

Ola Mae Carter Interview Log

Interview for Calvert Marine Museum Research on Seafood Houses

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

Also Present: Sarah Briscoe (mother-in-law), Fred Carter, Robert Hurry and Hanna Thurman

Location of Interview: Home of Ola Mae and Fred Carter in St. Inigoes, Maryland

Interview Date: 3-4-05

- 00:09 Name; address; D.O.B. uncertain
- 00:48 Born in Waynesburg, Mississippi; describes house; six or seven children;
continues describing house; yard work; job offer in Maryland
- 02:36 Coming to Maryland –story: hotel turned us down because of my color, finding
another place for me to stay
- 04:50 First time I saw a soft crab I was scared, thought people were feeding me insects
- 05:36 Story – woman wanted me to go crabbing
- 06:20 I caring for my few belongings
- 07:20 Planned to send money home but lost father's address
- 07:35 Fifty cents a day –that was like gold to me
- 08:20 Moved to Ridge
- 08:40 Stories –life with woman I boarded with; corn liquor
- 11:40 I snuck out; went to Mrs. Barnes house; Mrs. Barnes asked, "Why you straying
'round the streets?"
- 13:00 Met a man; tried to write to father
- 15:00 Reason daddy didn't send us to school
- 15:55 Made shoes out of cardboard; daddy got the wrong size shoes, too small
- 17:40 Hard life, but we made it
- 18:00 Came to St. Mary's; didn't eat much
- 19:40 Asked man for work; he was telling me all this stuff
- 21:15 I got pregnant at 13 –story
- 23:24 Having the baby
- 23:50 Went to work to buy pretty things for the baby who was cared for by another
woman

24:20 Got married, later the woman caring for the baby wouldn't give it back
25:15 Ms. Reed taught me how to pick crabs
25:50 50 cents a gallon
26:05 Some people shucked and picked fast
26:30 First went to work at 15; I thought they were shucking bricks
27:40 Never seen oyster or crabs
28:15 They all called me an old woman
28:48 Daddy whipped me, said always obey grown-up people
29:15 People thought I was dumb
30:13 A guy came over and showed me how to shuck; I washed the oysters off first
31:30 Then the whole house started washing them too
32:30 Hard to shuck –hurt shoulders; hands were sore
33:45 Shucking house; how to shuck
35:03 How they were washed in the skimmer and weighed
35:40 So cold your gloves would be frozen
36:05 Hard living
37:05 Clothes, boots, aprons; couldn't work in no coat; now there's heat
37:05 I came to be the fastest shucker
37:20 What time work started; wooden stools; 12 or 15 people; traveling to work in
back of open truck was like riding in a car on the highway with the windows
down
38:15 Leaving to go home when it was dark, never knew daylight until the weekends
38:25 Crab house was easier –had seats, tables; how to pick crabs
39:00 Fins cut up hands; had to bandage fingers
40:10 Bleached hands to clean the cuts
40:27 Thirty people worked at first; I helped out the slow girls; it's good to help each
other, I just wanted to survive
42:00 Thirty-some workers
42:30 Owners just made money for themselves, didn't pay enough
43:40 I worked for Ron, might have been a Stone, last place I shucked oysters; I went
down at night to shuck for him

44:40 I won St. Mary's County oyster shucking contest -12 oysters in three minutes,
fastest woman

46:40 Worker/owner relations

The second portion of this interview consists mostly of Fred Carter, Ola Mae's husband speaking. Although he gave verbal consent to being taped, he has up to this point declined to sign a release form. Therefore his portion of the interview has been removed.

Separate CD:

Ola Mae sings song she sang the most while shucking, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*