



Weston Fields

Transcript of an Oral History
Conducted by
Anjuli Grantham
at
Bear Island, Alaska
On July 31, 2015
(With subsequent corrections and additions)

Kodiak Historical Society

About West Side Stories

This oral history is part of the West Side Stories project of the Kodiak Historical Society. West Side Stories is a public humanities and art project that intended to document the history of the west side of Kodiak Island through oral history, photography, and art. The oral histories chart the personal stories of individuals with a longtime connection to the west side of Kodiak Island, defined for the scope of this project as the area buffeted by the Shelikof Strait that stretches from Kupreanof Strait south to the village of Karluk. The project endeavored to create historical primary source material for a region that lacks substantive documentation and engage west side individuals in the creation of that material.

The original audio recording of this interview is available by contacting the Kodiak Historical Society. Additional associated content is available at the Kodiak Historical Society/ Baranov Museum, including photographs of interview subjects and west side places taken during the summer of 2015, archival collections related to the west side, and journals and art projects created by west side residents in 2015.

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Note on Transcription

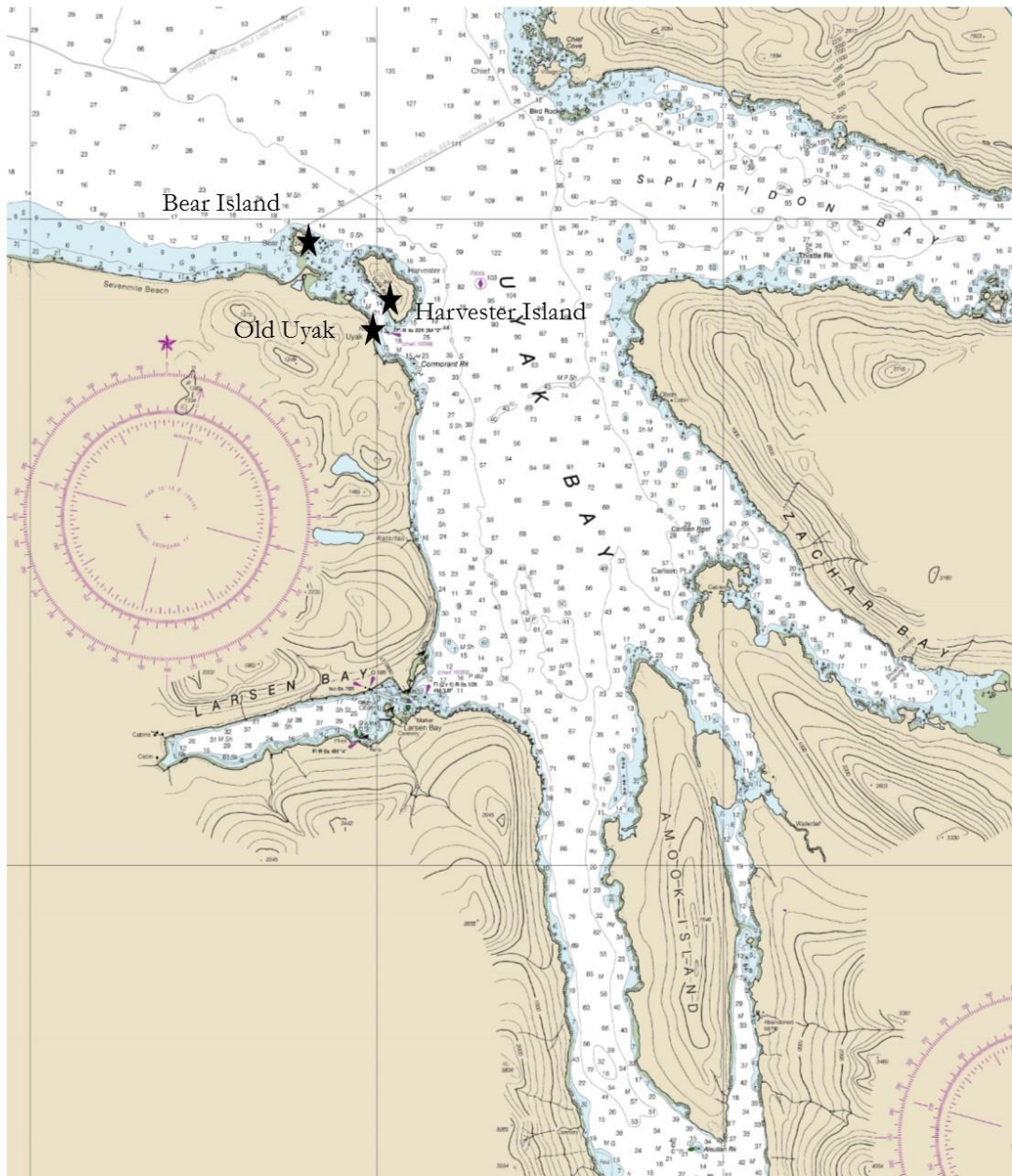
After the initial transcription was completed, a second transcriber performed an audit/edit by listening to the oral history recording and verifying the transcription. The interview subject then had the opportunity to add or retract information. The following transcript is the resulting document. Editing is intended to make the interview easier to understand. Bracketed words indicate they were added after the interview. The use of [...] indicates that something that was spoken does not appear in the transcription. Often, these are false starts. In some cases, it is information that the interview subject retracted later. The original audio file is available for listening.

Citation

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Key Words:

Cover Photo: Weston Fields, at Bear Island on July 31, 2015. Photographed by Breanna Peterson for West Side Stories. P-1000-7-169.



Select locations within Uyak Bay mentioned in the oral history.

Oral History of Weston Fields

WF: Before she [Wanda Fields] died, had been working on a book about fishing and I was helping her, and it was largely finished. The actual narrative was done up to about 1977, '78, but that might be some help to you.

AG: I know you also wrote a book about setnetting, didn't you?

WF: That was a little different. That was actually like a textbook for the class on salmon gillnetting that they had when they first started the community college. Carolyn Floyd was President, our first President, and they had the Fisheries Technology Program there. Pete Resoff was the one who taught that class for many years. He was a setnetter in Kupreanof. His son, I think, is still a setnetter there, Resoff. So anyway that was a textbook and it was all about how to do it and things like net mending, how to set anchors, how to take up, how to pick fish and all that.

AG: I need a copy for the exhibit.

WF: You got a copy?

AG: No, I need a copy for the exhibit.

WF: Okay. I have a copy here and a copy in town, but the copy here has been used so much by the crew for net mending and all that, but I have a good copy in town. You'd be welcome to it.

AG: Great.

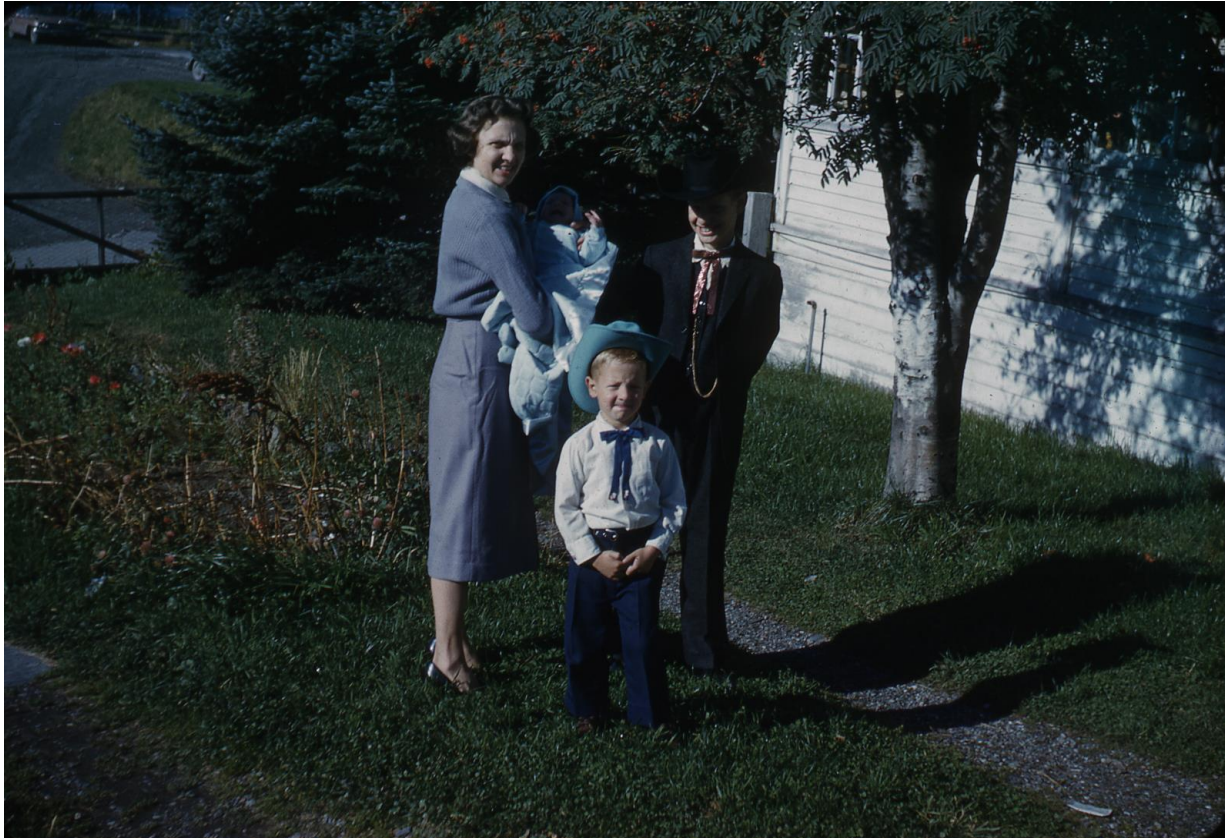
WF: It was written before the days of personal computers. I think I wrote it in '72, '73, along in there. So it was typed on the state of the art, at that time, IBM correcting selector typewriter and then printed and then a few copies bound. What they did for the class was just they Xeroxed copies of that, and Beth Kourmetis, I know, is one that Xeroxed a copy for herself and some of the others on the south end. So it got around, but that was more than forty years ago. (*Laughing*)

