

**BAYSHORE DISCOVERY PROJECT
DELAWARE BAY MUSEUM**

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTION

DATE: July 26, 2006
TIME: 10:30 am – 12:30 pm
SUBJECT: History on Charles Lawrence McConnell, Artist
NARRATOR: Olin W. McConnell, grandson
LOCATION: Home of Olin W. McConnell
2nd St.
Port Elizabeth, NJ 08348
856 327 0315

ATTENDEES: Olin W. McConnell
Nancy McConnell (spouse)
Sally A. Van de Water, BDP, Folklife Program Coordinator
Deb Slating, BDP, Museum Collections Manager
Pat Moore, BDP Volunteer Delaware Bay Museum

TRANSCRIBED BY: Pat Moore, Volunteer Delaware Bay Museum

DATE: 8/3/06
ACCESSION #: 2007.04
ACCESSION CATALOGUE #: 2007.04.
BEGIN: TAPE 1. SIDE A. -- Recording oral history of Charles Lawrence McConnell, Artist

0.5 Introduction by Sally Van de Water, of Deb Slating, Pat Moore, Olin and Nancy and their dog. Explained they must give verbal permission to be recorded.

17.5 Sally again, verifying she has permission from all attendees for recording their participation in discussion.

Olin: I am “chilli” McConnell’s grandson. Charles Lawrence McConnell grandson and we are about ready to get some papers together and describe my grandfather to you people.

Sally: And we have you permission to tape record this. Now that formality is out of the way.

Olin: I’m going to start talking about all the stuff standing around me. Too best known things grand pop did was a Field and Stream cover back in 1927, July 1927.

Sally: We are now talking about your grandfather Charles “Chillie” McConnell.

Olin: Charles Lawrence McConnell, “Chillie” was his nickname. Ahh I am holding an issue October 2005 and he did this cover back in 1927 it was chosen for one of the best covers in for Field & Stream in their survey. Probably won’t find it here in the listing real quick, but that’s the picture you are observing, here it is here. They picked the best covers of all time for this centennial that their doing and that was one of them. The cover was done by my grandfather and the story inside was done by my great uncle Burt Mort McConnell and picture actually shows a polar bear about ready to pounce onto a man pulling a gun out of his sheath. The story was that my uncle Mort was a explorer up in the artic and he went with Vallhalimore?? Stephanson?? Stephanson ended up ah comin back of an ice flow that polar bear followed him a long distance and he comes around the corner and it was about ready to pounce on him by dad told me the story that my the time he was able to pull the gun out of the sheath and shoot the bear that he had blood splatter on him. He was almost that bears supper.

Ah, knew about this ever since I was a kid finally I was able to find the magazine pictures and stuff like that and put it all together.

Pat: I have a question for you, let start with some basics, ah what year was your grandfather born? And do you have a birth date?

Olin: Ooooh, yes I do but I am not going to be able to give it to you until I find tht black book I can’t pin point it exactly for you. And....

Pat: Where was he born?

Olin: I believe Cedarville. He came to Port Norris at a very early age I believe he was born in Cedarville they lived on the back street, raised on the back street of Port Norris, Yawk Wawk road. And ah his house where my dad was born is let’s say its across the from the Palomino on Bacon St. south of the Palomino. Have you seen it Debbie or no? But you recognize it your on Main St you go maybe two houses, three houses in from the corner. Great big stone fireplace. And its as wide as this room is. My uncle Mort was an explorer and he would bring different rocks back for grandfather. The stone fireplace is made out of all, at the time I think it was 50 states, there is a stone from each state in that fireplace. Huge fireplace, I never seen one quite so big.

Pat: Who is living in the house now, do you know?

Olin: Yes I do, Nancy.... Mrs. Fullem she is 93 but I don’t know her married name.

Pat: A quick question again, do you know his death date?

Olin: On that paper I do and I can’t find it but 1962, around that is the best I can tell yous.

Pat: Do you know where he is buried?

Note: 8/06/2007 later found out that he was born and raised in Port Norris, NJ on Yawk Wawk Road. Pat Moore.

Olin: In the Port Norris Cemetery.

Sally: And he was Mort's brother?

Olin: There were eight children and uncle Mort was one. Mort was the youngest one. Grandfather was next to the youngest, Chillie was next to the youngest.

Pat: How did Charles start with his art? Did it start in high school, was he formally educated?

Olin: Dad never actually told me a story on it, he was ah self taught and then he went to two other schools. He went to an art school in a Chicago ah Chicago Fine Arts and he went to a sign painting school in Philadelphia. Ah the one in a Chicago the artist name, the teacher was Harvey Dunn.

