

Larry Chowning: [laughter]

Dianne Jordan: Must have been around for a while, I reckon, to hold it a little bit longer.

LC: Yes.

DJ: Do you know T. A. Williams?

LC: No.

DJ: Bobby (Callio?)?

LC: No.

DJ: We interviewed him. He is an interesting guy.

Michael Kline: Well, why do you not just start out by saying, "My name is."

LC: My name's Larry Chowning.

MK: We never were asking people their age, but maybe you give us your date of birth.

LC: May 23, 1949.

MK: [19]49.

LC: Yes.

MK: Why do you not start out telling us a little bit about your people and where you were raised?

LC: Well, I was raised right here in Urbanna, Virginia. I do actually have some heritage. It goes back to the steamboat era. I think the steamboat started coming to Urbanna in 1840, 1845, and the first dock or the first steamboat dock – and it may not have been the first one. But anyway, my great grandfather, Alfred Palmer, he opened one of the first steamboat docks in Urbanna. It was called *Palmer's Wharf*. Most people know it today as Barton's Wharf. When you interview most people, they'll talk about *Barton's Wharf*. Well, it was actually *Palmer's Wharf* before it became Barton's Wharf. Alfred Palmer sold it to a guy named, I think it was Lum Barton. It was one of the Barton families. That's how it got to be named *Barton Wharf*. That's what everybody around across the river and over here call that particular wharf that was at the foot of Watling Street here in Urbanna. But when I was a child, my great uncle, who Alfred Palmer would've been his grandfather – so Charlie Palmer – he was still very much alive, [laughter] and was living right down the street. I would go down and visit him and he would talk a little bit about the steamboat era, mostly the modern era, which I refer to as, as I recall, *Donaldson's*. It was another wharf here on Urbanna Creek and Barton's was the other one. He would talk about those. But he would reflect back sometime and talk about *Palmer's Wharf*.

Probably one of the earliest steamboats that came into Urbanna Creek was a *Matilda*. I mean, most people you go interview, they're going to talk about the *Potomac* and some of the other more modern or more recent steamboats. But I can actually relate back to the *Matilda*. He said that was my great-grandfather's favorite steamboat, which is kind of neat. What else?

MK: Did he ever say why?

LC: Well, it's sort of like the *Potomac*. Why did everybody like the *Potomac*? I mean, it was just one that was beautiful. I don't know exactly why he liked the *Matilda*, but I'm sure it had something to do with the look of it, something to that effect. I'm not exactly sure.

MK: Did you ever see a photograph of it or a painting of it?

LC: No, but she's listed in some of the steamboat books. David Holly, didn't he write a...

DJ: Yes.

LC: I think it's listed in that book.

DJ: Or maybe Burgess.

LC: Yes. Burgess. I mean, so much has been done on steamboats. That's why I stayed away from it, [laughter] to be honest with you, in all the work that I've done. I just feel like there's so many holes in our heritage and culture that I don't need to. Robert Burgess and Dr. Brewington and others did such a fantastic job in the [19]20s and [19]30s and [19]40s and [19]50s and [19]60s. [laughter] Those guys did a marvelous job of documenting so much of the history and the lore of the Bay. I've just tried to find holes. So, I've sort of stayed away from the steamboat era for that reason. I think it's pretty well documented, if you want the truth, as far as books are concerned.

MK: Of course, we are not talking about books here. We are talking about...

LC: Yes. But that's what I do. I mean, that's what I'm...

MK: Yes. Yes. Yes. You are a great talker though too, by the way.

LC: Is that right?

MK: Just in case you do not know already. [laughter]

LC: No, I don't.

MK: Well, you are.

LC: Okay.

MK: Tell me a little bit about your own rearing kind of in the shadow of this steamboat phenomenon.

LC: Well, the era. Well, the last steamboat came up the Rappahannock in [19]38. Is that right?

DJ: The *Anne Arundel* thing?