AG: I know of it because Bud Lather told me about it. But let's get started. It is July 31, 2015. I am at Bear Island with Weston Fields, and this interview is taking place as part of the West Side Stories project. So thank you, Weston.

WF: You're welcome.

AG: Can you tell me when and where you were born and what brought your family to Alaska?

WF: I was born January 16, 1948 in Long Beach, California. My parents were living in Los Angeles at the time right after World War II, and they came to Kodiak to be house parents at the Kodiak Baptist Mission. They came in 1949, June 1949. I was a little over a year old when we came up. At that time everybody came up on a steamship. Very few people flew from Seattle in those days. So that's how we got here. My parents were at the Mission for three years, and then they decided to stay in Kodiak but find other employment. So my mother became a schoolteacher and taught until she retired in the late '70s and my dad did a number of things, and one of them was salmon fishing. He also had his ranch at Anton Larsen Bay from 1956 until about 1980 or so. It was in November of 1960. We had, as a family, beach seined in Middle Bay for two years back in 1954, '55. [...] Dad had a seiner in Kodiak for about five years. I had been on the seiner as a crewmember since I was nine. Started out beach seining when I was six (*laughing*). Then he heard about a chance to buy this setnet site. In those days, it was practically unheard of to buy a setnet site, but the fellow who lived here, Henry Lamberg was his name, Norwegian, had fished here for a few years and decided to sell. The site had been previously fished by the father of Jack Wick, who is still a local guy, a couple of years



Wanda, Wallace, Duncan, and Weston Fields outside their home, the Governor's Mansion Rooming House (aka Russian American *Magazın*), around 1960. P-941-40.

older than I am. He had unfortunately drowned out here in 1949 putting out anchors by himself. They found the overturned boat but they never found him. And so we came out here in June, May, I guess, of 1961. That first year, just Dad and I were fishing because Wallace [Fields] was only ten months old and Duncan [Fields] was only five years old. Wallace really was a babe in arms, and we didn't have a crib or anything here because Henry had been just a bachelor and he just had a bed for himself. So Dad went over to the beach there at Sevenmile and found these little driftwood sticks, and he made a crib out of driftwood sticks for Wallace. So that was our first year and we've been here fishing every year since.

AG: Why was it mostly unheard of to buy a setnet site?

WF: Well, first of all, Kodiak at that time didn't have any such thing as the leasing of fishery sites like you have state leases now that you can get. Secondly, most setnet sites were fished by a single person or a man and his wife. When we first came here, no setnetter had any crewmembers or anything like that. And most importantly, perhaps, you could go and find a good site a lot of places by yourself. You didn't need to buy it. A lot of setnetters still put up tents and lived in tents during the summer. So there was no necessity, and you could buy as many licenses as you could find people to put in their names. Eventually, a place like this which had a couple of buildings had been built up by some of the Norwegians, were valuable enough that it took a little money to buy them. Now you have to remember that at that time a good year's wages would have been around \$3-5,000. Five



DeWitt Fields, Weston's father, 1982. P-779-10-67.

thousand would have been pretty high for a year's wages, and so what Henry was asking at that time was \$4000 for the buildings and the sites and everything. He had actually only two sites where he had been fishing. A few boats they were pretty old wooden boats, really old (*laughing*), not much in the way of gear, some linen nets, no nylon nets, and cotton lines and manila lines. So \$4000 for a site was quite a bit at the time. I think the next one that sold in this area was probably the following year. No, 1966. Lloyd Swan, who fished in Chief Point and who also owned a place at

Harvester, and we bought that

from him in 1963 [...] which consisted of a house and a warehouse and a chicken house and not too much more. Well, Lloyd had been fishing over at Chief Point and he sold his site to Gary Abston, who is Virginia Abston's husband. Now you probably know, you might know Trish, the daughter, and so-forth. I forget what her married name is, but anyways.

AG: Cox.

WF: Cox, yeah. Then after that, over the years a few and eventually most of the sites in the bay here transferred for money. Money passed hands. Danelskis' bought theirs about 1972 and Franciscos' bought theirs from the sister of Otto Erickson after he died, and then eventually bought the house and a site there by the old cannery from Bill Hoagland's stepson. That would have been in the '70s. Tom Keck sold his place probably in the '80s and that was over in Greenbanks. But some of the places, like where Stan Ness has, his dad and another guy just saw the place and thought it would be good and squatted. In those days, early days of statehood, there was very little control of the land during federal times. You could just squat anywhere. Everything was squatting. Now Henry here, this island, had a federal grazing lease because he raised cows and he provided meat for Karluk and Larsen Bay. That goes back to pre-World War II times when there was no refrigeration. Actually, in a lot of the villages, going back that far, they didn't even have generators. So he would kill the beef in the fall when it was cold enough and they could keep it cold more or less. But there were no deer around this far down at that time. See the deer were only planted in the '30s around Kodiak and it took them a long time to get down here. Not many deer, any deer that I remember. Maybe there were some in the early '60s. Then there was on Sevenmile, Bill Wood was there fishing in 1961 when we came, and he was a real mentor to me. A good friend of the family. He was the stepson of Kris Helgason from Terror Bay, the guide. His mother was from Afognak and he had grown up at Afognak. His stepfather, Kris, had fished that site since 1927 and then Bill fished it. He died in 1977, and then his widow fished it for '78, '79, '80. So about three years and sold out to us in 1981. Then down the corner where Wes Wiley is, that site was owned and fished for many many years by the

Von Scheele family. Herman Von Scheele. Von Scheeles were, in those days, still somewhat tied to Afognak before the tidal wave. They certainly were tied to Afognak. I don't know if any ever lived in Port Lions [...], and they sold out in about 1972 or 3 to a guy named Dennis Nelson who decided to become an attorney, so he sold out to Tom Keck who sold out to Wes Wiley. Tom Keck was well known to a lot of us because he was a high school teacher. So that's where Wes Wiley got his start there in Greenbanks. He was my Algebra II teacher in high school (*laughter*). A lot of the guys were school teachers. Leon Francisco was a school teacher. And then going on down the bay, Haugheys, Al Haughey was a school teacher. He bought that place from Jake Laktonen who was originally from Karluk but lived for many years in Larsen Bay, and he bought that in the, oh, late '60s, something like that. So it took a while before places were sold. But even after places were being sold there were others who came in and tried new places. For example, you know Don Nekeferoff? He tried fishing in front of just about everybody on the island (*laughing*) in the 1980s. He's still around, by the way. Did you ever talk to him?

AG: Huh-um.

