, that added to your production as well.

KL: Things got a little more consolidated?

CS: Yes. When we automated, we could have done this one plant, back before we sold it, I think one or two years, we packed two shifts, we had two shifts going. When we sold, the guy didn't keep the second shift going, he let them go, well we had over a hundred people, packers, and I said, "Why let them go, let them work at night," so they volunteered, some of them, to work at night, and we turned out almost as many cases at night as the day shift was. And if we'd have gone on another year, I think probably the night-shift would have done as well as the day-shift, and we could have probably packed, this one plant, probably three-hundred-thousand, four-hundred-thousand cases.

KL: Wow, in one plant?

CS: Yes, what we could have done. And it was automated, around the clock. So we had two shifts going, we did pretty well with it. and normally you pack one-hundred-fifty-thousand, pack three, four-hundred-thousand. [Of] course it was faster, quicker, and everything was all cut by hand, all machine cut, and all the girls had to do was put them in a can, and they could do it fast, and wasn't and in this operation, no one touched them, once they put them in the can, nobody touched them after that, was all automatic, the whole thing. It was a good set-up. And the baked fish was a better quality quality fish, much better. People took them around who sampled and said, "What a difference in the quality". And there was. We used to bake them, we had two great big gas fired baking ovens, then I added the third one. Just about half built when we sold



out, and the guy didn't want it, so I had to pay him off. But we needed was three of them, two wasn't enough, and the guy says, "Well," he says, "I don't understand this is four ounces, is four ounces." But I said, "My friend, four ounces of four fish in a can, vs. four ounces of eight or ten fish in a can," I said, "You've got to cook that fish a lot longer, cooking it with four fish, even though it's still four ounces." And they couldn't understand that. So one of my trips to Norway, [of] course I used to do a lot of work in Norway, and they had engineers over there, and [of] course, the government helped them a lot, so the guy (?) I said I had to go to a meeting over there; I was an advisor on that, government fish advisor, so I had to go to a meeting, so I took over a bunch of frozen fish over, I took some eight, ten fish over, [and] took some fours over and I said you pack those, you tell me when you get done, and I says, "I'll be back in ten days. And you do your research, and you give me all the statistics on it, and you tell me if you think four ounces is four ounces. It is, but it takes a lot longer to cook four ounces of four fish in a can, than it does eight fish in a can." They couldn't understand that. I says, "It's mass you're talking about." And [of] course when we quit the big fish in the steam boxes, years ago, when you had four fish together, big eight, ten to count fish that long, you had to cook them a lot longer, almost twice as long as you did the eight and ten count fish, because of the thickness, like a piece of meats the same thing. But they couldn't figure it out so four ounces is four ounces. I says, "I understand what you're saying, but it logically isn't the ounces, it's the mass that you're talking about." And so anyway, after I got done the meeting I went back to (inaudible) Norway, and had a meeting with a head scientist over there, and doing all the research, "Finally," he says, "If I hadn't seen it I wouldn't have believed it." And he said it takes a lot longer to cook that bigger fish, even though it's still four ounces in that can. I said, "Absolutely." And [of] course, when we did that, see, this is the same thing the Germans said because I had my cookers built in Germany, they says, "Well, you're still cooking four ounces." But I said, "They can put four fish in a can, twice as fast as they can put eight in a can. So that means I need twice as much production capacity as I do for the eights." "Well," they says, "those two cookers should handle it." I says, "I don't agree with you." I says, "No way it's going to handle it." If I start doing to develop the steak business, taking big fish cutting them up in steaks; we started doing that back in, oh, what the heck was it, probably '70's sometime, late '70s, maybe mid '70s we started making steaks, slice them up, steaks and put eight to ten in a can, and I says, "You put them (inaudible) how fast you put them in a can, and how quick they can go through those cookers," I said, "We're going to need three cookers." And the guy says, "Two is all you're going to need." He says, "I guarantee it." So we had quite a discussion about it. And I finally ended up, they came over here one day and I said, "Now you, I want you to come over," I says, "We're going to have the size fish I want you to see, look at." Oh I already had rigged up two, three steam boxes, I had rigged up (wagon?), automatically take them off the conveyor and put them on trays, put them in carts and steam them, which I didn't want to do, but I had to do it to keep the line going.

They come over, they looked at that, and they couldn't believe it. I says, "See, I need a third cooker." So they said they had it just about half done when we sold it out. That third cooker was half done. But they were far superior quality when they were steamed. They had a much better taste to them, much better.

KL: You said baking them was better than steaming them?

CS: Oh yes, so much better. And this was why I was after see, that way I could pick up more market, increase my market capacity, because of better quality, go promote it, and we did it in some places, supply and how the market picked up, just because of those baked ones. I said, "The best thing to do is make sure we take, because we only got one plant doing them," I says, "Let's make sure we send them to certain markets so that we can supply them every shipment from the baker, from the cookers, instead of the steam boxes, but don't mix them up, because if you do you'll upset your marketing system." People will say, "Oh, they got those back again." I said, "You got to go with the same how much you put them in there, you got to keep them there, in those stores." I said, "You got to do it." And we did, and people liked them much better than the steamed fish. So I don't know what Conner did. Conners, when bought the company they took them out, took them to Blacks Harbor, so I don't know what they ever done with them, if they (inaudible) them up, or what they did with them. They probably took them, put them together, and built some more. So that's the only plant there is around I guess, now is Conners, [in] Blacks Harbor.

KL: Do you know other people that I might want to talk to?

CS: Oh you could go down probably talk to the plant manager down here. Peter Colson.

KL: Peter Colson?

CS: Yes.

KL: Okay.

CS: He ran the plant for Bumble Bee, and those other people who bought it for several years. In fact he worked in the plant over in Southwest Harbor with his father, over there, used to run it, plant we had in Southwest Harbor, so he been with us since he was old enough to work. So he might give you a little different outlook on it, or give you some ideas.

KL: And you mentioned the woman in Corea. Are there other people who worked in the plant a long time who I might want to talk to?

CS: He could tell you better than I could, Peter Colson could. He could tell you better. Because I can't remember; some are passed away now, and I don't know if their still here or not, some of the older people. And so he'd be better, because I haven't been involved in it since 1990, so I'm really not (inaudible), a lot of the people are gone, the way the world goes.

KL: Yes, and is there anything else you want to point out to me that I might be over-looking or anything?

CS: (Inaudible) many people to do what now?

KL: That I might be over-looking, not thinking to ask about?

CS: I think we pretty well covered it. It's pretty hard to explain, you know, certain types of system, I mean, to me you almost got to see it, see pictures of it to really...

KL: Yes.

CS: It's too bad you couldn't visit some of those museums down there, might be a big plus for you.

KL: Yes, I'll check them out.

CS: Because they got some of the old equipment, and they got some of the old covers, and different companies packed and different things. And they can give you a good idea what it used to be like, back years ago. It's too bad I didn't have the pictures, because we lost them in the plant burnt, we lost all the pictures we had.

KL: Yes, that's too bad.

CS: The old plants and stuff, how we used to operate inside and all that. But some of these museums, that place in Searsport has quite a lot of different information on sardine industry, pictures and things.

KL: I'll check with them, yes.

CS: But I don't think they're open until summer-time. I don't think. I never been in there; I'm going to make point to go there this summer. I've never been in the place. But my friends have gone in and says, "It's fairly interesting. They got pictures and different things, you can see of the old sardine plants and different things."

KL: Well I want to make sure I get a picture if that's OK with you.

CS: I guess so. I don't know what you want a picture for, but... [laughter]

END OF INTERVIEW