LC: Yes. It made that last run. Of course, I wasn't born until [19]49, but my father was born in [19]24. So, he certainly remembers the steamboats. The generation before my father were very much alive when I was a child. So, the steamboat was very much on their minds. I mean, my grandparents subscribed to the *Baltimore Sun* versus the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. We didn't even know what news was, but the *Daily Press* today – and that was because of the steamboat going back and forth to Baltimore. They would bring the paper from Baltimore, and they would – I don't think it came every day to Urbanna. You would probably know more about that than I do. But at least came three times a week, I think. They would bring newspapers from up there. So, we had that connection to Baltimore because of the steamboat. It was pretty significant too, because when you look at this area, I mean, we were southern during the Civil War and the steamboats played a big part in bringing back this area economically after the war was over. Now, once we got through that reconstruction period where we were being punished pretty heavily, [laughter] the oyster industry, the freight business, which was partially due to the steamboat, and some of these other things that were all water or nautically oriented helped to bring back the economy of this area, and particularly, the oyster industry. Part of all that was the fact that the State of Maryland was fairly supportive of – before the war, we were close, and after the war, they tried very quickly to bring back the economic demise of this area and Maryland played a big part in that.

DJ: You are talking about the Civil War?

LC: That's correct. If you were in World War II, World War II was the war that brought it all back. That's when we finally became a country again. [laughter] I mean, the common cause – World War I didn't do it, but World War II did it. That was the common cause that brought us all back as a nation again, as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure there are historians that would [laughter] question that too, but...

MK: But you were talking about how the steamboats played such a major part in the redevelopment of the region.

LC: Yes. I think so. I mean, after the war, the economic infrastructure was gone. For four or five years, there was no oyster industry. I mean, water was the main avenue of everything. When we became another country, there was at least four or five years when everything just shut right down. The shucking houses became in disarray. They just fell apart. The oyster industry did. After the war, like in the case of my great-grandfather, I mean, he had turned most of his money over – as a Confederate, sent his gold to Richmond, done all the things that he was supposed to do as a southerner, but had nothing at the end of the war. So, he basically lost most of what he had. So, it really took the northern movement that came down this way. A prime example of that is the Hurley family that owns Bethpage Campground and Grey's Point

Campground up there. Their ancestors came here shortly after the Civil War from Hurlock, which is about ten miles from Cambridge in Maryland, and established an oyster house. Well, they, of course, had not turned all their cash into Confederate money and were able to bring dollars down into this area and hire people. They were from Maryland. That was significant because we had then a very different attitude towards Maryland and we did the people from New Jersey and New York and places like that.

MK: What attitude? More of like a sibling attitude?

LC: Well, more of a friendly attitude.

MK: Just like a sister?

LC: We felt like those coming from further up north were coming to plunder and take and get what they could out of the area. I mean, there were two things about this area and all the Tidewater, Virginia, that happened after the war. Number one, we couldn't pay taxes on our land. So, we began to lose it, a lot of us did. Two, there was a tremendous ratio of women to men – high ratio of women to men because of the war. So many men had been killed. So, there were two reasons for these folks to come down here. Number one, land was cheap and there was also a good supply [laughter] of women. So, they came to this area. Same thing happened in Mathews, happened on the Northern Neck, happened here.

MK: Terrible time.

LC: It was a hard time but thank God we lost. [laughter]

DJ: You have to be careful to say that. [laughter]

LC: It really would've been a terrible time if we'd won. Let's put it that way.

MK: What do you mean exactly by that?

LC: Well, I have a feeling that we would still have some type of slavery. We certainly would've had it into the 1960s when I was just a teenager here. It may not have been the same type that they had in the 1840s and [19]50s, but it would've been some type of – it would've been much more difficult for African Americans to have risen from the ashes, so to speak, if the South had won because of the attitudes that Southerners had towards African Americans. It would've been much more difficult – I mean, God, I would have to think about that. I mean, we would've had two countries, [laughter] two fairly weak countries, really, when you get right down to it, probably. I mean, with what Lincoln said about a house divided. I mean, the Lord knows what would've happened if the South had won as far as history. If World War I or World War II, would we have gotten into those wars, I don't know what would've happened. I really don't know. But I know that just having grown up here in the decades of the [19]60s and gone through integration in the schools, that, most certainly, it would've taken a long, long time to have reached where we have reached today. Taken a lot more than Martin Luther King, I can tell you that right now. [laughter] You're not going to print this stuff, are you? [laughter]

MK: Can you help me understand a little bit what that period of integration was like in this part of Virginia?

LC: Yes. It was in 1964, I think, when our county was integrated under the Freedom of Choice system. Doesn't have much to do with steamboats, but anyway, Freedom of Choice meant that you could not keep somebody from going to any school in the State of Virginia if they wanted to go there. Which meant that in the first year of integration in Middlesex County, we had thirteen Blacks going to our schools. The powers that be that came out of the – after World War II and once reconstruction was over and all that stuff, the folks that pretty much took over in regard to the power of our community – same thing happened, I think, in Mathews where the folks who were farmers or watermen. Basically, good people, but backward in the sense that they didn't have much vision in regard to race or anything like that. I'm not sure where I'm going with this.