WF: He would be very interesting. [...] He came to the 50th year reunion of the classes of '65 and '66 a couple of weeks ago, and although he was in the class of '63, he came anyway. So he's still around. He would be very interesting to talk to. So that kind of goes around the bay there. There are a few others, but most of the places are originally people just sort of set up there. Now one of the big factors, and I'm sure you heard about this in Uganik, too, for the sort of rise of the setnets was the ending of the traps and statehood. And a number of the setnet sites are on trap sites at Longbeach over there, Chief Point, Greenbanks. None on this side [south]. There were trap sites on down toward Karluk, but they didn't allow setnetting there. Now, when I first started, you could setnet about any place on Kodiak Island. Those restrictions came in only later. For example, down around Halibut Bay, Gurney Bay, Bumble Bay, Ayakulik, Red River, that was full of setnetters. Port Bailey serviced all those setnetters, but in order to do that they sent tenders down to their traps from Port Bailey. Like they had the trap at Longbeach and then they could go on down and catch the setnetters, catch the trap on the way back again, so it was worthwhile to run the fish all that way. Then when the traps went out, then Port Bailey said, "Well we can't service the setnetters in that area anymore." So just like that, all the people in Halibut Bay, Gurney Bay, Bumble Bay and Red River had to quit. So they came up, went all over, came up to this area, Uganik, and so forth. But famous people from Kodiak used to fish down there. Alf Madsen, the famous bear guide, fished there. A guy named Wilsgaard, who was a famous, I mean in Kodiak, old sailing ship skipper who came to Kodiak or to Alaska in sailing ships about 1885 or '86 or something like that. He used to live with us when we had the rooming house in the museum. Wilsgaard. Captain Wilsgaard. He fished down there. Otto Erickson, who had the place the Franciscos have now, he started living there at least as early as 1912. We knew him quite well, and he fished down in Gurney Bay. And that was back in those days, the '40s, the cannery at Carmel was still there, so that gave them also a market. When Carmel went out of market, then they had Port Bailey. When Port Bailey said no more, then that was it. They didn't have a market. Everybody had to quit.

AG: What about APA?

WF: They didn't want to send a tender all the way down. They sent tenders every day to Karluk, but that was because of the beach seine. So the seiners were sort of an afterthought. Now, of course, the seine fleet developed more after statehood. But yeah, APA had the traps you see here. I think APA had the one at Chief Point, Greenbanks, and then they had the beach seine, which was like a trap (*laughing*), you know, at Karluk because they could fish right at the mouth of the river.

AG: Well, you mentioned then 1927 someone of setnetting over here?

WF: Yeah, Kris Helgason.

AG: [...] What do you know about the beginning of setnetting in Kodiak? Because I know that initially it was beach seining at Karluk. There was really the commercial fishing gear.

WF: Yeah, [...] Well, there was the Northwestern Cannery here at Old Uyak right where Wallace's house is. Actually, we bought that property from a company that bought it from another company. It started out Northwestern. It was eventually taken over by Wards Cove, and then it was a land company called Trident Land Company. It had nothing to do with Trident Seafoods. That cannery was there from about 1898, along in there, 1890s. They went out of business in 1929, the Great Depression. I'm just looking at my watch for the crew. I have to say something to them to get them going at three. Now the president of that company, like a lot of people did in 1929, he jumped out of the window of a hotel in Seattle, committed suicide because he lost everything. So that cannery stopped. But we had letters that we got, either out of Henry's house—. I think probably they were Russian Dick's place on Sevenmile which is basically two houses along Sevenmile. The first one is Russian Dick's, the second is where Bill Woods lived, and then that way down the corner is Wes Wiley. There is also another cabin down there, too. Now, in the Russian Dick's place we found some letters back to the '20s and the letters were from Northwestern. They were saying something like, "Well, it's about time to think about getting your sets ready and if you need any kegs." At that time, there is no such thing as plastic buoys, so all the kegs were wooden barrels, sometimes this big, sometimes this big. In fact, I have saved all of ours underneath the warehouse here, and you can see exactly what we all used in those days before plastic buoys. So the cannery is writing saying it's time



Weston Fields holding an old shore keg. P-1000-7-155.

to get ready for the season, I think this is 1927 season, and if you need anything let us know we will order it, nets and so forth. So I know it goes back at least till then. Beach seining was a lot harder

way to get fish for one or two people than setnetting, a lot harder, with no power blocks. We beach seined for two years in Middle Bay. You beach seine and a lot of the good places where humpies come is full of grass on the bottom and kelp, and you have to pull all that in by hand. And you might be lucky to make three or four sets a day because it was all by hand. And actually, when we seined up till 1960, almost the entire fleet was still seining by hand. So you can imagine pulling in a whole seine by hand. You didn't make that many sets. So I think, mainly, setnetting was popular because it wasn't as labor intensive day by day, and secondly, setnetting allows you to fish a lot more places. I mean, [...] almost all our sets, let's see, except one, I'd say, are in places where you couldn't beach seine because they are all full of rocks. You can fish off the points, the capes, and fish way off out the beach at Sevenmile which [...] Kris Helgason was doing in 1927, fishing way off shore. It's all full of rocks in close, but you can get some fish if you [go off shore], but you could never beach seine. There's one place on all of Sevenmile Beach, when you reach the corner, where you can actually beach seine. Well, maybe two. Also, setnetting is often a more efficient way to catch reds, especially if you compare the kind of seine gear that people had back in the '40s, '50s, '60s. Reds often travel in very small schools or singly, so you have to hold hook for a while or be in just the right spot if you're going to try to catch them with a seine. Now with today's gear, [...] you take someone like Mitch Keplinger, you know, he can kill the reds. But a lot of it has to do with gear. And so setnetting for the June fishery, which was traditionally the big time for reds, was really a superior way for a single guy. So lots of seiners setnetted in June and fished seines in July and August. For example, Swan, who lived on Harvester, he did that. And Von Scheeles, they did that. They had a boat. And also Kris Helgason. He had the *KFC-121*. That was from Port Bailey. 'Cause that was Kadiak Fisheries, you know. And so lots of seiners did that. Oh, even take for example, Dennis Knagin. They had a site up in Uganik, Viokoda Bay, but they seined because a seine inside the bay is a more efficient way of getting pinks, you know. And then it's important to understand that the type of gear that people had until the 1960s wasn't anything like the nylon gear that we later got or the leads inside the line instead of outside.

AG: Describe the gear that you first used, please.

WF: Well, the first year we were out here we had linen nets that we got from Henry. And linen nets weren't nearly as strong and they're hard to keep from rotting. So you really had to dry them well and even so they rotted easily. We had manila anchor lines and some cotton anchor lines. They [...] took a lot of care if you planned to use them a second year. All of our stuff was old old old stuff. Our first net that was a nylon net, we actually borrowed later on the first season from Annie Johnson, who was the wife of the former watchman up at Parks [Cannery], and her sons were like Jimmy Johnson and Tommy Johnson, and they're cousins like to Virginia Abston, through their mothers, see. Well actually, Virginia is a sister to Tommy.

AG: Yes.

WF: To Tommy and Jimmy. But Jack Wick is a cousin and they're all—. Well, we borrowed a nylon net first from her. And we were still fishing for several years, even up until '63, '64 with some lead lines that had leads molded on the outside of the line. We even had the molds here and the lead to pour into the molds to actually put those leads on ourselves. But when you pull that kind of a leadline up into a skiff, it's five times harder than if you're pulling this new leadline with the leads inside. And I actually still have here probably examples of almost every kind of gear we ever fished, including manila lines, both new and used. Cotton lines. I still may have some linen netting, but I certainly have netting that goes back as far as 1964 or '65. All different kinds of line, you know. It was a big thing. I remember when we got our first roll of polypropylene line. One roll of it, 200 feet. Let's see, 200 fathoms would have been 1200 feet. Yep, 200 fathoms. In 1962, that was such a big

thing, you know. But all of that line was floating so then you had to put weights. Everybody had to put weights. Some people tied rocks or some other kind of weights, you know, pieces of machinery or something on the lines. We actually made a lot of circles of lead, and I still have a lot of them here, by making a mold in the sand. And then Dad would melt old leadline leads in a skillet on a campfire on the beach, a wooden fire on the beach, or a little Coleman stove, and then we would pour it into these molds, and that's what we used. So at first, there weren't any such things as, you either had nylon which was extremely expensive, or the floating polypropylene. And then in the early '70s, late '60s and early '70s you got this PolyDac, which is a combination of polypropylene and dacron, and it sinks. That was a big thing for everybody. So those are some of the things. We used all wooden skiffs. Everybody did, of course, and much smaller motors. Our first skiff here was about fourteen feet. It was a skiff that the cannery let us use. In those days, many people either leased or just used from the cannery, their skiffs for holding skiffs, for picking skiffs. And it was awhile before we could, I think it was 1965, no '64, we had a couple of skiffs built by a guy from Chignik, in his garage in Kodiak. But it was all wood. And we were some of the last to switch over to aluminum. We had all these wooden skiffs. We loved our wooden skiffs and we still have some of them. Duncan [Fields] has one down at Harvester and we have several of them in Kodiak that we never sold. And we have small motors, 18-horse [power] at first. I 'member first 33-horse that was a big, that was a big step, a big motor. And eventually 40s [horsepower] but [...] we probably got our first 40 maybe in the '70s. There were people that used a little bit bigger, but everyone had wooden skiffs. That was a big thing when we changed to aluminum skiffs. Another big development later on was rollers, in the front of the skiffs. That was huge.



