

Name of person Interviewed: Richard MacLeod [RM]

Facts about this person:

Age (if known)

Sex Male

Occupation retired fisherman

If a fisherman (Nova Scotia, Gloucester, New Bedford)

Residence: New Bedford

Ethnic background (if known)

Interviewer: Millie Rahn [MR]

Transcriber: Azure Dee Westwood

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INDEX / KEYWORDS

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- Gloucester
- Sailing schooner
- Good humored
- Seen many changes
- Dragging/dragger
- Red fish (“reddin”)
- Grand Banks
- Heavy accent

TRANSCRIPT

[Start of File]

[00:00]

MR: We'll start. Today is Friday September 23, 2005 and I'm here with Richard MacLeod in the Harbor Masters office at Pier 3 in New Bedford as part of the Working Waterfront Festival. My name is Millie Rahn and we're going to do an oral history interview. Why don't we start with, if you could give me your full name and tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, how you ended up in New Bedford and then we'll go from there.

RM: My name is Richard MacLeod and I was born in Boston, moved to Nova Scotia when I was a child, and in 1936 I was 13 years old I made my first voyage on a fishing trip. I was gone not quite 3 months. On a three-masted sailing schooner, the name of which was the *A. W. Chism*. In 1939 I moved to Gloucester, my grandfather... and some time around 1940 or '41 I picked up the Gloucester Times and there was a little thing said "sunk but not sunk." So I started to read it. And it was my old first vessel. She sank but she didn't. She filled up with water but she was lumber-loaded going to Barbados and she filled up with water but she didn't sink, they got her in with the load of lumber. I fished out of Gloucester, I don't know how many years. I think I came down here in 1952. I moved to New Bedford in 1952. And I fished out of New Bedford here on many, not too big of boats either, I wasn't a mover. But I remember being on the *Adventurer* with, in fact she was my first boat that I was captain of. For one trip trenchen'. Then my first command was *Smylin* – S M Y L I... by god I can't spell it now! Anyway, she was owned by Norman Andersen. And I was skipper of her for I guess 8 or 9 years. And then after that myself and two brothers, Lionel and Ray Sainte, we bought a stern trawler, steel stern trawler and I think in 1981 or '82 I sold my share to them and then after about a year or less than a year I went back as skipper of the *Mystic Light*, which was the boats name. I'm not a very good interviewer.

MR: I think you're doing great!

[04:45]

RM: And I retired in 1983 and I've been knitting lobster pot head ever since. 22 years knitting lobster pot heads. Myself and I had a whole lot of old time fishermen helping me and they all died on me. Yep. Last one that went was Ely Potter, he was 96 and he worked up until his last 6 months. His eye sight finally gave out on him. That book, if you don't come across it, to get the story.

MR: We were saying that was Yankee magazine about 1960.

RM: Early '60's I think. But Artman (sp?) has got one copy of it. Now Reidar...

MR: Reidar Bendiksen.

RM: Yep, Reidar would be able to find Artman, see if he can get it, but I can tell you most of, grist of the story.

MR: O.K. Well, we can find it in a library I'm sure, but why don't you tell us the story.

[06:03]

RM: We had a net stretched out on State Pier working on it. And this guy came down and he stand around here, I didn't know who the hell he was, and he's watching what's going on, and finally he said, "I take it you are the skipper, you seem to be

giving the orders.” I said, “Yeah”. He looked at me and he said, “You know, you’re about the youngest guys here?” And I said, “Yeah, I’m 41, that guy over there is 81.” That was Mr. Sainte. My two partners’ father. And I said, “There’s Archie Connor, he’s 65 or more” and I said “Tom Olson, he don’t know how old he is, really. I asked him how ‘hold are you and he said I don’t know’. And Ernie Rice was 40 years old, he was the cook. Claude Atkins was another guy who’s in his 60’s.” Jesus, how many knees have I got down there?

MR: Oh, they’re on the tape, you’ve got about 5 or 6.

RM: There was six all together, well I guess me would make it up. There was Archie, Tom Olson, Mr. Sainte, Ernie Rice, and there was one more in there somewhere...

