

Interviewee: Lucy Grant

Interviewer: Dr. Jolvan Morris

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Dionne Hoskins

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Abstract:

Mrs. Lucy Mae Grant was born in 1930 in the small coastal community of Sherman Bluff, Georgia in McIntosh County—30 miles south of Savannah. Growing up, fishing was essential within her family and community and throughout her married life. Her husband was a shrimp boat captain and they had three children. However, the family connection to fishing did not extend to her two sons, who hated fishing and chose to enter the military instead. Mrs. Grant occasionally crabbed, but made her living working at the local hospital until her retirement. She enjoyed life until her passing in 2021.

Mrs. Grant recalls that although it was hard, fishing afforded her family a good living. As a shrimp boat captain, Mr. Grant learned how to catch shrimp, oysters, and fish by watching and following others until he was given the opportunity to lead. He worked as a shrimper for almost 40 years, with the majority of that time spent working as the captain of a shrimp boat owned by the Sasser family. Mrs. Grant recalls that he traveled down to Key West, Florida, during the winter months, to follow the shrimp migration. Upon his return, the unsold extra catch was often shared with their community. Mrs. Grant recalls that she always passed on eating the lobster, as she cheerfully recalled were just “too big”.



Jolvan Morris 00:14

Okay, good afternoon. I'm here with the delightful Mrs. Grant. And this afternoon we're going to be discussing the history of African Americans and Georgia coastal fisheries. How her family and her husband became involved in influenced by this ever-changing lifestyle, and her perception and thoughts on today's African American fishing. So, let's get started. Can you state your full name for us?

Lucy Grant 00:38

Lucy M. Grant

JM 00:40

Okay. Can you tell us something about yourself, Mrs. Grant? Tell us your history.

LG 00:44

Well, I was born and raised in MacIntosh County. A little country town called Sherman Bluff, right on the water. Everybody lived off of the water. The fish, the shrimps, the oyster, the crabs, everything. My husband, he was doing that work for about, oh gosh, about 35, 40 years. He worked on a shrimp boat, was like a helper. And then later on, he'd become a captain of the boat. And they went out they got shrimps and lobster and in the summertime they were here in Savannah. They left Savannah on in the wintertime and they would go down to Key West Florida. And they work down there the winters months. And then they, they come back up here and it was a good living. It was real good. My son, I got two boys. They even worked with their father for a while, but they didn't like. [laughing] Let's see what else well. We bought a home, we raised our children, we educate our children all off of shrimp and crab, you know. Oysters and whatever was in the river that we could sale. And he, he worked Lazzaretto Creek, down past Thunderbolt. His—the man that owned a boat that he worked on was Billy Sasser. He was a nice man, we all got along.

JM 02:52

So, 'bout how much did you guys sell it for it?

LG 02:55

Now, I don't know exactly how much. They sell it by the box. And well, he worked for Billy Sasser that owned a boat. My husband was the captain of the boat. He he got paid by the by the box I think. I think by the hundred-pound boxes. I don't know how much that he made. That was such a long time. [laughing] I don't I don't really remember that. But um...

JM 03:35

But I did you yourself grow up in a family of fishermen. Like how was your mom?

LG 03:40

No, my uncle, my uncle, my Uncle Morris—he was a fisherman. And let's see who else was on the shrimp boat was a fisherman. Oh God, Harry—he was a fisherman. Well, he was my uncle-in-law. Harry Pierce, he was a fisherman. There was just so much, you know, where I was raised up that that, you know, they just worked on and water how they made their living in the water. Had a lot of cousins and stuff they would crab, you know, crab by the barrels it was sell them by the barrels. Oysters, they would sell them by the bushels. And um, but the biggest part of it was the shrimping business and oyster business. That was that was a big part of it.

JM

So, that was plentiful here in Savannah, and Darien?

LG

That was in Savannah and Darien and Sherman Bluff, where I really was raised up at and everything it was right on the water and everybody had their own boats and they own little crew that they would go out and go out with and um let's see what else.

JM 04:59

So, what was, what was your role? Did you fish too?