MK: Why do we not back up a little further? You mentioned the condition of slavery in the 1840s.

LC: Yes.

MK: Is that something you have looked at a little bit or that story is passed down through the family about...

LC: Well, we have done some of that. I mean, I've done some of that over the years. We did a book called *Soldiers at [the] Doorstep: Civil War Lore*. They're basically stories that came out of this area. Of course, I talked to African Americans about – the stories came from people [laughter] that were left at home during the war, that didn't go fight the war. So, we certainly had to include African Americans' ancestors of slaves who stayed on the plantations, on the farms, and things like that. They had some wonderful stories. They're just wonderful stories about that era. The era itself – you got two different elements. Today, you've got the side that thinks everything was totally bad. Then you've got some that don't think things were quite as bad. But in general, Blacks and whites, I think, lived pretty good together. It's just that the concept of slavery wasn't right. It depended on who you were living around, too. I mean, it wasn't just the guy that owned you. You had slave – what did you call those guys? I can't think of them. Overseers, slave overseers, and they could be pretty brutal too, I think. But just to give you an idea what it was like. In [19]64, when I went to – it was my first year at Middlesex High School. I rode the school bus. The first day I got off school, I had my lunchbox in my hand. I stepped out onto the concrete and there were three state troopers on one side and three on the other. There had been a bomb threat. [laughter] So, they looked in my little lunchbox to see whether there was a bomb in it or not. [laughter] So, I mean, that was the atmosphere that was going on. Now, that first year, thirteen came to Middlesex and they were bust in their – primarily, if they worked – I mean, for instance, if you work for a seafood packing house, if you were a Black man, you weren't going to send your child to Middlesex High School because you would've lost your job. So, basically, the thirteen that came, the families were helped financially through churches from up north to help pay for them going there. The first year, they weren't allowed to go to dances. They couldn't participate in athletics. The next year, it got a little better and they were allowed to participate in athletics and things like that. The problem was in the

community. The problem wasn't in the school. I mean, I say that. I mean, you'd have to talk to some of those thirteen to know what they really went through. I mean, we saw some things, but I don't know. I don't know what this got to do with steamboats, but anyway. [laughter] You're interested in that kind of thing evidently. [laughter] Where are you from?

MK: D.C. originally, and most recently, over in St. Mary's County, Maryland.

LC: Oh, yes.

MK: We have been doing a lot of folklore research over there.

LC: Yes.

MK: Well, let us connect this somehow with steam boating, maybe, by talking about how the different races would have participated in the steam boating experience. Who worked on the docks? Who worked in the pilot house? What stories have come down to you about that?

LC: Well, it would only be in photographs that I've seen that I would know anything about that, not from anything anybody's told me. But I know that they would have – of course, you've probably talked to people that had actually been on a steamboat dock. I never have, but they had pens built on the docks. I've seen photographs – in fact, have some photographs, I think, of Blacks pulling the bulls by the tails to get them in the [laughter] pens and things like that. I don't think any were ever captains of the boats. To be honest with you, I don't think the country, the attitude – I mean, it wasn't just a southern attitude towards African Americans. I think it was a national attitude. It was probably as much in New York as it was down here. Well, I'll share a story with you that is in one of my books. I often wondered when and how Blacks found out that the war was over and that they were free because communication wasn't what it is today. Plus, some [laughter] of these places, extremely isolated. There's one farm here in the county called Nestings. It's the oldest plantation still in existence in Middlesex. In fact, the first English – not that this has anything to do with that, but the first English-born boy in Middlesex was born in Nestings. So, that tells you how far back it goes. But anyway, the guy that owned Nestings, when the war was over, he had to go say something to the Blacks that had found out that the war was over. So, the story goes from a Black man whose grandmother was a slave that he put on his Sunday clothes and got his best horse. He rode down to the shanties, and they ring a bell and everybody came out. They all stood around, wondering what was going on. He said, "Well, I got something I got to tell you. The war is over. You all are free to do what you want to do. If you want to stay, you can stay." He said, "If you stay, I'll give you each a cow and I'll take the first calf, and you can have the second calf," [laughter] and right on down. "I'll have the third calf and you can have the fourth calf." [laughter] After that, he just turned and went back into the house. Some decided to stay and some decided to leave. But [laughter] that's basically what happened. Of course, as I recall, the old Black man who I was talking to, he said, "My grandmother decided she'd stay. Where was she going to go? What was she going to do?" So, they stayed right there, ended up eventually getting some property in that area and stayed right there until she died. This guy's name was Clement Brown. He's also passed away. But that's how things happened. It wasn't [laughter] any great hoorah. I guess it was for some, but – there you go. What else do we need? I don't know exactly [laughter] where I'm going.