Pat: Studied with Harvey Dunn?

Olin: He didn't study with him he was the teacher.

Pat: Yes

Olin: And he did study with ah Norman Rockwell. Ah um the story I've had from a couple of other people was Norman Rockwell got sick and he was at the time during the Saturday Evening Post covers. Grand pop did one or two of um for him while Rockwell was sick, they made the offer for him to stay on and stay up there and ah and do the articles and grandfather said I have family back down in Port Norris and he passed that up and came back on down.

Pat: When did he start working for Field and Stream?

Olin: Ah all is I can tell you he it was a singular instance.

Pat: Oh okay a one-time thing.

Olin: Yes, ah he did the reason I'm showing you these two did a lot of local stuff beins he was friends with Uncle Mort was a national recognition with Stephanson ah there are several articles that grandfather did, this is another one for Winchester it was a calendar. The date on that was (Sally: Winchester soft loading and repeating rifles shot guns, is that pen and ink and is that an original?) No, his signature is in the lower part of it and a like I say this is another national recognition type thing. And a Uncle Mort, I know of about maybe three other articles that grandfather did for the covers of the magazines and Uncle Mort did the story inside again same thing.

Olin: As I said before probably the best thing he was ever known for was this Field and Stream (pointing to Polar Bear picture) that's national attention.

Local thing was he built the race horse up at the Garden State race track. Ah that was burnt down and I have pictures of it when it was dedicated and then pictures of it when it burnt down. But it was supposed to be titled, I believe it was the world's largest weather vane. It actually did turn with the direction of it, it was larger than a full size horse, the jockey on it was a painted different colors and the number was changed each year of whoever's the winner of the Derby up there.

Sally: Was it from wood or from another material?

Olin: From what I understand that no it was built from a plastic wood, plaster, wire frame and stuff like that. And it whatever it was was made well cause it lasted quite a few years. I think that was made in 1927... not sure.

(Turned off recorder while Olin when to look for book containing more information on grandfather.)

39.1 – These are two of some of things that grandfather did, see the eagle (pointed to a wooden carved masthead of an eagle) they were ah, he carved quite a few of them that went in the mast schooner ships on top of the mast hold. And that is a gun stock he carved, if you want to grab that and look at that it has a patch box in it. I didn't know he did much metal work but he did really a nice job on the patch box. You'll push that lever and a door open up. You might have to use a pin.

Sally: That's very cool, so there is a recessed patch box in the butt of the rifle, decorated with a stag and lots of decorative work on the metal. And Pat while Olin is looking for that book, maybe you can state for the record on tape why we are here and your particular interest in the artwork of Charles McConnell.

Pat: We were recently given, (Delaware Bay Museum) was recently given a picture of the J & E Riggins Oyster schooner, supposedly during the 1929 Delaware Bay Schooner Race. And the Riggins ah won in its class, first place. The artist presented this painting to the Captain, Charles Riggins, as a memento of the occasion. So we are now providing a provenance for this particular painting. And that is why we are talking to the grandson of the artist.

43.1 – 61.3 TAPE HAS NO VOICE RECORDING.... JUST HISSING SOUND.

61.4 – 71.0 AUDIO IS VERY FAINT AND VERY DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH WHAT IS BEING SAID.

71.1 – Olin: Speaking about a painting of sheep.... Paint they look they are super cold there so he melted it out. That picture is probably of 8 ft by 5 ft or something like that.

Sally: And it was a mural completed in 1953?

Olin: Yes

Deb: You have the smaller original that the mural was painted from.

Olin: I had this for quite a few years and for some reason or other I said well I'm going to open up the back part of it. This, the detail on everything you won't believe it to look at it, you'll think its on canvas. It, I opened it up turned it around on the back part of it it's a advertisement for a union meeting. It's a poster that was stuck on a telephone pole that grand pop had also made for a union meeting Christmas time.

Pat: So he reused the backs of this other works.

Olin: Its on a piece of cardboard.

Pat: Now I am assuming these are oil paintings (referring to photos in album) and the mural herd of sheep with Jesus ascending from heaven. Next photo... this one is again Jesus as a Sheppard with a staff and sheep around him in a sitting position and this is, is this in a church?

Olin: Nope. It was going to go into a church or had been in a church not sure of the exact story on it. If you notice the face is not finished ah I think the feet could be a little more detailed and I think maybe the little sheep. Not quite finished. And I have that in my possession.

Show her the back of it....

