

## *Donald "Duck" Mattingly Interview Log*

Interview for Calvert Marine Museum

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

Also Present: Robert Hurry

Interview Date: 10-28-05

Disc I

- 00:01 Name is Donald Mattingly; they call me Duck; D.O.B. is 5-4-1944
- 00:22 Raised in the seventh; recollecting oyster shucking in the shuck house
- 01:00 Most who used to do the shucking were colored people
- 01:17 Workers would stay in tin houses with no heat
- 01:40 My father, Joseph Olan Mattingly, used to go as far as Piney Point to pick up shuckers; he was one of the biggest seafood dealers in St. Mary's County
- 02:20 Dump trucks used to pick up oyster shells to haul out and throw overboard
- 02:40 Very few oysters around anymore
- 2:50 Used to go to Leonardtown for ice; would throw in fish a hundred pounds at a time and put ice back on top; stacked four or five high; sent around the North-east
- 03:56 In 1950s and '60s would sometimes have to work two or three days to get all the fish out of the nets; a lot of work
- 4:15 Workers would separate different sizes and species of fish
- 4:30 Kinds of fish included croakers (hardheads and pinheads), perch, rock
- 5:30 Mr. Brown brought fish to father, but he couldn't take them because he couldn't sell them; Mr. Brown had to take them back to the river to throw overboard; they were already dead, several hundred pounds
- 06:00 Couldn't sell them if you didn't get orders; Mr. Brown took Dad to court; nothing came of it, but he wouldn't sell to him anymore after that
- 06:30 Buster Morris was captain of a boat; liked his drink but a good old guy; sold fish to Duck's father; never knew what he would catch, whether it would be five boxes or 1,000
- 07:14 Favorite place to haul it was Blackstone Island, now St. Clement's Island
- 08:00 Dad used to go to Piney Point to Carl Sheehan's; Mr. Sheehan would buy fish,

- oysters, and some crabs from Dad; would send several shuckers down there and then bring them back
- 08:30 There would be so many crabs you could hardly give them away; ice house would be full of bushels of them; if Dad went up to Washington or Baltimore and couldn't sell them, he'd bring them all the way back and put them in the ice house again; people wanted nothing to do with crabs
- 09:50 Would have three varieties of crabs by size: jumbo, medium, and prime; prices ranged from three cents apiece to fifteen cents depending on size
- 10:12 Mom would go from house to house and buy soft crabs
- 11:15 Would cull through them, collect dead ones and freeze them, and pack the live ones up in boxes and ship them to wherever they could be sold
- 11:34 A little better market for the soft crabs; back then you couldn't give the hard ones away
- 12:20 Never picked crab meat; shuckers used to eat all the crabs they wanted; could get all the crabs you could eat for a dollar at Sam Bailey's restaurant; he made his money on the beer
- 13:10 In the 1970s came up with a soft-shell clam; called them manoees in this area because they had a little snout on them; sometimes called pee clams (if you'd squeeze them they'd squirt water out)
- 13:30 Worked as a picker on a captain's boat; had a bushel basket in front of you and picked the manoees off as fast as you could
- 14:00 There was finally a market for the soft clams in the 1970s
- 14:28 Could pick 100 bushels in about two hours; they'd be a foot thick on that belt
- 14:50 What we couldn't pick went back overboard; they couldn't rebury themselves, so they would die
- 15:12 If you ran through a rotten patch of them, they'd come up through the boat on the conveyer belt and stink
- 15:31 I earned 40 cents a bushel; captain got \$1.75 a bushel, and out of that he had to pay for gas and pay me
- 16:00 Used to be a whole lot of manoees around here and now you can't get enough to eat