Aluminum skiffs on Harvester Island. P-1000-7-69.

AG: When did that transition take place?

WF: Well, I would say it started in the '80s. The people in Uganik, I think, were a little bit more forward looking, ahead of the curve there. Maybe some in Olga Bay, too. We got most of ours beginning in the '80s. By the '90s, we'd pretty well switched over to rollers. But we also had developed something even with wooden skiffs that helped us a lot and not many people really adopted it, before rollers. We still use it. It's what we call power picking where we would drive with power down the net and just have the headline up over a stick in the stern, and that would at least pull the headline up as we went along rather than—. Some people still today will go along and every skiff-length and pull up by hand the headline. If you only have one or two sets, no big deal. But now it's very like industrialized, you know. That has made a big difference like for us because we're fishing awfully tough weather and tide on Sevenmile Beach. So is Wes Wiley. So are the people out on Longbeach. Oh, Leigh and what's their name? They have a famous—.

AG: Kip [Thomet].

WF: Yeah, their son is famous for his running. Yeah. Levi. Yeah. So anyway, but they originally here were used. In fact, a lot of people were still using dory-style. Bill Woods used the dory-style, which is narrow front, narrow back, until he died. Otto Erickson used a dory-style which fit the fact that most setnetters, at that time, fished alone. It was single guys by themselves. A dory is a lot easier to handle, you know. Bill Woods, he put out and took up [nets] pretty much by himself. Sometimes his wife would help him take off. But Otto fished completely alone where Franciscos are. Bill Hoagland, he fished by himself. Even those guys were in their seventies, maybe eighties, they were still fishing by themselves. Everybody over there. Lloyd Swan. The guy that was on, Johanson, who fished on Longbeach back in the '60s. He eventually died, disappeared, no one knew what happened to him. Just disappeared in the winter in a skiff. So the equipment at that time had to be lighter and it had to be something that one guy could handle and, also, something that you could repair more or less on your beach by yourself. And of course, a wooden skiff was a lot easier to repair than an aluminum, where you've got to have a welder and so-forth. And a lot cheaper, too. And those smaller motors were cheaper. But it meant that running time with a full load to tender took a lot longer. Running time to the cannery, it could take us two hours to get to Larsen Bay with our 18-horse.

AG: How long does it take now?

WF: About fifteen to twenty minutes. [...] I only have a 90-[horse power] on ours. [...] I think I've got the biggest picking skiff in the bay now.

AG: How big is it?

WF: Well, it's this one down here. You can take a look at it. It's about thirty-three feet long, and the main thing is it's about ten feet wide. Maybe, yeah, I think it's ten feet. Maybe it's only eight, but it's very wide, very big. I built it just a few years ago here on Bear Island. I actually had a guy come and build it here specifically for the rough fishing out on Sevenmile. So you go out in a northeast, blowing northeast thirty, sometimes forty, you feel you have a much better chance to make it back. A lot of times you don't know, really, seriously, you don't know if you're going to make it back or not. Lots of times I've gotten back in over the years and seriously, literally, said a prayer of thanks that I was alive. (*laughter*)

AG: Where did you get your gear? Who were your suppliers?

WF: [...] In the early days, the cannery, you know APA, we started fishing for them. They kept some gear or they would order it for people. [...] Now you have to remember I was in seventh grade the first year we were here. I was going into seventh grade. So obviously my dad was doing the

ordering. But he wasn't really doing the ordering. Dad wasn't organized like that, so he would find a deal during the winter, you know, somebody trying to sell a net or maybe he would order something through the cannery, maybe not. During the season if we wanted to buy a roll of line, just one roll would be a big deal. They had that stockroom for gear upstairs in the first warehouse there, the one closest to the office upstairs. They had a whole area, twine, needles, line, and some netting. And then eventually, by about 1969, by then I was in college and taking more responsibility and getting a little tired of just catch-as-catch-can gear. But that was my dad. That's the way he was. And that's the way some people still are here (*laughter*). So after the season, Tom Keck had had a real good year in 1969. So I asked him what kind of gear he had gotten, and he had gotten some nets from somewhere in Seattle. At that time, a lot of people got their gear from Nordby. I don't know if you've heard that name. That was a big name, Nordby. So I decided on my way back to college that I would stop in Seattle and see what I could find. Now at that time, a lot of the gear business was still down on the piers, right down below the hill, below Fourth Avenue, right on the piers. So I got to Seattle, stayed in a hotel, walked down from Fourth and University. I was at the Olympic Hotel, and I decided to just walk along and try to find a supplier for netting. And I was looking for a



Mending nets at Bear Island, July 2015. P-1000-7-132.

particular kind that was called Crystal at that time. So I went into the first place and it was as though they didn't really care whether they helped me or not. You know, I was only twenty years old and probably looked a lot younger than that. Just a kid. So then I went next door, and the company next door was Seattle Marine. So the two founders of the company were there. They started that company after World War II. And so they welcomed me, took me under their wing, and then actually we had a lifelong friendship after that, their life-long. And they set me up. I said, "Look, I

want to get some web, and this is how many meshes deep and this is the size, and I want this new stuff that's not just pure nylon, but twisted and all this stuff." And they set me up. So we have been buying all of our gear from Seattle Marine from that day, '69, until now. So that is, what, 45 years or something. In fact, when the first owner, Bill Anderson died, and then the second died, only maybe fifteen or twenty years ago, and he left instructions that we were to be treated well. He became really a good friend with us. So they've given us a special deal on web until this moment. We buy it cheaper than anybody in the bay, but that's just, you know, that friendship that started when I was young. And I always went every year then to see them on my way back to school or wherever I was going. So Seattle Marine which then started Kodiak Marine eventually.

AG: Did you all hang your own nets?

WF: Always till now.

AG: How did you learn about such things?



Hanging nets at Bear Island. P-1000-7-148.

WF: Interesting. The whole thing with web and hanging started out in Kodiak because Halferty's was the cannery in Kodiak in the '50s and early '60s until Alaska Packers bought it, about '60, '61. They bought it to be crab cannery, but they did a little salmon and some clams, too, right at first. But one thing that they had in those days was a whole crew of net menders and net hangers that worked all winter long because the canneries owned the seines. In Kodiak, the crew chief for the net crew was named Charlie Christoffersen, and some of his descendants are still around Kodiak, actually. So when I was twelve years old, when we were still seining, [...] my dad asked Charlie Christoffersen if he would teach me how to [...] mend. So he came down on the seiner and he went through the whole thing, and he taught me to mend when I was twelve. And until now, when I teach these guys every year, I use the same things that he taught me and the same terminology, you know, measure, pinch, first knot, all this stuff. Then when the second year that we setnetted, dad had found some web, didn't have the first clue about how to hang it, but he bought some line for corkline, and we bought this new web, enough for one net, and brought it out

to Larsen Bay. And before we left town, he had put me with a guy named Al Levine, and his descendants are still around Kodiak, too, by the way. Levine. [...] He was a fisherman, but he had worked on the seine [mending] crew during the winter. [...] The way he taught hanging was you had to measure between the nets. The way he did it was he carved a little stick 'the length of the

measurement, and then a little groove around the middle of the stick, and then he would tie a string around that and around your neck, and you had that measurement right there so that every time you went to make a knot, you had that stick there. Later on we started using marks on the needles. And then later on that changed over to use something like they do with seining where they have a line where there are measurements marked on it. I can show you up in the warehouse. We're still doing it that way. Then there was another, the guy from Harvester, Lloyd Swan, he was living with us there at the rooming house right before and after the tidal wave in '63, '64. 'Cause we bought this in the fall of '63 and we had the tidal wave in '64. He was living at our house. So he also taught me a few things, and actually I still hang, and the crew here does, in a kind of old fashioned way. But I still like it. I think it is the most efficient all the way around. [...] And I also learned from Seattle Marine. They had a full time web loft in those days. So most often people would order nets already hung. We never did. Mainly to save money at first, and then we sort of got to do it our own way, you know. So we've done that. [...] And also from Bill Wood, I learned quite a bit about hanging. So various people taught me that mending. Eventually after many years of doing it you know how to do it. But I did have a chapter on mending there in that book I wrote with some drawings. How to do a patch and all this stuff. And of course later on books came out, too. Back in those days, there weren't that many books on splicing, or knots, or netting. Today you can get that kind of thing. But everyone here hung their own nets. I don't know of anyone, and most people still do today. I don't actually know of anyone that has them hung like down in Seattle. And now they do very little hanging in Seattle Marine. They may do a little more at Lummi, like up in Bellingham, but they were newcomers. The guy that started Lummi actually worked at Seattle Marine way back as a young guy.