LG 05:01

No, no! I did! I crabbed some. My uncle-in-law—I was, you know, we had a crab and what you call a crabbin' business and I would go out with him and we would catch bushels and bushels of crab and bring back and sale. The big truck was there waiting on us to come back and weigh the crab and they take it off. Wherever they carries it, I didn't know; but you know to process it, process the crab. Process the crabs and that's about all I did. Stayed home and cook and clean and have everything ready when they got home.

JM 05:43

Okay, so you have to tell me about that because I don't know about crabbing. So, how do you, how do you go about doing that? What materials you gotta use?

LG 05:48

The crab? Oh, gosh, let's see. We had a long, it was a line, we called it a crab line and you would tie the bait to it. And it's about 15 or 20 feet long. You, you put an anchor on the end of the um the crab line and then you let, you let it out. And it's on a reel, you let it out. And you let stay there for a while then you go back and you have a net to scoop it up. Crabs crab on the net to scoop it up and put it on the boat. Go a little bit further and you scoop it up and you put it on the boat. Until you get about a bushel or so and you set that bushel aside. And then you do the same thing.

JM 06:41

Okay, so how much came in a bushel? How many crabs? [laughing]

LG 06:50

Honey, I know how much a bushel is. It's about ummm 50 or 60 crabs or maybe more in a bushel, you know, bushel basket. And then you just let the line lay there awhile and then we go back and catch it again then there's some more crabs on it and you do the same thing all over again. And so that's that's how we did the crab thing. The the shrimp thing is a big old net up on—I had a picture of that somewhere—up on the boat and they put that out they have a big net on this side of the boat and a net on the other side of the boat. Then they would drag like they say, “Draggin’ for shrimp.” And they pull it up and the nets full of shrimp and they dump it on a on a deck of the boat.

JM 07:46

Oh! So, you could eat for days! [laughing]

LG 07:49

And you put it back out and the same thing and that's how they made a livin’. The sell the crab and stuff to the... In fact, they bring it into the dock to the owner that owns the boat and he would, you know get it and then pay them so much and so much. Some of the Black man's now they had their own shrimp boats. Because I had some cousins that owned their own shrimp boat and they really made good money doing that because it was theirs you know. All the shrimp that they caught after expenses and stuff. All of money went to them, but my husband he never owned a shrimp boat. He just worked as a captain.

JM 08:31

Okay, so how long did your husband work for?

LG 08:34

Oh gosh. Let’s see my husband died in 1980 and he’s been working and doing that kind of work from let's see about ‘50 from about ‘58 or something until, until he got sick in the last part of the 70s. He did that kind of work. I don't know exactly how many years that is. You’ll have to figure that out.

JM 09:09

So, she brought, he brought the food in. Was it always used or did you guys share it out with family.

LG

What?

JM

The profit that he brought in?

LG 09:18

Oh no, that that was ours! The money and stuff that came in. Excuse me [coughs]. No, we didn't share with anybody. The only thing that he shared was, was with me and my three kids. Yeah, that's it, that was more. I would take him back down there and they would stay out some time for two or three days and come in and unload and I would go down there and pick him up. And that was about it and do the same thing over and over until you know during the summer months. And then like I say the winter months they go down to Key West, Florida. That's where they had a big shrimp and place down there. And they stayed down there and so from I guess about to around April, sometime when this when the waters warm up here and they could catch shrimps get plentiful up here.

JM 10:20

Yeah. So, he was basically focused on shrimp. Did you guys catch anything else?

LG 10:25

Well, he would catch lobster! A lot of time he would come home from Florida and bring me a big old bag full of lobster, but I never did like lobster. It was too big a shrimp for me. [laughing]

JM 10:38

So how about you? Did you eat anything else? What was your favorite fish?

LG 10:41

My favorite fish was whiting. I love whiting.

JM 10:46

Was that plentiful around?

LG 10:49

Yes. It's still plentiful around here and there.

JM 10:51

Okay, so do you still fish?

JM 10:53

Oh no, I don't fish now, I'm too old for that. I go to the market. Yeah, I have to go to the market and buy or somebody might give me a few sometime. But that's about it.

JM 11:08

But I heard you say your, your sons became fishermen or worked with their father?

LG 11:12

They used to work. They worked with him for a while, but they didn't like it.

