

## *Mary Ridgeway 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

### **Mary Ridgeway**

32:55 Name, no D.O.B. given; proclaims eternal youth.

33:27 I was born in Tompkinsville and have lived there my whole life. I have three brothers, two sisters; we were Jacksons. My parents were Emma M. and Sankston Walter.

34:20 My father was a farmer, carpenter and he worked the river. My mother was a homemaker.

34:50 Never saw the shucking house until the first day I worked at Coulby's; started after graduating from high school

35:36 First day: lots of people and boats; it was confusing at first. I kept the books and recorded what we bought.

36:36 The shucking house was a factory-type building; describes place; there were shanties, oyster shell piles, and it smelled.

37:35 Could see the boats and crab trucks, watch men put oysters in tubs, wheelbarrows, etc.; knew most of the watermen; I remember a man with one eye who took his dog on the boat

38:41 I watched people work.

38:56 The workers were all black people. Watermen were white. Describes where watermen and workers came from; the men from the Eastern Shore had larger boats.

40:00 I remember the processing and the singing; some of them were melancholy

40:19 Singing was full of life; happy people

41:10 Workers talked with one another and sang hymnal songs.

- 42:30 The place was noisy; the steamers and the people. I recorded what the boats brought in and paid the watermen.
- 43:23 The oyster processing—wash them, shuck them; I never saw anyone get hurt shucking oysters or picking crabs.
- 44:00 Good workers— I couldn't do the work— worked all day and it was hard work
- 45:11 I was separate from the shucking building; got up to see the shuckers
- 46:10 Work was different back then. You were free to move around if you chose to.
- 46:39 Describes Mr. Coulby and his family; Adrian's older brother came to the office; I called him Buddy. He kept the same type of business. It was a water community.
- 48:29 Always lots of crabs
- 48:52 Describes method of crabbing: used salted eel or tripe for bait; used trot lines
- 49:22 Woman crabber: she worked just like a man and also had a dog she brought on the boat
- 50:02 Big business: employed people who would not have had work otherwise, summer and winter
- 50:40 Rural area: you had to drive to LaPlata 20 miles away; you'd go once every two weeks or so to go to the store; very few stores
- 51:29 There was a steamboat at one time that came from Washington, D.C.; father managed one at Morgantown; tiny bridge to Cobb Island
- 52:52 There were 30-50 people employed. They were mostly pickers or shuckers, only about six other positions with the company. Trucks came and went.
- 54:12 Pay—everything was very cheap; oysters didn't cost much; paid watermen daily according to their catches; pickers were paid weekly
- 55:58 Nothing in the surrounding area; people brought lunch or went to Miss Simms'; tiny store at the top of the hill and the shucking house was at the bottom
- 57:07 The shuckers/pickers were paid once a week to keep them coming back
- 58:00 Biggest sales were to people in Baltimore
- 58:34 Mr. Coulby's partner had other places to sell the goods
- 58:55 They called the oyster steamer a blower; describes sterilization and the appearance of the oysters

- 59:48 Barges would load the oyster shells after shucking and put them in the river, or shells were taken away on trucks.
- 60:33 There weren't many storms, so work wasn't interrupted much.
- 61:10 The tides were normal. They are changing now, getting higher.
- 61:40 Describes how the crabs were kept alive
- 62:20 I love crabmeat; used to eat it with my fingers at work
- 63:28 Other oyster house at Rock Point had less work/business
- 64:00 When Mr. Coulby died, the business also lost its life.
- 65:10 Pickers were paid by how much they picked; same for oysters; a man checked production, weighed crabmeat to judge pay
- 66:50 It was a good place to work; honest people
- 67:30 Adrian Coulby: There was a window from the shucking house to a room with a tally board and a record of progress was kept there.
- Mary Ridgeway: It was fun; emphasizes the abundance of the catch