I knew him.

AG: So was it Bill Wood that taught you and your father how to setnet?



Eddie Paakkanen. P-1012-18.

WF: Well, we had some help on that. Dad had known a guy named Eddie Paakkanen. You may hear about Eddie when you talk to people. He had the site that now the Beardsleys have in Larsen Bay. Only he just had the one net there. And he was a local guy. He had been raised on Alf's Island way up in Uyak Bay. His dad was a Finn. And his dad did not allow him to go to school, like a lot parents in those days around here, so he didn't read or write. A lot of people were in that situation from my parents' generation that grew up around here or they only went to the fourth grade or fifth grade, something like that. Anyway, Eddie. Dad had known him in Kodiak somehow. So when we came out, Eddie brought us down here for the first time, got us on the island, and he came down and helped us measure the first anchor lines, helped us put out the first set. Then at that time there was a guy living over in the lagoon named Joe Maxwell. He lived there from about 1951 through 1962, '63. His house burned down in the winter. The watchman poured gasoline instead of oil into the oil stove to light

it and it blew up and burned the whole place down. But he kept coming back for a few years to

seine. But he helped us. He was also a bear guide, Joe Maxwell. His son is still alive in Seattle. He's been up here to visit, including last summer. Bobby. See I was only thirteen when we were out here the first year and Bobby was like nineteen. It was like light years older at that age, you know. But yeah, Joe helped us. So he came over and pointed out a second place where Henry had had a set. I mean when Dad bought it he came out for one day and Henry said, "Well, I fish there and I fish there," you know, an hour or two and that was it. So we didn't have too much knowledge passed along. But other people like Bill Woods, he taught us a lot over the years, especially me. He would stop by to visit. People did that a lot more in those days because if you're making a trip that's a two to three hour trip just from here to Larsen Bay or four hours to Karluk or something, you need a break and people would stop a lot more. It was a lot less fast paced, you know. So people would stop and give us hints. Bill especially gave me hints on, for example, why do you hang a setnet twenty percent in, that is, rather than even. In or even or out means, say a mesh is five inches, or ours are five and a quarter, and that's from the middle of one knot across the triangle, across the diamond, to the middle of the other knot. Now if you hang it even, if you pick up two meshes when you're hanging, then between the middle of one knot and the other knot on the hanging will be five and a quarter inches. If you hang it in twenty percent, then it's going to be twenty percent less than that. And then in those days, most people picked up two meshes when they were hanging. Then we got into picking up three because I saw how they did it at Seattle Marine. So then it's one and a half times the size of the mesh is the length between the knots when you're hanging less twenty percent. And you do that so that, you know, the meshes are not exactly a diamond, but they're like a bit of a collapsed diamond and it fishes a little bit better. And also some people will hang just the leadline in, which kind of creates a bag at the bottom. We don't do that. It makes it a lot harder to pull up (*laughter*). But you learn, you know. And then we were fortunate because these people were all willing to share their knowledge with us. These days' people are a lot stingier with their knowledge. They look at it as kind of a proprietary though I have always been willing to help. But the next generation thought it was a little bit more proprietary, which is really funny. We don't hide our nets if we have guests, but some people they don't want you even looking at their nets. And most people would get very upset if you took a skiff and you went up, lifted a net, and looked at how things are. They would be very upset by that. Still to today.

AG: What do you think caused that change?

WF: Probably economic pressure. In about three or four minutes, I'll go out for about five minutes and let the guys go. You come with me and meet the guys.

AG: Okay.

WF: Yeah, I don't know. Some people are just paranoid. But we were fortunate all the people here that we learned from like Otto Erickson, again, the guy that was there before Franciscos. He had been setnetting there since 1912, so he had a whole lifetime. And he was a single guy, Norwegian, been here all those years, and still his English was so-so. But very happy to show you anything. So he showed me a few things about mending or knots. There was one constant with these old Norwegians like Willsgaard and Otto and Bill Hoagland. One constant. And that was they would say, "Oh, this is easy." So they'd show you a knot once or twice and bang they expected you to get it. They'd say, "Oh, this is easy." I always felt like saying, "Yeah, it's easy when you know how to do it. It's very easy." And I teach twelve to fifteen people every year here all the knots, all the hanging, all the mending. The whole bunch of the guys out there right now started out at zero in the middle of May or first of May, and I always tell them that story. I tell them it's really easy when you know how to do it (*laughter*). So it's not good to start off with that kind of a preamble preface when you're teaching somebody something because you make them feel stupid if they don't know how to do it

right away. But that's the way Otto was and he would show me stuff. We learned. And another thing is that in those days the mail plane came in twice a week at Old Uyak and Otto was the acting postmaster. So for the first few years, we had our mail delivered right here twice a week, Tuesday



“Old Uyak,” the old mail plane stop. Currently Wallace and Beth Fields’ site.
P-1000-7-110.

and Thursdays, by Kodiak Airways. Well, going and getting the mail was a whole ritual. Wait for the mail plane and he would sort the mail. Then we would go up to his house and have coffee and smoked salmon. And the mail he kept in his warehouse where his nets were, so I always was learning something, watching, seeing how he was doing it, what kind of gear that he had. And he was, I think until the day he died, he was still using some linen nets because he had bought a lot of them ahead of time back in the ‘40s, ‘50s. And so he figured, “Well, why switch to nylon,” except he started using nylon for the hooks. But you know, I learned so much. Those guys were still using cedar floats, and we have hundreds of them here from those days. Henry had nothing but cedar floats. And those were great except they’re awfully heavy to pull in. They bang up your skiff. Plus they get water logged so you had to change them all in the middle of the summer. So after June or the first couple weeks of July, all the floats in your whole net, all your nets and everything had to be changed because they were sinking. But they’re great. You know what I’m talking about, the cedar floats? Yeah. [...] And those guys always tied them three to a bundle. Some people for some things would tie two, but they always had three on the net. But we learned about all that kind of stuff from watching them. Bill Woods was somewhat more forward-looking. He was younger, been around more. Although he had grown up in Afognak, he had been in the Air Force and then he had fished a

little bit in Cook Inlet. He had what they called tuna floats which were an early kind of Sponges. Until only about three or four years ago, we used that same type and it got to where there was only one company making them, and they were making them special for Seattle Marine for us and they finally quit, so we had to. But we used those for fifty years. They called them tuna floats because they were used in the tuna seiners down in California. Yeah, we learned how to setnet from our neighbors, very kindly neighbors, and then over the years we developed certain things ourselves that other people copied. You know, you are always learning from other people. One guy that always shares with me is Dan Earle over at Chief Point, and I would always say to Dan, "You know, Dan, everytime I come over here I learn something." Which is true. We are very good friends. It's one thing in this bay, there is a lot of longevity here. Families, several generations, much more than Uganik and certainly much more than Olga Bay. I mean, really good relations between everybody here. Thirty, forty, fifty years together. Our kids and our grandkids and our great grandkids have all grown up together. Like Levi [Thomet] over there. I remember when he was two years old. So in a way when I see in the paper that he's won this race or that race, I'm proud of him because he's one of the kids from Uyak Bay. And Uyak Bay, too, is oh not so different from Olga Bay, but different from Uganik and Kupreanof because there was a time that we used to say, you know, if you don't have a Master's degree probably you're not gonna be a setnetter in Uyak Bay or at least a BA because of all the school teachers and everything at that time. Now this generation's a little bit different. But learning and constantly learning, trying to figure out a better way to do things. For example, how nets are taken up. We still take them up basically by hand. There's nobody that uses, well Stan Ness uses a power block. He fishes a lot by himself. We've developed a way of doing it. I've tried to teach some other people, but one constant in human behavior is that people prefer to adopt new ideas that they thought up themselves. They don't like necessarily to be shown something that they didn't think of. Dan Earle does something similar to ours the way we take up nets. But when we go out and we've got fifteen nets to take up and we have only, say, three or four crews, we've got a lot of gear to get out of the water. And a lot of long 150-fathom sets in rough water and really strong tide out on Sevenmile there. So we had to develop a more efficient way of doing it. We gave up years ago on pulling it over the side and all that. We have a way that we do it. We tie the corkline of the net to the running line every four fathoms, and then we just simply drive the boat underneath it and we untie those knots in the stern and the net just plops down every four fathoms right into the skiff.