MK: That story was almost a metaphor for laying down a system of sharecropping that they must have followed.

LC: Probably so. I used to hear about something about so many acres and a mule or something.

MK: Forty acres and a mule.

LC: That didn't happen here, I don't think. I haven't seen it anywhere.

MK: The only place that really happened was in South Carolina.

LC: Is that right? Yes.

MK: It was soon rescinded. People had to get back their mules and their forty acres.

LC: Oh, really?

MK: Yes, a few months of this.

LC: What happened here, well, Eubank was one of them that owned Nestings. He set aside land. It may have been the same land that they were living on at Shannon's, but it was always on the outreaches of the farm and what have you. In Urbanna, if you go outside of town, Hewick, which is an old colonial plantation, which is right outside of town. Town Bridge Road is where you see a lot of African Americans, their homes are. That was land on the outskirts of the main farm. They would give them that land. That's where they would go. But as far as that thing of forty acres and a mule, I don't know. It didn't happen here. It may happen to Mathews. It happened down there. I found no indication of it over here. Now, there were individuals who gave large tracks of lands to the slaves and sort of set up an area, but like I said, on the outreaches. But some of it was decent land too. Some of them, if they didn't have relatives of their own – there's one farm right outside of town here, that pine tree, which is just down the road, the guy left it – when they were freed because of the war, he left it to them, to the slaves or some of the slaves. We saw that type of thing happen, but not a governmental thing that came in and said, "Now, forty acres here," and that type of thing. I don't know. I don't know where I read about that, but I read about it somewhere. It is supposed to have happened, I'm sure.

MK: It was by order of General Sherman.

LC: Oh, is that right?

MK: Off of coastal, South Carolina.

LC: Well, he would've to come to Virginia and make sure it happened because I'm sure we weren't going to listen to what Sherman had to say. [laughter] Do you think?

MK: They did not listen to it very long over there either.

LC: Oh, I'm sure. [laughter]

MK: A few months and the old boys had their places back.

LC: [laughter] God, I'm sure of that.

MK: It must have been a terrible disappointment to the people who were given the mules and the land. They would have to give it back.

LC: I tell you. I mean, they were hard times when you think about it.

MK: When you think about it.

LC: Yes. We don't...

MK: The steamboats were chugging up and down the river all through all of those hard times.

LC: Well, steamboats played a big part in bringing it all back and getting us to a point where we could support ourselves again. They weren't the primary thing, but they were a secondary thing. The primary thing was the water itself and the seafood industry and the amazing ability of the Chesapeake Bay to produce food. The steamboat was just a peripheral thing that grew at a need for transportation. As the industries grew, thus did the steamboat industry grow too. As life got better and we began to trade more and to have more, the steamboat became even more significant. But what killed it all, I guess, was just plain roads. [laughter] Road rage. [laughter]

MK: A couple of significant hurricanes, I guess.

LC: Yes. But hurricanes wouldn't have done it. It's like the oyster industry that people talk about. The two hurricanes did the most damage, but they always came back after the hurricanes. They just couldn't come back after MSX and the disease that finally killed it. If there had been a demand, a real demand for – the hurricanes didn't kill the steamboats. That's a misconception. Hurricanes just hastened the demise of it. It was already on its way out. That [19]33 storm, I mean, I don't think steamboats would've been around much longer anyway. Do you? I don't think.

DJ: There were a lot of other things driving that too.

LC: Yes. I mean, it was economy. It was economics.

DJ: Roads, government regulations.

LC: Right. Right. What the hurricane did was just take away the infrastructure, the docks and all that, and there wasn't enough demand to build them back. I hope I'm telling you right on this stuff because I don't know. [laughter]



MK: You have very nice way of talking about it. So, can you talk a little bit about how the steamboats and the industry development of those things after the war went hand in hand? How did the fishing industry recover?

