

Adrian Coulby Interview Log

Interview for Calvert Marine Museum Research on Seafood Houses

Interviewer: Carrie Nobel Kline, Talking Across Lines: World Conversations, LLC

Also Present: Richard Dodds and Claire Cambardella

Location of Interview: Calvert Marine Museum

Interview Date: June 9, 2005

Adrian Coulby

00:12 Name, D.O.B. October 30, 1933

00:29 Born and raised at Newburg; father built oyster house at Rock Point

1:00 Oyster house called the Potomac Fish and Oyster Company; partially owned by Edgar Coulby, my father

1:20 As a kid I hung around the company, knew crab pickers and fishermen; it was fun

1:50 I liked to see the fishing boats come in; cleaned the oyster house

2:25 Things that were going on in the office; I'd bug Mary Ridgeway

2:54 I don't remember the boats having names. They were all different sizes; always full of oysters; 40-50 bushels

3:45 Processing of the oysters/crabs; the boats would tie up at the dock and the oysters were put in wheelbarrows; oysters were separated by what river they came from

4:40 I was fed oysters by the workers: "Straight up," the only way to eat an oyster

5:04 Names of relatives—always joking, all good people

6:00 I pushed wheelbarrows of oysters which could fit three bushels

6:34 Watermen were white, but shuckers were black. They came from different parts of Southern Maryland, Virginia and the Eastern Shore. They lived in shanties and all who stayed in them worked.

8:20 People got to work by catching a ride (hitchhiking) and stayed during the season (oyster or crab season).

9:00 Shucking oysters and picking crabs were two different jobs and people knew how to do them. I enjoyed watching workers shuck; they sang along with their work.

10:35 I enjoyed time at shucking house; dad bought the oysters from the watermen and hauled them to Baltimore; shipped all over the country by railroad

- 11:28 Description of father; born in Newburg; grandfather, William Coulby had a farm; my father was a commercial fisherman and seafood dealer
- 13:02 Grandfather's farm was ten miles from Cobb Island/Rock Point
- 14:14 Father would fish by hauling seines; caught catfish and carp, shipped them to New York and Philadelphia; fished in the Wicomico River; we lived on a cliff on the river and he could see the fish; every time he went fishing he came back with a boatful (18 foot boat)
- 15:48 Had fish pond at our house father would put the carp and catfish in; also kept them in live boxes in the river; (Describes loading and processing); he sold the fish live
- 16:56 I went out with my father for pleasure. Men also worked for him. (Tells the story of "Uncle John," a black man, who "never got wet")
- 18:43 Shuckers were nice, made sure I had something to eat
- 18:50 I was the only kid at the shucking house
- 19:10 Eleven kids in my family; I am the second to oldest; mother Irene was born and raised at Rock Point; she took care of the kids
- 20:33 Lists other activities at shucking house; father died on road driving back from Baltimore; the seafood truck turned over on him; I took over driving at age 15
- 21:34 Father had a business partner at shucking house who sold seafood in Baltimore; he sold the business four or five years after my father's death
- 23:28 Sherman Ferbush owned the land the shucking house was on; my father leased it
- 23:54 Shucking house was built in 1944, my father was killed in '48, continued on until '52 or so; the workers went back to their off-season lives
- 25:11 The Rock Point community had one other shucking house and a store. It had a rooming house where I went for dinner. Not much going on in community.
- 26:00 Steamship days built up area long before I was born; big hotel there then
- 27:08 Miss Simms owned the boarding house, always wanted you to come eat; also cut hair
- 28:08 I don't remember what I ate there, probably catfish and chicken.

- 29:07 Three cans they shucked into: standard, count, and select; pasteurized then put in gallon cans, put on ice and shipped to the markets
- 30:00 Crab process: picked into pint cans, packed in ice inside of barrels and shipped to the markets
- 30:50 Gallon can with a lithograph with the name of the company
- 31:46 Oysters were graded for their size. Small ones were standard, medium were count and large were select.