AG: It's a good method.

WF: It saves us. Well, we gotta go see the crew.

Interview continues

(Walking outside and wind is blowing. Weston points out property and set locations along Sevenmile Beach, to the south of Bear Island.)

WF: You see it?

AG: Oh, I think so. Is it on the ledge a bit? Okay.

WF: That was built in [...] that there were Russian newspapers that they used in the ceiling for insulation. [...] Henry had lived there and fished there before he came here, so when he sold us that he also sold us a couple buildings in the lagoon. That all came as one package.



Bear Island site. P-1000-7-114.

AG: So you got the buildings, you got the sets and you got the lease?

WF: Yes.

AG: Tell me about the connection between your family and cattle industry out here.

WF: Well, it was just that Henry already had the cattle here. And then because my dad liked cattle he had all these cattle in Kodiak. Of course, he knew he was going to lose his lease at Anton Larsen Bay when the Native Land Claims came in. Ouzinkie had filed on the land that he had leased since 1956. So he had a homestead there and [...] partly because some of the people running the Ouzinkie Corporation were kids that they had been house parents for at the Mission, like Nicky Pestrikoff, and partly because they just, my dad said, "Look. I've had a homestead and been here all these years," so they gave him his homestead. So [...] the family still owns 120 acres right down in the flats there at Anton Larsen Bay. But eventually all the cattle went to Burton's, all the horses. But to here in 1978, dad wanted to start cattle on Harvester. So we hired the Cape Douglas and brought out thirty or forty head, no it was maybe twenty head, and then they grew up to forty, and then the bears got on them and then the Russians from Homer started coming down during their season and killing them and eventually killed them all off. So this is one of our sets here on Sevenmile. And then you go down, it looks about more than halfway from here, and you see another house built into the bank. You see that there?

AG: I don't know.

WF: Okay. So I'll tell you what. Maybe another way to find it is—.

AG: I think I see something like almost straight ahead from us.

WF: Well, it's right here and it lines up with the mountain behind it that has a big saddle in the background.

AG: Yeah, okay, I do see that.

WF: Okay. That's where Bill Woods and Kris Helgason lived. We still fish sets there but we don't use the buildings. The one building is still livable. And then if you go all the way down to the corner just where the bank stops and goes low, that's where Wes Wiley is.

AG: Wow, okay. So that's the furthest south of the setnet operations on the west side?

WF: Yes.

AG: Okay.

WF: He has a couple of sets and we have the next further sets. Ours, we have seven sets along Sevenmile, and then we have four around Bear Island and we have four around Harvester.

AG: So really it's the Shelikof that you're fishing.

WF: Yeah.

AG: Uh-huh.

WF: Yeah, and [...] they're mostly Karluk [salmon] but a lot of Uyak Bay [...]. Basically all our nets are open to the weather. (*Background noise*)

AG: I'm curious. These characters that you listed, like Mr. Erickson who was here from 1912, I have the sense that probably they came initially from Karluk. What is the relationship between Karluk and Larsen Bay?

WF: Well, there really wasn't much of a village there until Larsen Bay built the cannery in 1911 or whenever it was. Mainly, Alaska Packers had a cannery before that in Karluk, but it's a hard place to get into. That's the problem still to today. One time there was seven canneries down there. But in the case of Otto, I don't know how he came up except that I know that his profession before he got here was sailing ships. He wasn't a skipper but he sailed on sailing ships. In the case of Bill Hoagland, his neighbor there, where Franciscos are, he had had quite a career on sailing ships around Cape Horn, and this was like would have been in the 1880s, 1890s, that era. But Alaska Packers maintained a store in Karluk up into I would say probably the late '60s or even the '70s. Alec Panamaroff I think was the last person to run the store there and he still lives in Larsen Bay. Charlie Christensen, Clyda Christensen's husband, ran it way back and he was also the postmaster. But Larsen Bay just was more convenient and eventually when they built the air strip [...], and they had a better school there and so forth, people just kept moving to Larsen Bay. It was a very easier place to live. Easier place to live. But probably you're right in thinking that many of the families that got started here could trace back their roots to somebody that worked in Karluk in one of the canneries or on the beach seine or something like that. For example, Jack Wick's father, although he [...] gillnetted here later on until 1949. There are pictures of him in the '20s I've seen with the cannery crew in Karluk. Jack can tell you a lot more about that. Let's see. Russian Dick had a son and his name was Tony Novikoff. Russian Dick's name was Dick Novikoff. He was a white Russian, and he [...] came over to the states in the era right before the full Russian Revolution. He was probably running from the Reds or something (*chuckle*). I don't know. And he had a son, Tony. He was the first one that built that house and lived in the lagoon in the '40s. But he got into a dispute one night over a setnet site there in the channel, and probably alcohol involved, and he ended up shooting Jack Wick's mother and killing her and another guy, right there in the lagoon. They're still buried in the lagoon. So then he spent about twenty years in prison for that murder, two murders, and that

was when a couple of other people bought the house and everything, and then Joe Maxwell ended up with it in 1951. And he ran a bear guiding outfit out of that. And then eventually Tony got out of jail, about 1969, 1970. He actually worked in Port Bailey on the beach gang.

AG: Gosh. That's a sad story for Jack Wick.

WF: Yeah. His mother was related to Charlie Christensen's wife and the Christensens raised him.

AG: Okay. Can you tell me, how did the '64 earthquake and tsunami impact the west side or your family's operation out here?

WF: Not nearly as much as on the east side. Here we lost our outhouse that was right over the bank down there. We lost sand in some of the bank around the warehouse. It didn't take the warehouse off the pilings. That happened later on because the land settled, but it didn't settle the full five to eight feet, whatever it was, on the north end or east side. I mean there's been constant erosion on this bank along Sevenmile that over the last fifty years because I've been watching it for fifty-five years. But now, the last few years, it appears to me that the island's coming back up. Because not only is it not eroding as it was, but it's starting to build up again. Here on Bear Island, too. See, the worst damage during the tidal wave was in places like Kalsin Bay, Middle Bay, around the harbor in Kodiak and so forth, where water got funneled in and then it rose. Here, none of that happened. There was a warehouse that did get kind of wiped away, washed away down by Leon's [Francisco]. That belonged to Otto Erickson's brother, Ole. He had a house there, too. And he was also setnetter down in Gurney Bay. And then Maxwell there in the lagoon had a warehouse that Tony Novikoff had, but it took several years before the tide kind of washed that away just because the land went down. It just depended on where it got funneled, but it wasn't nearly the damage over here.

AG: And you didn't notice really any changes in fishing?

WF: No. In fact, 1964 was the best year we'd had so far. [...] Of course it was only the fourth year we were here. Then the next year, '65, was not very good. '66 was good for the pinks because that was the escapement from the summer of '64. And then the worst was '67 because that was when the escapement was really affected, especially where the fish tried to come back (*laughter*) and there was nothing to come back to. It kind of spoiled fishing. In fact, '67 was only open here for three weeks in June and then a couple weeks in September. So the rest of the summer we actually spent in Kodiak. And then Dad and I came back out in the fall, in September, and fished here. We fished for Dominici. I'm sure you heard that name in Village Islands when you were up in Uganik. And he had a little hand-pack cannery called West Point. And we actually fished for him in the fall, and he sent a tender down every day from West Point.

AG: Just for you?

WF: Yeah. We were the only ones fishing here. He would pick up some other setnetters along the way at Miner's Point and all. Yeah, we were the only ones fishing here. It was Torsen. Yeah, he's still alive, too. His sister lives in Kodiak, too, Linda Torsen. [...] Yeah, he was running that. And then '68 came back as a pretty good year. '69 was good. Well, it was closed the whole summer just about in '67, so then '69 was a tremendous year. So it didn't affect the fishing that much except for I would say for one year.

AG: So beyond West Point, did you always fish for APA and then—?