LC: Well, I'm not a student of the steamboats at all, but I am more of a student of the fishing industry, I guess probably is – my feeling is that I don't think steamboats started here until the 1840s. Is that right?

DJ: The steamers started up and down the coast, I think, around 1815, 1820.

LC: Yes.

DJ: They did not really become significant until the [19]40s and [19]50s.

LC: Yes.

DJ: Shortly before the Civil War.

LC: What had happened by that time is Baltimore had grown to a point that it was a very significant city. The oystering, the seafood industry built the foundation to allow there to be a large population of people there and also in Norfolk and in Hampton and in places like that. In the 1820s and 1830s, of course, New York and places like that had already developed, were growing, had restaurants, had these things where there was a demand for large amounts of food and the locality couldn't produce enough to keep it all going. So, they began to look at the Chesapeake Bay region for oysters, fish. Not going to say crabs because crabs was like a third – it has been a third-rate fishery until very recently. But particularly, oysters and fish. Anyway, they began to come down here with these large vessels. They brought dredges, oyster dredges, which we did not have down here. We hand-tonged our stuff up. We were able to produce enough just by catching them with hand tongs to feed anybody who wanted oysters. But that area began to grow. It was more of an industrial area versus we were an agrarian area. We didn't need the masses of people. We didn't have the masses of people that they had up there. Anyway, they came down and introduced all this stuff, introduced the system of dredging and of catching oysters so that they could catch large numbers of them in a hurry. Of course, we picked up on it right away. Baltimore became sort of a center of commerce. It was really built on the oyster fishery. Then other things sprang up. The steamboat industry was one of the things that came out of that. Of course, it may have had something to do with railroad. I don't know. Did it have something to do with railroads? I'm not sure totally about Baltimore.

DJ: Somewhat.

LC: Yes. But anyway, the seafood industry played a big role in the development of those communities, particularly Hampton and Norfolk and Baltimore. The railroad played a big part in it too when they started coming down. They were able to get oysters and fish and things out of here real quickly. These little towns, like Urbanna where I live, I mean, there was enough demand. We lived on the Rappahannock River, which is just a prime oyster river. So, we would have two things. We would have oysters going to Baltimore to – we'd have people coming down

here on boats, buying them, and taking them back to – well, not just Baltimore, but to Cambridge, to Annapolis, and shucking them up there. They carried them on steamboats too. But as the economy began to grow, all through Tidewater, Virginia, and Tidewater, Maryland, there became a need for a way to get things to and from these areas for little stores that were popping up, for the seafood plants that were beginning to – they needed gloves. They needed boots. They needed this, they needed that.

MK: Canneries.

LC: Canneries, tomato canneries came along and then Baltimore was sort of a center of that too. They began to branch out from Baltimore and established canneries of their own. Lord Mott, which was close by. It was a cannery that was established by Lord Mott, which was a Baltimore firm. Morattico Canning Factory, which was right over here, was a branch of that. There was a steamboat dock right there too. So, I mean, they needed things like salt and sugar and all kinds of things for canning and steamboats would bring that. As the steamboat era began to die, though, they began to have their own boats to do the same thing. But that's sort of how it all came about. There was a demand. As people begun to be able to buy things and to need things, they had to have a place to get those things. The Little Country Store popped up on a corner, every corner. [laughter] That little store supplied maybe fifty families in an area. I mean, it wasn't like it is today where you get in a car and you can drive to Walmart. I mean, you walked to the store and that little store had everything under the sun. Most of that stuff came via steamboat. So, the steamboat became the avenue of bringing things to these little communities and what have you.

MK: You have to wonder if there was not a port town or a port village culture that surpassed state and county lines, and all over the Chesapeake region, if these port villages were not more alike, even at great distances away than they were to an inland town twenty miles away.

LC: Well, they were. Yes. Just like the newspaper.

MK: Have you thought about that at all?