MR: Who was the cook?

RM: The cook was Ernie Rice. Ah, my memory is failing me.

MR: Well, now we’ll have to find the article.

RM: Anyway, he said, “You know, I don’t understand, I can’t understand why you have all these old men?” And I said, “I’ll tell you. I had some young fellows and I weeded them out.” He said, “Why did you do that?” And I said, “Well I had lug a guy down from the bar room, so he only lasted until the next trip, next trip he was gone. And somebody else... he quit, anyway. So it left me every time I went looking for a man I got an old man! Because all these guys, most of them, have all been skipper. We throw the lines off and go out, soon as we’re out clear of the harbor, I can go lay down, I don’t have to worry. There’s always somebody that knows more than I do to go into the pilot house. As far as work, they do just as much as the young fellas. They do it a little easier because they know how. If the net comes back tore up, I don’t have to rush out on deck and worry about it, they fix it, so I can sit back in the corner and not worry about nothing, when it’s done they’ll tell me. That’s the beautiful, beautiful part of having experienced people. Let’s see, what else, I can’t think.

[09:52]

MR: What were you fishing for all these years?

RM: Yellowtails and haddock... anything we could catch. Anything! Anything that was saleable. Yes. Oh by God, I don’t know, I believe Ron Murray was there at that time. And he was an old timer. I think Ron was there then.

MR: Now let’s go back. I’m interested in... you were born in Boston but then you went to Nova Scotia and what was that connection?

RM: My mother died shortly after my sister was born. I was about 18 months old. And they took me down there and if I can recollect correctly, they left me with my great grandmother. Up in the middle of Nova Scotia, in the country. On a big, big farm, I can remember that farm, oh my God. My great grandfathers name was Thompson and he owned property almost as far as the eye could see. It was a large hill behind the homestead, and down over the other side of the hill was a huge lake that was all still on his property. He had an apple orchard there, down below the barn, he had another one above the house, he had another one over there... he had more apple orchards than I could shake a stick at, I can remember all that. He used to sit in the evening just about dusk, by the corner of the barn and watch the deer down in the apple orchard when the fog would start to form. You could see them walking back and forth. It was great country, that was great country.

MR: Well, I can hear it in your accent too.

RM: Probably.

MR: Definitely.

RM: You can't much by accent, god almighty, I heard a guy talking one day up in Gloucester, in the Union hall and this guy was talking to the Union delegate and after he went, I said to him, I said to the delegate, "Jesus, when did that guy come here from the old sod, Newfoundland, ya know?" He said, "he ain't never been to Newfoundland!" I said, "What?! He sounds just like a Newfoundlander." He said he was fishing out of Boston for about five years now with a gang of Newfoundlanders and he talks like them! But he was educated in Harvard, come to find out.

MR: Interesting!

RM: He came out of the service and he enrolled in Harvard University. He had some kind of a degree or something and he went fishing!

[13:13]

MR: Well see, I used to live in Newfoundland and your accent sounds a lot like a Newfoundland accent.

RM: Oh yes. Well I was shipmates with Newfoundlanders and Nova Scotia is the same way. Almost the same accent. Yes. Then I boarded with an old guy and his wife, well they weren't old when I was boarding with them, for six... I think I was... five years. My grandparents boarded me with those people. Hellish nice people. Beautiful people, man oh man. But there was a guy that worked from daylight 'til dark. Used to get up at daylight, go to bed after dark. But he didn't quit until the sun was gone down.

MR: So, how did you get from a farm in Nova Scotia onto that boat at age 13?

RM: Oh, that was after my grandmother moved down from over here, she had to quit work, her legs let go, she used to be a waitress in the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston for years. And her legs finally gave out on her, she couldn't do that, so my grandfather had build a big, enormous house down there many years ago. That would be my mother's father. Anyway, my grandmother moved down there and I naturally, she took me out of boarding and ... I was 12 I think, 11 or almost 12 or something, anyway. So anyway my... I can't figure that out... we used to call him Uncle Jimmy. Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Claire. So Uncle Jimmy was going away fishing and my grandmother said, "Why don't you see if you can take Richard with you." Well he asked the captain and I guess it was alright, so I went on this 3-masted schooner. It was a big, big, big, big, big, big boat. She was so big they built her for a 2-master but when they got her built they found out she was too big for 2 masts they had to put three! Because they were worried about the main boom would be so long between the mast and the stern that they worried that it wouldn't take very little wind to break it, you know? The main boom used to be that big around, so they put another mast to shorten the main boom. Yeah, she was quite an old vessel, that one, God.

