

George Bailey Interview Log

Interview for Calvert County Marine Museum Research on Seafood Houses

Interviewer: Carrie Nobel Kline, Talking Across the Lines, LLC

Also Present: Richard Dodds

Location of Interview: Home of George Bailey in Newburg, Maryland

Interview Date: 2-24-05

00:07 Name; D.O.B. in 1925

00:26 I'm an oyster shucker, farmer; raised tobacco, corn

00:55 Born in Mt. Victoria; moved to Rock Point at 15; been an oysterman, crabber

01:37 Started farming at 11, working 10 hrs a day for 50 cents, worked on the farm, moved to Rock Point at 15; caught oysters on water, then shucked oysters for about 62 years

02:26 Hard to remember old people; Henry Fowler; most the old ones are dead; I married Henry Fowler's daughter; Henry was a farmer and waterman, had a couple sons that were watermen

03:50 Back then they worked all day to catch four or five bushels of oysters –hard times

04:22 He was a waterman and a farmer; same tongs, describes how oysters were caught –the same way then as now; fewer oysters now

05:38 My mother died when I was young, daddy died when I was about 20-some

06:44 Mother Florence Bailey was house woman; I cooked and washed clothes; no siblings; I don't remember none of her people; dad Jim Bailey farmed for a company

08:27 I worked long hours for low wages; rode a horse home at 10:00 or 11:00 at night

09:20 Worked for a Lancaster, he was a hard worker; I plowed many a day and milked cows by lantern light; plowed fields of corn, tobacco, soybeans

10:48 Story –left farm to go oystering for a 70-year-old man

12:24 Two shucking houses at Rock Point –Norris and Colby; 100 some shuckers at Norris's, came from all over; Hurricane Hazel took it away; shucking house caught on fire; shucked for Norris's son as well

14:00 Summertime work at Camp Charles

- 14:28 Describes Stephen Norris's shucking house; long hours during Christmas; nice and warm in house; sounds in house –all you could hear was shells dropping; some people drank, danced; plenty of women
- 16:55 About 50 or 60 people came by truck from Eastern Shore; brought their furniture over by boat; story –barge with ducks and chickens came over and hit a storm
- 18:01 Where other shuckers lived
- 18:24 Carrying shells and wheeling oysters; wages; I was drinking along with them at the store
- 20:16 People came over from Crisfield –mostly young girls; work all day and party every night, as long as you do your work
- 22:02 Owner Stephen Norris, Sr. was right there all the time; they were buying oysters all the time; boats came in all the time, put oysters on the wharf; 75 to 100 boats
- 23:15 I was oystering in September until it got cold; I could make myself good money shucking oysters –sometimes \$100 a day
- 23:45 I been in some cold days though; no hat; white guy's boat
- 25:00 Generally two black guys and the owner on the boat; owner culled them; used anywhere from 14's to 22 or 24 ft. tongs; hard old men used 36 ft tongs; I came indoors to shuck around December
- 27:50 Boxes in shucking house; owner came through to look and see what's going on; packing oysters
- 29:09 How to shuck oysters –with oyster knife
- 30:05 I started on my own; watched then started; worked up to 18, 20 gallons a day; story –stabbed hand
- 31:30 Some singing, loud talking; Eastern Shore folks sang church hymns; I used to listen to records and sing to myself
- 33:25 Women were worse than the men for drinking; different kinds of wine; I could shuck a whole lot better
- 36:00 Describes Mr. Norris, Sr.; more on different houses
- 38:25 Same ones that shucked oysters picked crabs; I was away crabbing; how to pick crabs; women did all the picking; weighing the crabs

- 41:20 Men helped weigh, ice down and steam the crabs; describes the crabbing process; house in Rock Point was the only one for picking crabs
- 43:20 Other house was just for shucking oysters, it was newer; had shanties for people to stay in; Hurricane Hazel took all that away
- 43:58 People who stayed in shanties –mostly women; 45 or 50 people worked at that house
- 44:46 Competition between the two shucking houses –pay
- 46:10 Story –shucking house burned down in 1958
- 49:20 Owners went to pick up the shuckers; everybody knew everybody at the houses
- 51:10 Bands came in to play; dancing the jitterbug
- 52:57 Texture of the oysters are different depending on where they came from; Maryland oysters are soft; Texas oysters have good flavor, Louisiana oysters are big
- 53:42 Fixing oysters –I fry them single, make stew for breakfast
- 54:38 How started at Tucker Brown’s oyster house in St. Mary's County
- 56:03 Using grinders
- 57:07 I could shuck about 2 gallons now; takes over a bushel to get a gallon; I can average about \$20 an hour; when first started it was 50 cents a gallon
- 59:20 Had to buy shucking knives –lasted 2 or 3 years; if broke one, they took the cost out of your pay; paid with check
- 61:40 Captain John’s restaurant cashed checks
- 62:20 If I live, I’ll be shucking a long time; you can’t sit down and shuck oysters; I got to rock with it, get the motion going on
- 64:14 When Tucker Brown shucks oysters and where he gets them
- 64:58 The oysters won’t come back; water pollution is so bad; can’t catch any fish, oysters are the same way
- 67:13 It’s gone; the old people are gone; all the black people are dead; there’s nothing here for the young people
- 69:11 Had sheep, cows, shanties in Rock Point –nothing there now
- 69:55 Going to Cobb Island to eat, Butcher’s to play music
- 70:20 I worked for Captain John; worked a lot of jobs

- 71:30 Black people weren't allowed on Cobb Island at one time, except for workers;
sign on door at Captain Billy's said "White only"; Hurricane Hazel tore up the
place, and no one ever replaced the sign; Hurricanes Diane, Isabel
- 74:40 Storms on the water; prayed to get in off the water