LC: Well, it's just like the newspaper thing. We were always directed towards Baltimore, not me, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents. I mean, when they would go for Christmas and stuff, I'd get in the car or my parents would put my sister and I in a car, and we'd drive to Richmond, to Miller & Rhoads in (ToleHams?). But my grandparents, when they were children, they'd get on a steamboat and go to Baltimore. Everybody had relatives in – there was so much going on in Baltimore. You had the watermelon aspect of it in the summer where they would sell watermelons down on the docks. If you farmed, you grew watermelons. You would hire a boat. If you didn't own a boat, you would hire a boat to carry them to Baltimore, and you'd stay on that boat for a week until you sold all those watermelons right there at the dock. They did it in Washington, too. Did it Baltimore and Washington. So, I mean, everything was directed towards those places versus getting in a car, driving to West Point. I talked to Louis Gray about how they used to get to Richmond. I mean, [laughter] they have to get on a train or something and go [laughter] It was just amazing how difficult it was to get to Richmond. Here's another way to put it into modern perspective. Okay? When I go to get a book published, I have to look

to the State of Maryland to get it in print because as much as anything, Richmond's got publishers, but I'm more associated with what goes on in Annapolis and Baltimore and Cambridge. We have the same type of things going on here that they have up there. Whereas if you look at Richmond, which is actually right on the edge of the Piedmont – I guess it is in Piedmont – it has a different philosophy and a different look than we have. That's why when I think about St. Michaels or something like that, I think of it – after the war, because so many of our relatives went to Richmond, we began to have a different outlook on Richmond. But still, today, if I want to get a book published about Chesapeake Bay, I've got to go to a community that is associated with Chesapeake Bay, and Richmond isn't. [laughter] It's always bothered me that I have to go out to state to get a contract on a book because once a Virginian, always a Virginian. You know how that goes. [laughter]

MK: I have heard that.

LC: [laughter] Well, that's how stupid we were during the Civil War. [laughter] That's why so many of us look at Lee. I mean, why he did what he did was because of his love of the state. I can understand where he was coming from. I'm not saying he was right. I can just understand where he was coming from.

MK: In terms of the water itself, which you have alluded to a couple of times, did Virginia not get the short end of the stick, at least with regard to the Potomac River?

LC: I should know the history of that. What did that had to do something with...

MK: Maryland taking possession of...

LC: Yes. But what did we get? We got something else, didn't we? I can't think what it was.

MK: I do not remember what that whole settlement was.

LC: Yes. Well, it created an interesting situation up there that has, as far as folklore, if you go up to Coles Point and places like that. I've been up and talked to some of those folks. I mean, that really was a fascinating time. When they would go out in the middle of the night and [laughter] – I went up to – the fellow has passed now, but I'm not going to tell you his name. I went up to Coles Point, probably about 1981 or [19]82, and did an interview very similar to what you're doing right now with a guy that was a captain of some of the old schooners that went out. But there had been another story about him. The real reason I went up was to ask him about – I had heard that he had been involved – the last time, I think it was about 1958 or [19]59, that the last Virginian lost his life up there in the middle of the night to *Merlin* gunboat. It may have been [19]57. I don't know. I can't remember now. But anyway...

MK: He lost his life. What in the world are you talking about?

LC: They were fighting over oysters. They'd go out in the middle of the night and dredge oysters. The *Merlin* gun police boat would come out and they got into a gunfight out there and one of the guys got killed. Anyway, this guy, supposedly, was involved in – and it's a wonderful

story that goes along with it. [laughter] Whether there's any truth to it or not, I don't know. But supposedly, about five of them were out in the middle of the night dredging oysters on the Potomac. In the middle of the night, the Maryland police just come right up on them in a boat that they had that – there are pictures of it around that shows what it looked like. But anyway, they actually sort of surprised him. I don't know exactly what happened, but anyway, somebody fired a shot. Of course, Virginians say Maryland fired the first shot. Virginians said – they were out there dredging oysters in the middle of the night, which was illegal because the Potomac is in Maryland. So, anyway, it was a heated battle. I mean, just shots everywhere and boats being shot up. All the boats were shot up to some degree. Anyway, this one guy, who I went up there to interview, supposedly had some way gotten away in the midst of it all. They got all the other boats. It was five boats. They got four of them. Anyway, he was able to get back into Coles point. So, he goes in and takes his boat and ties it to the stake. Of course, his boat is riddled with bullet holes, so you know he is going to be caught the next day if they see his boat. So, he takes his skiff and he takes the boat out into the deepest part of the creek and takes a double barrel shotgun and blows a hole – and gets what he wants off of it, throws it in his skiff, and blows a hole in the bottom of the [laughter] boat, and sinks the boat right there in the creek. He gets in the skiff and then goes home and tells his wife that he's going to bed. If anybody comes looking for him, you just tell them that I've been in bed all night. So, that's exactly what he did. Of course, nobody from Virginia would ever tell. But anyway, the great part of the story is what happened after I asked him about [laughter] if he had played a part in this thing. We'd had a great interview. We talked about this and that. He'd actually been captain of the *Chesterfield*, which was a schooner that was well known around the Bay. Right at the end of the interview, I asked him about this thing. He was sort of blind. He wasn't completely blind, but he was sitting at a roll top desk. I was sitting fairly close to him because he wanted me to be able to hear him. But when I asked him this question about this thing that happened out in the Bay and whether he was there or not, everything just changed right there. He looked at me kind of funny. He said, "Are you the law?" Like that. [laughter] I said, "No. I'm not the law. I told you who I was." So, anyway, he's sitting at this desk and he scared the devil out of me. He's got a drawer. He pulls the drawer open and I can see what's in the drawer. There's a thirty-six-caliber cap and ball pistol, which is a [laughter] – and he takes that out, and he puts it on his desk there. There's a thing, a liquor, a flask with a cork on the top of it. He takes that out and he sets it on the other side. Then there's a bible there, a Kings James Version of the Bible. He pulls it out and he flaps it down in front of me, and he said, "As God is my witness, I wasn't there that night." [laughter] He asked me to leave. [laughter] But he was probably there. [laughter]