[16:04]

MR: And where did you go out of?

RM: Out of Lunenburg. Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

MR: OK. I've been there.

RM: First place we went to was where, right close to where the Saints came from, old man Saint came from. Little Saint Lawrence, Newfoundland.

MR: Oh yeah!

RM: And then there was the bigger harbor that was Saint Lawrence Harbor. Yeah I can always remember we used to sail, just fanning up the harbor, an old Newfoundland fellow came out, he had a big, long white chin beard, with a dory, with an outboard motor in the weld, they used to put a weld in them there dories and put an outboard motor, a little outboard motor in. He shot up along side, he says, "Hey Cap! I'll bait ye!" That was to get the bait for the fish, you had to have bait to catch the fish in them days. Capelin. Left there. Went to Grand Bank. I remember the mate saying when we dropped the anchor; "This is what's known as the whales deep." But before we dropped the anchor he said, "Flunky, go get the hand line over there." So I went and got the hand line and come over. "Now" he said "jump down in the bait pen and get a couple of capelin". Went down and got a couple of capelin, he hooked them on, dropped the hook, dropped the lead overboard and let in run down, 'til it got bottom. "Alright" he says "now go tow it". So I took the line in my hand, I had been fishing off the shore the summer before, so I took the line in my hand and I pulled on it, and it wouldn't come. I said, "its caught bottom." He said, "let me see." He took a hold of it and said, "Ah no, it ain't caught bottom!" When he hauled them up, there was two codfish that long.

MR: Wow! About three or four feet.

RM: This is what they called capelin fish, these big ones! Yes! Yes, they were about, easy three feet long! Big enormous codfish. But the best part of that was, on that trip, there was one man, the cook. There was 29 men on that vessel, and he fed them three meals a day, and how he done it I'll never know, or anyone he ever talked to could understand how. And he used to bake bread every day. He had to bake bread everyday. I'm telling you, he was a marvel. His name was Sam Jennings. I will always remember his name. I remember the names of a lot of those guys. After 60 odd years.

[19:24]

MR: Now how did you get from the Grand Banks down to New Bedford?

RM: Well, we were gone for I think 2 ½ months on the trip, and he came back to Lunenburg, and discharged the cargo of salt fish, then the next three years, I don't know what the hell actually I done. But I wasn't 16 when I came here, I had to be 16 in June and I came here in February. Came to Gloucester. My grandfather came down and he brought me and my grandmother over here. Then brought her back, she came back. So now I fished out of Gloucester, when I got here, he asked me, "You want to go to school?" We were living across the street from high school. I said, "Go to school? I got to go back to practically grammar school because that's all I had down there. School, I think the eighth grade. And I said no. I said I'll go to work. So I went down to Gloucester lumber company and got me a job helping the guy on a truck, handling lumber and so on. So I worked there a month or two and finally spring come and grandfather got a job on a boat and he worked me in too. So I started fishing then. Out of Gloucester. I fished out of Gloucester... I believe I moved down here in the spring the hurricane came, Hurricane Carol came in September I think it was. I think that's the year... I might have been down here a year before that, I'm not sure, I don't know.

MR: So that was the '38 Hurricane?

RM: No, no, the '52 I think it was. I think it was '52. Yes, because I was just married a year or so, and I got married in 1950, I think, I ain't sure of that either.

MR: That's O.K.

RM: I moved around from boat to boat, god almighty I was on all kinds of boats... seiners, I started out seining. And then I went in to the Service. Spent a couple of years in the Army. The Navy wouldn't take me, they said I couldn't see. The one eye didn't focus too good. But the Army would have taken me as long as I was breathing!