- 16:22 Clams were down in the sand, while oysters were on top; used to take oyster tongs, which ranged from 16 feet to 24 feet; they were made of wood and had two metal shafts at bottom; when you got the tongs full you'd raise them up on the boat; another man would cull them; two or three people on a boat would work at this all day
- 17:38 Had two barges, one named the *Eagle*, and the other *Magnolia*; Dad would give me money to go out and buy oysters; he'd take the *Eagle* and I'd take the *Magnolia*; he'd go down one part of the river, and I'd do down the other
- 18:07 The boats would hold several hundred bushels at a time; would bring them to wharf and unload them, each one by hand, onto trucks
- 19:00 Used to even sell water terrapins; used to have a pen down in the mud with water; after Hurricane Hazel came through, the water got so high that the terrapins started getting out of the pens; brother and I swam out there to cover the pens with nets to keep them from getting away
- 20:00 Even sold a few carp; the Jewish people and a few other people liked to eat them
- 20:50 Begins talking about the guys who lived in the shucking house; one was Kenny Jones, How Maddox, Dick Arnold; they'd sleep there, then get up at five or six in the morning to come to the shuck house and start shucking oysters
- 21:23 Even colored ladies used to come and shuck oysters; there might have been 15-20 in this shuck house and they'd shuck every day, all day
- 21:40 Names of workers included Robert Ellis; he used to live on one of the barges; another named Bryant Bowles (he was there until he died) and he stayed in the shuck house; he was the foreman – wasn't very educated, but he knew about oysters
- 22:40 Oysters would be blown (or cleaned) in big stainless-steel tubs; as you cleaned them, they would be bigger – which was an advantage, since you got paid by the bushel
- 25:00 Pint cans of oysters would be sealed by a machine; made more money by selling water and air
- 26:40 Two people would have to throw barrels of ice and oysters up on a truck
- 27:10 Used to have pints made out of cardboard; the unwashed oysters have better

- flavor; air and water don't taste like much when you clean them
- 28:00 Containers used to have Dad's name on them, along with the size of oyster stamped on them; ordered cans from D.C. or Baltimore
- 30:15 Companies would buy fish right off of trucks; almost like an auction
- 30:45 My granddad, Clarence Zachariah Mattingly, used to run this place; buried in Sacred Heart Cemetery
- 31:10 Family had disease that runs in leg muscles; granddaddy had it, and after he was about 60 he couldn't walk anymore, so he wanted to get out of the business; Dad bought him out and came down here from New York; this was around 1946
- 32:08 First house was burnt to ground; this is the second house; the house was the best house around at that time; Dad had a safe in the store full with money
- 33:25 Shuckers used to run a bill in the store, kind of like the company store; they would eat from the store and deduct it from their bill
- 34:15 He probably got half what they made; like the company store back in the old days – they owned the company, they owned the store, they owned the people
- 35:00 Most of the oyster shuckers were black; he'd pick them up from and carry them back to Piney Point; would pick them up around 4:30 in the morning; took them home around 5 p.m.
- 36:00 The cycle would repeat itself the next day; many an oyster has come through here, many a one
- 37:12 A lot of the time, all the money they earned shucking was took up in groceries
- 38:00 Some oyster shuckers shucked faster than others; all the females seemed to be fast; the older men were the slowest; maybe that's the only job they could find
- 39:08 Staying in the tin building was rent free
- 39:30 The foreman who stayed there was a heavy drinker; used to drink two fifths of liquor a day, every day; that's all he had
- 40:00 Bryant Bowles was always here
- 40:52 The store was the meeting spot; drinking beer and playing cards
- 41:12 Recalls he and his brother Goose used to make a circle with a potato and play marbles on the concrete floor; with men all around, just loved it; learned to play cards at five years old

- 42:15 Used to play games of stud poker for money back when there was none; but the watermen had money
- 42:52 Remembers a few fights; one guy got cut with a knife; watermen are big drinkers
- 43:21 During hurricane used to come up to store drinking beer and up to their knees in water
- 43:40 Anything you wanted to eat was in that store
- 45:27 Got a microwave in the 1970s
- 46:00 Had a potbelly stove that burned slabs of wood; got the wood from Mr. Tennyson up in Chaptico
- 46:30 The store would close around 8:00 or 9:00 at night; opened at 7:00 in the morning; people would sit around playing cards and shooting the bull about the day; mostly it was all men
- 47:22 Most of the women shuckers were from Piney Point
- 47:47 Jimmy Jones, Tom Sawyer, Sam Mack, Ben Dyson – some of the black men who worked as shuckers
- 48:17 Dad used to rent a boat to Tom Sawyer
- 49:10 His Dad had his own oyster bed; they were plants, which were in the mud of the creek; oyster tended to get long and narrow; bar oysters tended to be round; the bar oysters tasted better
- 50:05 Oystermen used to catch 70-90 bushels of oysters; now you can't get enough to eat; isn't that a shame?
- 50:50 During the workday, there would be radios going and people laughing; crabs and manoes would be steaming; great times, great times; I just wished I still lived around here; I live in Hollywood now, but I'd prefer living around here
- 51:29 I'm proud of my heritage, believe me. Very proud
- 51:40 It was just normal; everyday was just a normal day; now that I'm older you don't see these things around anymore, you know; you appreciate what you had
- 52:05 I started working when I was 10 years old; when I was 15 or 16, I'd get on one of the buy boats, anchor out, and wait for the people to bring me the oysters; I used to have a big bucket of money
- 52:50 Sometimes you'd go out and run a white flag up the mast; that means the price of

oysters went up a dime or so

54:21 Sometimes you wouldn't get to bed until 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning

55:15 Used to sweep up oyster shells as a child; or helped in the blower or canning room; would help ice fish; a hardworking day, but didn't know it, didn't know it

56:00 About 40 dollars a week was about all I ever made from my dad, so I had to leave there and go make some money

56:10 When I was a teenager, if I could make \$100 a week I felt like I'd done something; and now you have to make \$100 a day to even get by

56:40 My dad wasn't a highly educated man, just a regular guy; he had good market and business sense; knew what he could buy and how much he could sell

57:15 He made a million dollars for sure, at least that; he was probably worth a million dollars at one time, but he had his problems drinking

57:54 He'd go out and people would steal money out of his pockets; he was a partying guy; made money, spent money, and lost a lot of money in games, booze – just the regular vices of life, and he liked his vices

58:20 Dad used to play cards with the captains of the fish boats

59:00 He was a pretty strict boss; he didn't throw his money away on work people; he enjoyed his good times

59:25 Used to go to Cuba every year for 10 years in a row; stopped going after Castro came; he was there when the revolution came

60:00 The wife didn't go

60:20 Granddaddy had the old shuck house; he's the one who really started the business

61:00 Knew granddad and grandmother a little bit; grandmother had a part time business selling used clothes

61:36 They bought a home in D.C. and four or five boarding houses; would go with grandmother on the street cars to collect rents when he visited them; went to the movies and stayed all day

62:12 Would stay a week or two with them in D.C.; remembers eating snowballs from drugstore; ice cream and root beer floats; I can remember it like it was yesterday

64:00 Granddad had the same store; it was just called the "store"

64:30 Granddad was kind of a quiet, easy-going guy; real skinny; never saw him get

mad; was crippled; my dad was also crippled at the end of his life – he died in the mid 1960s; lost his mother last February

65:40 The old shuck house; had ice house; 15-20 used to shuck in there; the old shuck house was the fish house when my dad had it, and this was the oyster house

66:45 Old shuck house had the scales for the fish; in the back part had salted eels and tripe (which was the bait for the crabs)

67:22 Back then there were no crab pots like nowadays; there were just lines with eels; called trot lines

67:42 I remember sitting on the porch at 12:00 or 1:00 at night waiting for the fish boats to come in; you'd sit there and listen, and you'd hear the boating coming up the mouth of the creek

68:20 The old shucking house was probably 60 yards long and 50- to 60-yards wide

69:50 Ever since I remember it was there; and the ice house is still there

70:00 The ice would come from Leonardtown

71:00 In the old days, had ice boxes; you put blocks of ice in your refrigerator to keep your food cold; my grandmother had that

71:40 My grandmother's name was Blanche; everybody called her Miss Blanche; she was a Laningham before she married granddad

72:00 Always used an oyster knife to shuck the oysters; open them up from the front, not the back as they do nowadays

72:40 Shucked it from the mouth; could shuck 10 or 15 oysters in 20 or 30 seconds

73:00 The place was always open, even in the summer; I think most of the colored people worked on the farms during the summer and when the winter came they would shuck oysters

74:00 But Bryant Bowle was always here; he was the one who pretty much run the place

75:00 They stayed here, had something to eat, a place to lay down, their whiskey and they was happy

75:10 The guys in the tin building were also there year round

75:40 Tom Sawyer saved my life, I'm told, when I was a kid; I fell overboard and couldn't swim, I was three or four years old; if it wasn't for him, I guess I wouldn't be here, really

- 76:00 We had the run of the place when we were kids
- 76:20 They'd tease with me; tell me "You're gonna get your ass whupped."
- 76:40 And that's how I got my name – from them; my name was Donald and they just started calling me Duck; and from then on it stuck; and when my brother come along the colored guys were still here so they put a "Goose" on him.
- 76:50 Duck and Goose; my older brother Herman was nicknamed "Seafood"
- 77:30 He stayed with the business more than we did; he stuck with it a long while; but he had a drinking problem, too; died when he was 39 of cirrhosis
- 78:42 In the late 1970s and '80s the seafood business started going; you could see it getting worse and worse every year; people wouldn't catch anything; the seafood business just went bad
- 79:11 Today there's only five or six people who have license to oyster, who make their living from oystering
- 79:30 Dad still had the store going and bought what he could; he had enough to keep going; You never thought it would end, everyday was like Christmas

## Disc II

- 01:00 I'd just like to have the money that was stolen from my dad (out of his pockets)