MK: Yes. I can remember. My interview went something like that too.

LC: He scared me a little bit. He was very nice when I first got there, but once that happened, he wasn't too friendly. I saw him a few years later. He was in a nursing home. I went in and talked to him. He laughed about it and I laughed about it too. When I left, I said, "Well, were you there that night?" "I wasn't there. I told you I wasn't there." [laughter] He was there. I can tell you right now. [laughter] If you interviewed anybody, you ought to go up there and talk to those people about the Potomac and what went on up there during...

MK: Yes. Can you suggest any names?

LC: I probably could. I'll have to go get my book.

MK: No. You can think about it. We do not need it today necessarily.

LC: Yes. But...

MK: When something comes to you.

LC: – Shane Bill Ryland's passed. He was one of the Virginia police that worked that area heavy and got [laughter] – he was in a small airplane going over top and as he went over, a bunch of oystermen fired shotguns at him [laughter] and fell the plane.

MK: I am going to take that can away from you.

LC: Oh, is that balling?

MK: My phone is – [laughter] So, how has the writing that you have done addressed some of these issues that we have talked about.

LC: Well, I'm a recorder. You sort of say I'm a writer, but I'm really a recorder.

MK: A recorder?

LC: I'm doing exactly what you're doing, writing what people say [laughter] and to some degree interpreted by – for instance, if they talk about crab dredging, I put it in a chapter on crab dredging. If you'll read the harvesting, some of them, I mean, I told the history of the – and it talks about the history of how crab dredging started, that type of thing. But basically, I'm a recorder. I don't consider myself – never ever considered myself much of a writer.

MK: It almost sounded, when you were talking about the outsiders, the industrialists, or whoever they were, bringing in these dredging techniques and everything else, did it get to the point where the bay and the fisheries were more or less colonized economically by interests from Baltimore and New York?

LC: To some degree. That's a good point. I really hadn't thought about it, but it's true. To some degree, it was hastened. Part of the reason for the Civil War is that we weren't an industrial area. We were growing and we needed a labor base different from what they needed up there. Not that they weren't any rougher on the Irish and the groups that came in from – that they used in the factories and in the shucking houses. I mean, then we were down here with African Americans, but to some degree, you're right. It was good and bad. I mean, there was a lot of poverty in this area, I think. I don't know that we knew what poverty was. When the Depression came, we weren't hit as hard. Because of the Civil War, we weren't hit as hard. Because we had lost so much of what we had, we weren't hit as hard as some other areas in the country, if you know what I mean. I'm not sure that's right. But that's my assumption. I mean, we always had food, plenty of food. Part of that was because of the Bay and the Tidewater area. I don't know what it was like for the inland, in the Piedmont and the mountain areas of Virginia, but we

certainly weren't affected a great deal. I say that. My family wasn't affected a great deal by the Depression because we lost pretty much everything we had, except for some land, after the Civil War. Most everything was gone. My great-grandfather lost steamboat dock. He and two other guys built the first bridge across Urbanna Creek. Any other time, it may not have been too bad a time, but they did it around 1852 or [18]53. The Civil War came. It was a toll bridge. It was partially burned during the war. Of course, it's kind of funny. My great-grandfather, he didn't have a whole lot of love for Confederate soldiers or Yankee soldiers because neither would pay the toll to come across a bridge. [laughter]

MK: Was it a covered bridge?