MR: Was this in the 40's or the '50's?

RM: The '40's. 42 or 42 I went into the Service. I got out in '44 or '45, I don't know, I can't remember them details. I know I was glad to get out. Then I started going on draggers after that. I was on with Captain Ralph Jensen. On the *Kingfisher*. We went fishing on Saint Pier Bank. The trip consisted of 130,000 of haddock, and 35,000 pounds of halibut and I bet you I'm the only one that's alive to know that, or say it. Never heard tell of that many halibut before. We got as high of 22 of them to a tow and some of them we couldn't get them up in the pens and when the pens started to get full so we had to put a rope down through the bunker and haul them up in the pens. Yes.

[24:15]

MR: Now did you have any close calls?

RM: No, no, no.

MR: Well that's good!

RM: No, I don't remember ever losing any boat under me.

MR: What are some of the biggest changes that you've seen for the better or the worse?

RM: Well, it was alright but now it's worse! There is so much involved. The government got involved and when the government gets involved it's terrible. And of course, the biggest changes are, that I can see, I had an old boat, first boat I had was *Smilin'* she was supposed to have 200 and some odd horsepower but I called it 150 tired. You go out and fish 4 days and 50,000 that's all she carried and then come home. That was seven days. Like I told the guys over in Newport, there was a bunch of guys fishing, wildlife service guys, this was years back, oh god almighty, well back first when I... back probably in the... around '73 or '74, and they were standing around gabbing and so on. Somebody said something to me about something and I said, "Hey, don't talk to me about the fish business." He said, "what do you mean?" I said, "I'll tell you, it's going down the drain." "what do you mean?" Well I said, "I'll tell you how much it's going down the drain that I've seen since I've been at it. When I had that other old boat, no trouble to get 50,000 of fish in 4 days. 5 days at the most. That was a boat with no potential of producing. But I got a boat here now with 400 horse power, and I can't get 50,000 in 7 days!" Jesus that bothered me something terrible! To have such foolish talk!! So I said, "that's the situation, I can get you a logbook, of the production, trip after trip after trip." On the old boat, the log book on the new boat is almost equivalent to production with 300 more 250 more horse power! So I said, "don't tell me the fish business is alright, because it's now!" That was after the Russians were here. But they blamed the Russians, the Russians didn't do it! All this guys laying around the dock is what done it. I wasn't the first one, I think the *Narragansett* was the first the stern trawler. And there was other boats that

looked like stern trawlers but they weren't they were using side trawlers. But that's what happened, these guys here, I said, "The vacuum cleaners is going to clean it up." And I was right, it did, it cleaned it up. And the government was the instigator of that. They put their nose in, supplying these guys with all these boats, for nothing, giving them the money and so on. Oh, I've seen a lot of changes.

[28:44]

MR: Now, what do you think is the future of the fishery here?

RM: Not very good to me! I know I wouldn't get in it for \$5 million, to get in and go fishing to try and make a living. No way. Of course I can't anyway. It's too much... scallops are doing well, they're making a barrel of money. My sister-in-law lives on the side of a guy, she says he comes in one day and he goes out the next. He comes in, takes out the scallops, puts his check in the bank, goes down and gets another site on a different boat, out the next day. She said he's been doing that for quite awhile. I said, "yeah, he's going to have a lot of money." If he keeps on, because they are making a barrel. But what they make now in one trip it used to take us a year to make. Yes sir. I was on the *Adventurer* with Micky Swain, and we had two years over \$10,000 which was a lot of money in them days. And now there you want to talk about production: 41 trips per year. 41 trips per year. But I can tell you a better one than that. But I can tell you a better one than that, as far as trips are concerned. Captain by the name of Jimmy Din told me "I made 52 trips in one year beam trawlin' out of Boston. Wherever I put the net overboard, there was a load of fish. It made no difference where, we left Boston one time, went down on Stellwagen Bank, throw the net overboard, the haddock was 10 tier deep. All we had to do was make a tow, dress awhile; make a tow, dress awhile. Gone three days, back with the old thing full. Yes. Yeah, Jimmy Din, he came on the *Mara Stella*, the old captain, that owned her, he fell down and hurt himself or something. But anyway Jimmy didn't come, took the boat. So we went out one time off of Nova Scotia someplace, set out, made a couple tows... good big bag, ya know, a couple 3-4,000.