Larsen Bay Cannery in 2015. P-1000-7-699.

WF: [...] Well I think beginning in '65 we fished for Parks and we fished for them a few years and went back to APA. Then we fished again for Parks for about four years, and then they quit taking from any setnetters in 1974. So then we fished for Kodiak Island Seafoods, KISI they called it. It was owned by the fishermen. We didn't have a share in it. And then we started fishing for Western Alaska for ten years, '77 through '87. Then in 1987 we were one of five people that bought out the cannery in Larsen Bay, and we owned it for twenty years and we sold it out to Icicle 2006.

AG: So when Alan Beardsley owned it you were part owner as well?

WF: That's right. [...] There were three other people. One of them was an attorney. He's not in Kodiak anymore. And then Van Johnson had been a worker in the cannery there for many years. And then there was another guy, too, from Kodiak. Five of us. In our family, four of us, Dad and we three sons, each owned one-fourth of the Fields' share. It was a good experience to be on the inside and see what it takes to make a cannery go and make money or not make money. Marketing, I did a lot with the marketing.

AG: Like what?

WF: I made trips twice to Russia, to Saint Petersburg, to Lithuania, to Poland, to France to meet with buyers and actually sold quite a bit of fish to Russia. Frozen, headed, and gutted. And then, you know, that was when we developed our Fields Wild Salmon label. And actually, Wallace and I developed that. And so we even had not only English label, we had bi-lingual French and English, we had simple French, we were doing quite a bit. But the main success we had was selling frozen pinks to Russia in about the year 2000, 2001, you know, when right at the bottom of the price for

pinks. At that time we were getting seven cents a pound. Crazy stuff. Five cents a pound. That's why we started that and still have it going. We still label a few.

AG: So then was the cannery doing all the packing for you and then you were doing your own marketing? Or how did that arrangement—?

WF: No, no, well both. But mainly, I was doing marketing unofficially for the cannery just because as a fisherman I wanted to see the cannery sell more. And I was going back and forth anyway to the Middle East for my work with the Dead Sea Scrolls. So we would stop off in Russia or a trip to Lithuania, to Poland. All those places. I went on a Alaska seafood trip with Gary Stevens and what's his name, a representative for many years?

AG: Alan [Austerman]?

WF: Yeah, and the guy who is presently the Commissioner, Cotton. He was on that trip, too. And Diane and Wallace [Fields]. So and we went to processors in Iceland and Ireland and actually visiting salmon farms, too. Norway and Sweden and Denmark. But yeah, I had some success selling to the Russians. Learned some things, too, about being sure about your money. Also learned some things about how they expect to be bribed to unload the vans on their dock and unload them from the dock to the ship. You get a message, you need \$3000 for unloading. But I was working with Alan [Beardsley] too. I was just like freelancing because I was already half-way there anyway, and so I would just let Alan and the superintendent here know where the vans needed to go and they would do all the billing and everything. Yeah, I wasn't getting anything out of it except hoping to raise the price.

AG: Yeah. So what was the motivation for you to come up with the Fields family's own brand?

WF: Simply another way to try to sell salmon. And then within a couple of years prices started rising, and so it [...] wasn't really necessary for us to keep doing it to raise the prices. However, we could have and could still now use it as a means for raising price. I went to Washington and met with our representatives there, both Lisa [Murkowski] and her father. Her father was senator at that time. And we had a system set up. We could have sold a lot more canned salmon, but there's an association, the Cannery Association of America or something like that, but they didn't like the idea so it didn't go. And it was just kind of a fun thing to do. It's not that we made any money out of it, really. [...] Part of the deal with selling to Icicle was that they would provide us with the canning capability like forever and sell it to us for wholesale price. [...] We didn't label any last year, but up until then we'd just tell Icicle, "Okay, we want a certain day's canning, a certain time of day, a certain—." You see, everything is graded in Seattle. So the highest grade, and then put so many cases with our label, and they do it in Seattle or in Astoria. And then we still supply Cost Savers and a few people (*laughter*), but it's just kind of fun.

AG: So moving back, can you tell me how the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act impacted everything on the west side?

WF: Yeah, I think in some ways good and some ways bad, if you want to do a good and bad. For us, it meant for a while it was pretty painful because they wouldn't allow anybody to build or do anything, and then eventually they got around to where they're willing to sell, so they sold this island to us. And they sold the other end of Harvester to us.

AG: So initially, Koniag was granted this land?

WF: Yeah, it was Koniag.

AG: Okay.

WF: Yeah. Yeah. Well, they chose where they wanted land to be granted. And of course, looking ahead they knew that if they wanted to sell it, the best chance to selling it was to people already living there. So you had no choice but to buy from them. At first, you see, they were pulling stuff like they would sell you the land your buildings were on plus one-foot wide strip all the way around the building. You know, stuff like that. But eventually we sat down and negotiated with them. We had this all surveyed and the same way with the other. Harvester was a little bit more complicated because going back to World War I, there was part of that one end acreage there was bought with soldier's script, which was something that US soldiers got after WWI. They could go out and buy federal land or homesteads or something like that. So part of that was a soldier's script. Maybe somebody who had lived there before. There was a Smith family. They were the ones that started Kodiak Transfer way back in the war years. Actually, then [Lloyd] Swan had had that business in the war years, and he traded his business to the Smiths for their sort of homestead on Harvester. That's how he got there in the '50s. But I would say that the people whose land was filed on by Koniag were the lucky ones in the end, as far as the setnetters, because the ones who are on state land are hassled until today by the [Fish and Wildlife Service]. You know they have to paint their houses green, [...] and they can't have four-tracks, and you can't have tractors, and on and on. And they can only be there for a certain number of weeks a year and so-on. Those of us who were able to buy from Koniag really came out much better. In the case some of this land, see, [...] they had patents on that going back to the cannery years, like the Northwestern Cannery there at Wallace's place. The canneries had a policy of filing for a patent on the land where their fishermen fished. So there's a 38-acre patent on Billy Woods' property down there. Now, we could have bought that but there was no reason. So [Fish and Wildlife Service] got it, but they could never get to it. Even today, here you got a light westerly and the surf's not too bad, but you get down there and it's pretty hard to get on the beach, even today. And forget it if there is a little bit more wind, either westerly or northeast or whatever. It's hard to get on down there. (*Wind muffles voice*). So the ones who were able to buy their land from the Natives were the lucky ones. Now Danny and Sandy at Chief Point, they're twisted up in something because that was a homestead going back, way back, by a Native guy and the descendants don't want to sell to them. But they bought the site and the house and the property 35, 40 years ago [...]. In the case of Haugheys, they got that land from Koniag. In the case of Franciscos, all that land had been filed on by Northwestern Cannery. So they bought it, a few pieces, from this Trident Land Company, and then we bought the piece between them and Wallace together and we split it up. And we bought the piece where Wallace's is. But that was land that had been filed on, see, by Northwestern Cannery. Yeah. And there are these parcels all over the island that were filed on by canneries.

AG: Yes, I think that a lot of the private land in coastal Alaska at some point was staked by canneries.

WF: And you can see why, [...] especially when you're dealing with beach seiners and setnetters. Then they wanted to have some way to have continuity of the supply of fish, and one way was to have some kind of ownership of the land. Also, during federal times, it was better to be working with a private company or private people than with federal government. [...] In a lot of these places they could have filed, and some people did, filed for manufacturing sites. And that would be a 15-acre site or so. Of course, you had to prove up on it for seven years. I don't think that anybody tried the normal homesteading out here because you couldn't do agriculture like you're expected to do. But mining and manufacturing sites, you could do that.

AG: What about mining out here?

WF: You know, a lot of people have done it on Sevenmile Beach. And actually Wes Wiley has been doing gold panning, has been the last five or ten years. He's very quiet about it. Yeah, been all kinds of people. Russian Dick's, when we got that place, it had all kinds of equipment. It had canvas sluice pipes and the rocker arms and the gold pans and the mercury. I've still got the gold pans and the mercury that they used to take the gold out of the gravel. Still got it down there (*chuckle*). So there's gold around on Sevenmile Beach. There was a gold mine up in Amook Passage. And Bill Polland, that's another famous name in another older generation in Kodiak, he had that one there in the Passage. Of course, there is a famous mine in Terror Bay, famous for a murder that occurred there (*chuckle*). That, by the way, was owned by Bill Woods' parents. That was Kris Helgason and Clara. So I imagine there's a lot more that could be done, but it takes a lot of money. And this far out on the Shelikof, this is pretty inhospitable for about seven months a year. Yeah, even in October and May, it's a pretty rugged place to be.