Sally reads: The United Packing House Workers of America CIO Vote by secret ballot Wed, Jan 7, 1953 12 noon to 8:00 pm Firehouse UPWACIO A New Deal in the New Year.

Olin: Describing the way the painting was put on cardboard he and Pat discuss the difficulty of painting on paper. Olin says he would put on a gesso and Pat agreed.

Olin: It was more less of a pre before he painted the big one I think he had really too much intention on doing that.

Pat: Remarks that while observing the painting she discovers that you can see the cardboard through the paint and said it did not have an undercoat of gesso before he painted with the oil paints. Beautiful, beautiful brush work lot of detail,

Olin: Some people made fun of the pink nose (on sheep) and pink ears on a couple of those sheep he downtoned it on the church picture.

Pat: Very very lovely. The next painting is painting of Christ again sitting ...

77.8 – AGAIN TAPE GOES SILENT ONLY HISSING NOISE.

78.1 – Pat: the next paintings are difficult to see.

Olin: The church paintings as I said are all very large. And I have to say maybe 8 ft by 4 ft something like that. Ah there are in family, I can't tell you much more about it, that's a glare from my camera at's cracked it was next to a fireplace what happened super dried oil painting out and make it look older.

(pointing to another photograph) Ah I believe these were practice pieces when he went to that school in Chicago.

Pat: Yes, one is a

Olin: If you are an artist you will understand that, they want either stilllife apple fruit and stuff like that.

Pat: Yes this is a farm scene with a small farm house, woman pulling a bucket out of a well trees.....

78.9 – 95.9 – (end of Tape I Side A) TAPE WENT SILENT AGAIN.... A GREAT DEAL OF HISSING... CAN HARDLY HEAR VOICES

TAPE 1 – SIDE B

0.2 – 16.3 – TAPE NOT RECORDING VOICES JUST HISSING

16.3 – Olin: My sister has that and that's her name Patsy. Um I think that could have been made out of crate wood I'm not real sure on it but it is nice detail on it really for.... **Pat:** also made by your grandfather... **Olin:** and that is also doll sized that is not full size its.... **Pat:** It's a rocking chair with a rush seat, not sure the style of the back of the rocker what that is called, possibly curved ladder with spindles at the top (Sally) and carved spindles on the bottom.

Olin: Full operated lath that was is in existence when I was a kid (referring to rocking chair) I remember seeing that.

Sally: Very versatile, your grandfather.

Olin: I can't believe the amount of things he could do or did. People will ask me and the best explanation I can tell em is he didn't have a television set.

Pat: He was a renaissance man.

Deb: Is that a ??????????

Olin: Uhmhhh my sister has that nothing else on it. That's very small I don't know what that's for (Sally interjects: It's a little thumb scale dog house made of almost could be of pallet wood it has that coloring.)

Olin: This was my Dad, (shows plaster casts of faces) made these plaster casts, Dad remembers this happening what he did was (refer to grandfather) was put cotton in dad's nose and give him a straw to breath out of and actually put his face into a mold... I would think plaster or not, I don't if there are different kinds of plaster or not.. would it burn him maybe or something like that. Ah.....

Pat: This is probably plaster of paris which is able to be adhered to the skin, usually you have to put Vaseline on your skin first then you can be molded.

Sally: Do you know who the girl figure is? (referring to other mask)

Olin: No, I, yea I do know the one of my father he said that was very unpleasant as a kid he did not like it.

Deb: Do you know where (the masks) are now?

Olin: My sister has them. This grandfathers clock (pointing to photo) was made out of Oregon Myrtle. I have a piece upstairs it looks very much like Maple. But it has a real pretty grain into it. Again he made that clock all by hand tools. My cousin has that clock, Haley. And that's local. Almost looks like a curly maple (referring to photo again) and there is some inlay in it.

Sally: (referring to inlay medallion in center of front of clock) looks like a a sunflower starburst inlay.

Olin: (pointing to a typewritten paper) that's a poem that grandfather did. Ah, probably my dad.

Pat: Did he pass away before you grandfather did?

Olin: No – yea it sounds like despondent like maybe he died or something but no he is just talking about remembering. Pat: Oh when he was a boy. Olin: uh uh

“If I could have him back again just as I see him now.... (Olin can't finish reading, becomes emotional).

Sally: Here, I'll read it... "My Boy" , Chillie McConnell, Port Norris, NJ. If I could have him back again just as I see him now, to press him close against my heart a kiss upon his brow. I give the world an.... TAPE WENT SILENT!!