[31:38]

RM: So Jimmy come down on deck, said "So this is reddin'." I said, "no Jimmy this ain't reddin'", I'd like to say the words that I told him but I can't. I said, "Jimmy, this is not reddin'. You got to hunt for a lump to fish on. On the flat, there's no amount of fish. They are all congregated on lumps." He said, "How do you know that?" I said, "somebody told me. All the skippers hunt, they sound around until they find a lump to tow on. Now Jimmy that's all you got to do." So we steamed around, he says, "alright boys, throw her overboard!" We hauled back and boy oh boy oh boy, The net come up the cod end come up, the redfish used to get full of air and they'd float. The net stood up and jumped out of the water, Christ half as high as this building probably, the cod end, and them kept rolling out. I said, "now Jimmy, that's reddin' boy!" He says, "I guess you're right, Dick!" Yes, it must have been probably 30,000 pounds of fish in the net, you know. I said, "That's reddin'!" That was something, the red fish. They were an abundance. We used to go out of Gloucester one day and come back with 100,000. They are gone. They caught them up. They've been gone for years and years and years, all the way chocked to Grand Bank. They cleaned them all up, sitting around here [hand needing?] they started to go off of

Nova Scotia, down the Eastern end of Nova Scotia and up around into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, fished that out.

[33:52]

MR: Well what would you say to somebody, these guys out here on the pier now that are fishing, what would you say to them?

RM: What would I say to them? Keep at it, as long as you're making a living.

MR: Especially the guys who aren't scalloping.

RM: Scallopers are making a living. They are making a living alright enough. They are getting \$10,11, 12,000, sometimes \$15,000 a trip, that's money I think. Saunders, I meet him in the Stop and Shop once in awhile. Thick fellow. I don't know his first name.

MR: Mark? Paul?

RM: No, its Paul's brother. Anyway, he told me, the crew I think got \$17,000 and he got \$30 odd - \$31,000, a share, a trip. I think that's what he said. I know it was in the teens that the crew got. Scallops are almost \$10 per pound now! Can you imagine you get 15-20,000 of scallops? Oh boy oh boy. Them days are gone. These days is coming. My days is gone and the days that are coming now... some of them are doing alright.

MR: It will be interesting in 40-50 years when these younger people are the old timers and perspective they are going to have. It will be very interesting to see.

RM: This is something I can't understand. They couldn't regulate the fishery here. Could not do it. But up on the west coast, they can regulate it, they regulate the fishery there. Because I've seen a documentary on the History Channel. A boat making a tow and getting 200 tons of fish, not 200,000 but 200 tons! The net was stretched out from here to... the cod end was stretched out from here to Pier 3! I tell you. But he's only allowed to make only 3-4 trips, that's it. But when the quota is filled, you're through. It's just like king crabbing, I watch that now half a dozen times, that king crabbing fishing, the most Dangerous Catch, was the name, used to be on Discovery Channel. They got so many days to catch so many thousand, so many millions of pounds of crabs and that's it. They got probably 18 or 24 hours leeway when they are called and told to cut off at such and such a day and such and such an hour and they are through.

[37:44]

MR: Well I did an interview with Kaare Ness and he was saying that when they started regulating the west coast, they still had a catch. Where when they started regulating here, it was on the way down.

RM: It was too far down the wrong road, yeah. Yeah. Too low, it got too low. To do that, they would have had to stop the fishery for about 5 years. Stop it completely. No fishery. Maybe with hooks or something, but no putting these vacuum cleaners out there, cleaning up the bottom. Oh boy, I'll tell you. There's been a lot of changes, lots of changes and there's more coming. That's for sure.

MR: That's a great way to stop. I'm going to... if you have nothing else to say, that's a great way to stop.

RM: Great, fine and kind, great for me!

MR: There's been a lot of changes and there's many more coming. I will say thank you.

[38:52]

[End of End of Interview]