JM

They didn't like it? So, what did they go do? [laughing]

LG

After they got up there, they all went into the service and they came home. I got a son that lives in Jacksonville. He worked with the post office. My other son work at Savannah State.

JM 11:31

Oh ok. That's good and that is exciting. So, with that profit that you guys bring in are not necessarily profit, but the food that you bring in? It was just for the family, right, or did you share it with anybody else, as far as the food was concerned like the lobster and the shrimp?

LG 11:47

Oh, yes if they'd bring any home, yeah I would share it with the neighbors. Oh, yeah. Sometimes he would get a chance he would bring some fish home, you know, a few shrimps or whatever. And I would share it with my neighbors. I had a neighbor across the street. When she see me pull up in the yard and see him get out the car and see him with a bucket, she'd say, "Oh, we gonna eat some fish night!" [laughter] So, I would always take a few over to them. And we just we just that's the way we lived. That's the way we lived.

JM 12:17

So, fishing was your main source of income?

LG

That was his main source of income.

JM

Okay and you? What was your occupation?

LG 12:25

I worked at the hospital—Memorial Hospital. I worked in in the linen department at Memorial for about 28 years. That was that was what I did. And I retired in '91 from Memorial.

JM 12:43

Okay, so do you get a chance to go down with Thunderbolt anymore? Down there by the marina?

LG 12:52

No, I hadn't been down there. I can't even remember the last time I was down there.

JM 12:54

Oh, okay. So, your childhood. How was, how was that? I wanna know some more about you. [laughing]

LG 13:02

Oh, I had a wonderful childhood! I was raised up there down in Sherman Bluff. Playin and just having fun. [laughing] Yeah, we, we were good down there. My sister and I—I had a brother, but he passed and—we just we lived good. They all, a lot of them live off the water too. My my stepfather, that's what he did. He used to take people out. You know, those folks would come down. Firstly, it was like a resort like a vacation resort. And he would take people out fishing in and they would catch the big bass and trout. And that's how he made a lot. That's how he made his living.

JM 13:52

Okay. So, did um—what would your husband and your father, your stepfather? Did they—were they taught that or did they learn how to fish, just naturally?

LG 14:04

I, I think they would just just learn it. There was just something you learned to do. I guess. I don't think anybody really, especially my husband, I don't even remember anybody teaching him. I think he just went out like I say for a helper would someone that really knew what they were doing. And he probably watched them and learned and that's when they gave him a boat, you know, made him a captain of a boat. And and that's the way it is. I guess you learn you look at learn from seeing other people do what other people do. That's how I learned to drive, watching other people. And I think that's what he that's what he did. You didn't have to go to school or nothing to learn it. No. Yeah.

JM 14:54

Okay. So, did your husband stay at this company? Or did he move from different companies that he worked for?

LG 14:59

Oh, He stayed there. He stayed there until he got sick. Yeah, he stayed right there with um with um the Sasser family. Like a family and he stayed right there and worked with them.

JM 15:12

Okay, so do you know anything about his parents, his parents? Were they fishermen or?

LG 15:17

No, they were like farmers. Yeah they were like farmers.

JM

So, they grew up farming?

LG

Yeah and doing things and and that's that's, I know his mother and his father. But you know I don't even remember what his father did. I don't really know. I know his mom, she would—she used to go down to the, to the factory where they would, you know, shuckin oysters. And headin' the shrimps, when they would bring the shrimps in.

JM

Okay, was that factory here?

LG

No, that was down home. That was at Sherman Bluff.

JM

Okay!

LG

She would go down there and she used to get—it started off I think paying 25 or 35 cent a bucket for the shrimp, for the shrimp ya head. And she was she did that and she crabbed. Just like we did, her and her children went out there and crabbed. Caught the crab and brought the crab back and sell the crab. So that's that's that's just the way we lived. That was it.

JM 16:27

Okay, so did your husband have any brothers or sisters?

LG 16:31

Yeah. He had oh, gosh. Let's see, how many did he have? [laughter by JM] I know he had two brothers other than hisself. Then he had about, about four about four or five sisters. He came from a big family.

JM 16:49

So did any of them...I know you said some of them worked with their mother every once in a while.