24.9 – 27. 6 – HISSING – FAINT VOICES CAN'T MAKE THEM OUT.

27.8 – Sally: Do you remember your grandfather working on projects, woodwork or do you remember him doing the painting and things?

----- TOO FAINT AGAIN TO MAKE OUT WHAT IS BEING SAID.....

31.1 – Sally – and they were brought from your Uncle Mort to your grandfather.

Olin: Grandfather built it (referring to fireplace). (showing a photo of fireplace)... that's the inside part and you can also see the outside part which is right here. Very big fireplace.

Pat: Describes the outside view of the fireplace is exquisite, very colorful, beautiful shapes...

Sally and the stones are embedded in steps that go from one room to the other as well. It looks exposed log chinking walls as well.

33.0 Pat: Look at this door, now this is your grandfathers house.

Olin, uhum, this is the inside of the house. These are all split, he cut those logs quite a few years before he built this extension off of the house. He made this look like a log cabin. Purposely he kept the bark on it. The bugs and worms and stuff inside and it looks super old when he built it for that reason.

Pat: Is this house still standing?

Olin: Yea, exactly the way you see it now. Mrs. Fulham lives in it.

Sally: And he built this door and scroll work and everything here.

Olin: I can take you to the house or show you where it is.

34.9 – Olin: This is a mill that was really nice in its day... it's a fish pond (referring again to a photo of the backyard of grandfathers house) outback. It had water that came over the mill that is missing now on down to into a pond. Its got a little walkway over top of it. School kids used to come there as a school project to see it. Um it was about 2 -3 ft high.

38.6 – Olin: Grandfather did I'd say at least 75% of the oyster cans that came out of Port Norris (designed the advertising on front of cans). He worked with the

owners had them incorporate their own designs and different things on it. I have probably all of the cans that he did. Also, he designed I'd have to at least 75% or better of letterheads for the company. And they are very graphic, very graphic. I have some other pictures of them here. Most of them are grouped in the black book (that he couldn't find that day). But I do have some other pictures.

Deb: How did your grandfather get the nickname "Chillie"?

Olin: I don't have an answer for you. I've asked that since I was, the only one that would probably be maybe able to answer, it has been asked many times and I've never had a correct answer.

Sally: Because the sheep looked so cold they called him Chillie.

Pat: How do we get our nicknames, probably for very silly reasons.

Olin: He used do fox hunting an awful lot, ah winter time and I remember every once in a while somebody cutten up with him sayen, asken em if he was cold, then or not. Now whether that was just cutten up with him or whether that's where he actually picked up that name.

Pat: Or he was always complaining about the cold.

Olin: Yup. Ah, I don't have an answer for you on that. Its spelt Chillie that makes a difference but that's as much as I can tell you on it.

Sally: I have to ask you to, I notice that you are wearing a shirt with an oyster on it. And the back says oysters plates and collectables Cape May Branch International oh it from the 1998 convention in Absecon October 30 31. Very nice.

44.6

THIS ENDS THE SECTION OF THE TAPE THAT WAS RECORDING THE CHARLES LAWRENCE MCCONNELL INFORMATION.

MOST OF THE RECORDING THAT FOLLOWS IS INAUDIBLE.

95.8 ENDS

TAPE II - SIDE 1

OLIN MCCONNELL ORAL HISTORY

7/26/2006

Olin: I'm supposed to go down to Rutgers in November.

Sally: Yea, November I think the 24th or something.

Olin: I have got a picture of Stephanson on 16mm film. The film I happened to find it on Ebay didn't pay much for it but boy is it neat information. All the early Eskimos these are pixture, movie pixture 1915 really neat. I think you are going to enjoy it.

Sally: I need your title of that talk to, actually.

Olin: We'll hold off on that and I'll make it real good. I'll make a real good title for it.

Sally: Ok

Deb: I just had a thought when you, supposedly there is a copy of a film made of the great schooner race on Delaware Bay. Do you know anything about that?

Olin: No more thans been written up, I'd have to say the best information research on it is (book title) Under Sail. We're all screwed up on it. I do have this other picture type stuff and a little bit more information on it.

Deb: This was supposedly movie film.

Olin: One has been made up you say?

Deb: It was made up at that time, supposedly at the time of the race.

Olin: Start with Warrington Hollinger. I'll ask him if you want me to, Ah cause he just ended up getting a bunch of old films that his dad had taken on the 16 mm film. But a lot of it what I understand were parades, fireman parades in Port Norris and I think most of it is around the 40's. I haven't seen them, I couldn't tell you.