AG: I'm wondering if you have a sense why there is so much more private land in Uyak versus Uganik.

WF: Well, yeah. I think that's pretty simple. Uganik never had a real village. You had a bunch of people together living in Village Islands. But there never was, at least not during the white man years, the last say 150 years, there never was a real village in Uganik. Here you had Larsen Bay and people were living there year-round. And they all, in one way or the other, were connected with the cannery or lived off the cannery. And certainly in the older days, up until the '80s maybe, Alaska Packers always had the store twelve months a year. They allowed credit, which meant that a lot of the people in the village were always a little in debt to the company store. But the company brought them through with oil and groceries and then they kept a school there. So then Native families, and a lot of them moved from Karluk, almost all of them moved from Karluk, almost all the people, maybe every single one of those Native families once lived in Karluk. But they lived there, and that meant that when the Native allotments came out, when the 10-acre home sites came out, they all filed for them. Just back-to-back around the whole of Larsen Bay, Uyak Bay, over to Carlson Point, Zachar Bay. And the reason they filed on them was they looked ahead and said, "Oh, we'll be able to sell them." And some of them did really well. Jack Wick sold his 130 acres to Fish and Game, so did the Abstons and a number of others. Eddie Paakkanen sold his to Alan Beardsley. He had both a home site and a 120-acre [...] it was called Native allotment that wasn't specifically tied to the Native Land Claims but actually preceded it. And also, Clyda Christensen and Charlie filed on the lagoon over here. They had 120 acres which they ended up selling to my dad, so we actually own that 120 acres over there. But it was all tied to Larsen Bay. Uganik never had that.

AG: Okay. Because looking at the map it's striking. At Uganik there's so few parcels of private land.

WF: Yeah and those people, a lot of the fishermen had some connections to Afognak and then to Port Lions. But after the tidal wave, Afognak was never totally revived at Port Lions. A lot of people moved to Kodiak about that time. It was easier for school, especially high school. [...] Uganik never had what they [Uyak] had. I mean you find the same thing around Old Harbor. Akhiok was always kind of a bit dysfunctional. They could have done a lot more, but with so few people, and many of them with alcohol problems. But Old Harbor did quite a bit with their filing. Of course, with Native Land Claims they tried to pretend that there had been a village in Uganik and they signed people up. Just like they tried to pretend that there had been a village here at Uyak, which there never was, not since Russian times anyway. And some people got tricked into signing up there and they got nothing because there never was a village here. [...] It's sort of like Woody Island. When I was growing up, there were a few people living on Woody Island, but not in 1971, '72. There was not a single soul



Parks Cannery, 2015. P-1000-7-568.

living there. [...] Anyway, I understand why there were a lot of families that felt the connection there. They picked berries and they hunted and they went for the weekends and all that. But it was different here in Uyak Bay. So the cannery was the main thing, and we have to remember, too, that up until 1975, '76, '77, Parks Cannery was still going. And then Ocean Beauty owned Zachar Bay and still kept that going as a herring meal plant up until 1980, '81, '82. And then five of us families bought that out, too, and then eventually sold it to Marty [Eaton]. The family that has Kingfisher Air.

AG: The Eatons

WF: Yeah, Eatons.

AG: What would entice you to fish for Parks Cannery versus the Larsen Bay cannery, for example?

WF: That's very simple. The cannery had not operated for some years, and it had been in what they called in those days a combine. And a combine was where a cannery kept its own fishermen and serviced its own fishermen, but another plant actually canned them. Well, then the owners of Parks, actually Mr. Parks himself, decided to try to kind of revive it about 1965 after the tidal wave, and he hired a guy named Frank McConaghy who was really famous in those days. He had run Halferty's in Kodiak for years. He was the one that had the Pioneer Clams that were done there from Swishak. He had had a cannery in Kanatak. A famous guy. I'm sure you know about his name.

AG: Um-huh.

WF: Yeah, and he was charismatic, friendly, he knew how to treat people. People who fished for him always got a turkey for Thanksgiving and a ham for Christmas. That sort of thing, really small,

but the right kind of public relations. So he came along to my dad before the '65 season and he said, "You know, I'm going to be superintendent, I'm going to start it up, and I would like you to fish for him." There was no question (*laughter*). And so then he was there a year or two and then someone took over as superintendent. I don't remember when he died. He might have died shortly thereafter. He was fairly old when he took over. I don't know when he died. [...] He was an amazing guy in the community. He was active in the Community Baptist Church. Back in the '60s, you know, he would do things like finance replacing all the windows or he financed the siding. [...] He had a certain style. He always wore these hats from the '40s or '30s, you know, and he was always had a tie on down at the cannery. He was sort of more heavy weight kind of guy but just always smiling and cheerful. He was educated. He was well-spoken. He knew everybody's name. He treated everybody the same as everybody else. You were important to him. Even as a child I felt that I was important to him. [...] That's why he could start up Parks. Just as simple as that. Personality.

AG: But why did you leave?

WF: [...] Only because they weren't going to take setnet fish anymore. They were only going to do seine fish. And that—.

AG: Why would they make that choice?

WF: I don't know. That was Gary Wiggins who was the superintendent at that time. He had been superintendent at Larsen Bay and then he made that decision. I don't know. I think maybe it was he got cross-ways with two or three of the setnetters or something and just got mad at them. [...] He was exactly the opposite of Frank McConaghy. He was just that kind of vindictive guy that would say, okay, you know if I have an argument with one setnetter I'm just gonna throw all the other setnetters out. It was as simple as that (*laughter*). Yeah, [...] the ability to run a cannery is very dependent on one's personality.

AG: What are the key characteristics of a good superintendent?

WF: I think, just like Frank McConaghy. Making every person feel like he's important, taking care of his problems and needs, and kind of keeping track of them all year long during the winter. You know, what can I do to help you, maybe you need a little money to get through, or you need to buy some gear or always caring. Alan Beardsley was excellent, a good personality. And there have been some other good ones here. About two back, Steve. What was his last name? Anyway, he was here for about four, five years. He was quite good for Icicle. And there's a guy, sort of the second in command at Icicle, John Woodruff. He's very good. He's like that. [...] Have you met him?

AG: [No]

WF: He's in charge of all six canneries that Icicle has now in Alaska. He knows how to sit down and meet people. He was here in June and came down just to sit down and have coffee with me for a couple of hours and just talk. And when I go down to Seattle, he wants to take me out to lunch or take me out to dinner or whatever. That kind of personal touch. That's important. The guy at Port Bailey, Chuck Turner, for many years, back in the '50s, '40s, '50s, early '60s, he had that reputation. You ask anybody who fished for Port Bailey in those years, like Thorvald Olsen or any of the Olsen brothers, all kinds of people in Port Lions. Ask them about Chuck Turner. It will be the same thing. [...] He cared about them. He took care of them.

AG: One thing that we haven't covered totally that I am curious about is that you mentioned that Port Bailey stopped sending tenders down there, so as a result people stopped setnetting. But now you cannot setnet.

WF: Yeah, I'm glad you asked that. Very perceptive. Okay, so here's what happened. Traps went out '58, '59. By 1961, nobody was there. Even 1960, nobody was there. [...] Fish and Game was just in its infancy, just starting out and trying to figure out what new rules and everything. So somebody said, "Well, nobody is setnetting down there, so let's make it so you can't setnet." And probably it was some seiners or whatever. (*Unidentified person calling up about a skiff on the beach*). And there's always, if you read back, any of the books like Roppel's book or others, they talk about the sort of built-in tension between mobile gear and set gear and the built-in tension between seiners and beach seiners, and so it was seiners probably that said, "Well, setnetters are probably in the way anyway." It was the same on the east side. Still, in the '60s you could setnet all on the east side. Down Barling Bay, Old Harbor, Saltry Cove, all those areas there were people setnetting. But eventually, after the tidal wave especially, it wasn't as good of fishing for a few years. Then the canneries didn't necessarily send tenders and different generations passed away. So finally they said, "Well, there's nobody there, so let's just say no setnetting on the east side."

AG: Interesting. So really it all originated with not having the market.

WF: To a large degree. To a large degree. Well, because look at us. We're stuck here. We can't hop in a boat and take them to Kodiak.

AG: Yeah (*laughter*).

WF: Yeah, we're totally dependent. And not only for getting rid of the fish but for fuel and food and all of that.

(*wind muffles voices*)

END OF RECORDING



Weston at Bear Island. P-1000-7-157.