LG 16:54

They would go down there and work and help her with the shrimp and the oysters. But other than that...

JM 16:59

None of them did it for a living it?

17:00

They didn't did it for a living. No, most of them just got to they grew up and they just left. Some of them went this part of the tow—world. And they all over. Yeah, they all over

17:12

So, as you seen your husband bring in the food or whatever. Did you notice a difference with fish? Like maybe one month they'll bring in a whole lot of shrimp or maybe another month they'd bring in a little bit?

LG 17:22

Oh yeah. Well, that's that's the way it was. Time and they had a saying that shrimp, let's see how he said it. "Oh, they're running good this this week". And then the next week uh, "Not so good". Sometime they'd bring in 25, 30 boxes. Next week maybe 10 boxes or five boxes. Just it runs like that.

JM 17:51

Okay. So as a captain, what was he in charge of on the boat?

LG 17:57

He was in charge of the whole shebang! [laughter] Yeah, he would get people sometime you have one person working with him and sometimes two people. You know, it wouldn't. He, he had to run the boat. He had to keep his eye on where you're going. And so, you know, they wouldn't run into nothing. And that's about it, made sure the boat is clean and make sure all the shrimps and stuff is in the box and iced down. Because they'd be out there for two and three

days. They'd have to make sure the shrimps was iced down and everything. And so, it could be good and fresh when they get back to the dock with it.

JM18:39

Okay, so for processing. Do you remember how long it took? Like when he got back to land and you guys had to get all the things separated? [laughing]

LG

No, I don't remember all of that. I don't remember that.

JM

I understand.

LG 18:56

It was was a long time ago. And I just don't remember. But it was it was a good living. Everybody got along. Good. That's about all I can think of right now. If you axed something maybe it'll come to me. [laughing]

JM 19:21

[laughing] I understand. Do you know of any fisherman today?

LG 19:24

Do you know, I think all of them are just about gone. I can't think of one that was around when my husband was doing this kind of work. One, but he's he's down in the country. He's in the country named Jake Washington. He's down on a country now. I saw him Sunday. We went down to the church. And he's old and just barely getting around. Him and my husband's first cousin. Yeah. Did he own a boat? I'm trying to think. I think he ran a boat. I'm trying to think if he was a captain I don't think he owned a boat. I think he was a captain of a boat. I think. He's the only one I could really think of. The rest of them are all gone. It was it was it was a hard job it's hard work, but it was good clean yeah work and it was worth it.

JM 20:38

Sounds good. Sounds good. Sometimes I wish I could be back. Sound like that was some good food back then! [laughing]

LG 20:45

Yeah, we used to get shrimps, smothered shrimps and the morning some good old smothered shrimp and hot grits. That was good eating! [laughing] And this with the fish, good eating. Yes sir we just we all lived off the river.

JM 21:09

Okay, so did your husband your husband taught your children, but you said they didn't, they didn't want...[laughing]

LG 21:15

They said, "Dad, that's for you, not for me." [laughing] I think my youngest son he went with him about twice and he came back. He said, "Mom, you know what?" I said, "What?" He said, "I'm walking on the ground, but I seem like I'm floating in the water." [laughing] But my oldest son, he worked with him for for a couple of months or so. He, he...they all went in the service, "we can't do this." Some with the Navy road and some went to the Army and they came back and then they went their different ways doing different things.

JM 22:01

That's good. Sounds like you guys had a beautiful life and I want to thank you so much for allowing me to get your story.

LG

You're welcome.

JM

You have a lot of good information. [laughing]

LG

I'm glad I was able to help.

JM

Thank you so much. And if you remember anybody else that fishes just let me know and I want to get in contact with them too.

LG 22:23

Okay, okay. Well, you know I don't know if um if Mrs. Scott, she lives back there. I told Thomas about her. She didn't give you her number?

JM 22:37

No, but if you have a number I'd be glad to take that down. [laughing]

LG 22:42

Maybe she might could tell you because her husband was a fisherman too. Maybe she could give you some information. Maybe some... let me see, hold on.

JM

Ok that's fine.

LG

Rosalie Scott. I just talked to her the other day, she called me.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Michelle Duncan 7/5/2022

Review by Molly Graham [DATE]