Deb: This is younger Barney you mean, oh the older Barney.

Olin: Yep, this is Old Man Barney. Right now this is all I can tell you. I'll talk to this person that has the trophy (for the Delaware Bay Race) just maybe he might know something or where it gone. I was going to show you other signs that grandfather made. (Pointing to a piece of paper) that's a letterhead,

Sally: JM Garrison Wholesale Dealing in Oysters Clams and Fish Maurice River NJ, looks like the AE Whitaker, Maurice River, NJ is there under full sail under high seas, is that Ship John, no is that Ship John lighthouse or is that which lighthouse is this?

Olin: Ledge

Sally: Oh Ledge, Cross Ledge Brand – House specialty.

Deb: Is this an original (looking at a letterhead)? Not an original

Olin: No, it's a blown up from the paper, I have the original, but that's a letterhead enlarged so you can see the detail. I think they were originally large and they reduced them for letterheads and stuff. So you can get into the detail. Stowman went off on that (pointing to an oyster can) .

Pat: Oh isn't that neat.

Sally: Stowman Bros. ?????

Pat: (describing the design on the can) It is a plate of oysters with a fork, a salt and pepper and hot sauce.

Deb: or ketchup bottle?

Pat: What is Miya Maul Salts?

Olin: It's a lighthouse.

Pat: Oh

Olin: It's the only one out there that there is just a base to it. What was the story Debbie, it was either, I think knocked off by a ship. Ship ran into it and knocked the lighthouse off, if I remember correctly. I heard a couple stories, one was a storm and one was a ship.

Deb: yea

Sally: Also, oystering does take place right around Miya Maul. I believe, public land um not leased beds but public lands.

Pat: The illustration was pen and ink with possibly watercolor. And then we have another sign, Oysters Fresh From Delaware Bay, packed by Planters Packing Company, picture of the oyster can done in a dark teal blue printing.

Olin: And that's a picture of his can. That's a harder can to find. Ah, grand pop designed that can. Also that Stalts Ferry, Planters Packers. Pointing to another drawing, Olin: That's Newcomb Brothers poster.

Pat: (Reading from drawing) Maurice River Cove Oysters Sold Here, Famous Crystal Brand, Fresh Daily From Newcomb Brothers Beds, Bivalve, NJ, Under Federal and State Health jurisdiction, Bell Phone Port Norris 22, Western Union Telegraph.

Sally: Now what is the Crystal Brand that they refer to?

Olin: Don't have an answer for you.

Sally: Okay, cause Maurice River Cove its Newcomb Brothers beds and they are selling them as Maurice River Cove.

Olin: Oha I don't know, Newcomb Brothers can in existence. This is a hard can to find (pointing to a oyster can) I have that also that's DuBois.

Sally: (reads label) Jersey Brand Oysters with a Schooner at sail pictured, printed in red.

Olin: A very pretty can, I'll show that to you, grand pop, the father did this sign and also did the this a poster. Nancy can you find that can for me. Really had a rough time getting these posters. You will never believe where they came from. Back probably in the 60's or something like that they were picked off the dump.

Nancy: Your brother did it didn't he?

Olin: Barry yes... Georgie

Pat: Looks like a handheld advertisement (pointing to a drawing) um

Olin: He was big in the oyster business, Christy Yates.

Pat: (continues reading) Here is an eye opener full of real delicious goodness direct from our own beds in the great Maurice River Cove. Untouched by human hands. Eat oysters. G. Christy Yates, Bivalve, NJ. Phone Port Norris No. 26. And you open up the advertisement card and there is a full color drawing of very happy smiling face gentlemen with, it's a pop up and when you open it his eye winks at you. Open both eyes to the fact that oysters are rich in food components, rich in vitamins ABC&D, rich in mineral content iron, calcium, phosphorous and iodine, rich in delicious flavor and health giving properties. G. Christy Yates, Bivalve, NJ Eat Oysters – from the Oyster Beds direct to you in the shell with all the tank of the sea.

Sally: Now when was that “Magi thing?? Was that early 20th century, maybe in the mid 19 teens, or maybe 1920’s maybe even.

Pat: That is a wonderful piece.

Olin: This is a copy, the original was maybe about half that size, but this we can handle and have no problems with it. And I show that at demonstrations. This is that DuBois can and I have a larger gallon one that you can see that’s a ships window that you are looking out and seeing another ship window. I think its one of the neater cans grand pop designed. I like it.

17.5 Group decides to end the interview and set up another time to meet. Some casual conversation then tape ends.

26.8 TAPE ENDS.