LC: No. No. It was an open bridge that in the middle of it, it had a draw that went straight up and it was higher so boats could go underneath of it. It was the first bridge across Urbana Creek. That was the reason they did that. Urbanna was a county seat of Middlesex County from the 1700s until about that time around the 1850s. The reason that it was moved to Saluda, which is not far from here, was because of the fact there was no bridge. So, my great-grandfather and two other local businessmen decided they'll build a bridge, but it was too late. They'd already decided they were going to move the county seat out of Urbanna. So, and that hurt the town. What else? [laughter]

MK: What are we missing? I am the newcomer here. I really do not know my way around all this very well.

LC: The steamboat stuff, I wish I knew more about it. I haven't really delved into it too much.

MK: Are there photo albums that have come down through your family or other family? Do you know of private collections of photo albums that...

LC: Yes. I could probably set you up with a couple of people that might have some.

DJ: That would be nice.

MK: Tales to go.

LC: Yes.

MK: Family tales to go with them.

LC: Yes. The Barton family is still down the street. They took a lot of photographs, but I think they may be stuff you already have. I don't know. I gave you everything I had when you opened, as far as photographs.

DJ: Yes.

LC: I got a lot of that stuff because the family members would just bring them to me.

DJ: Who did you give that to? Bruce King.

LC: Bruce King, yes. They made prints up and got them back to me. But I'm sure there are others around.

DJ: Yes. Sometimes you just need to ask people. It never even occurs to them that somebody would like to see them.

LC: Yes. I can give you some names and –

DJ: Okay. It would be great.

LC: – on there.

MK: Well, you have got a wonderful discourse as an audio producer. I'm primarily a folklorist, but I am also an audio producer. I can tell you that this has been a very rich overview. You have provided a nice framework to which some other stories that we have recorded, we can...

LC: Well, that's sort of what I've been able to do, is to take an overall view. It's been nice that I haven't focused on one thing like the steamboats. It's helped me. The other thing is, I started in [19]72 doing this and just basically what you're doing. Of course, I couldn't afford that kind of equipment. Not then, anyway. But we would record with these big tapes like this. [laughter] I listen to some of them now and I break down and cry because the people are gone and they just meant a lot to me, you know? But first book, it took a long time to get the first book out. But I started recording in [19]72 and the book didn't come out – it was called *Barcat Skipper: Tales of a Tangier Island Waterman*. This old fellow who – he was actually living in the house that I live in now, when I left and went to college. By the time I got back, he had moved out of the house. But he still kept his [unintelligible] behind. His name was Elmer Crockett. He'd lived on Tangier most of his life and he just had some unbelievable stories. He had listened as a boy to people in their [19]80s and [19]90s on Tangier and had stories that went back forever about just the heritage and the culture of the place, market hunting and – He had such a broad scope...

MK: Market hunting?

LC: Yes. Killing ducks and selling them, which is illegal. 1918, it became illegal. They use these big, punt guns. They would go out in skiffs in the middle of the night. These were massive guns. They looked almost like a cannon. If you research them, there's a wonderful book here called *The Outlaw Gunner* which shows you all these different types of things. They had battery guns. They had like five or six barrels, and they would pull a string and all of them would go off at one time. They used what we referred to as a gunning light. They would paddle out in these little skiffs in the middle of the winter, dangerous as I don't know what. If you set a light on a boat, you can't tell – it can be right up on you, but you can't tell where it is because of the way things are in the water. So, they could actually paddle right up on them [laughter] and just blow the ducks and geese away. Then they would sell them. The steamboats would carry those to Baltimore, to the restaurants up there. They'd barrel them. They'd have large barrels and put them on steamboats and haul them away, which is probably an aspect of steamboats you

haven't heard too much about.

DJ: I came across that book, *Outlaw Gunner* and that opened my eyes.

LC: Yes. Great book. Yes. So, anyway, Crockett gave me a pretty good overview and then I took it from there. I just got interested in it. I didn't want to leave the area, but decided I'd attempt to make a living out of it because I'm a newspaper reporter. But I mean, all of it fits together. So, I've attempted to make a living. [laughter] I've survived, but it's been a dog, I'll tell you. [laughter] So, tell me about yourself.

DJ: Can I ask you one more thing before you turn that off?

MK: Please.

DJ: What about bootlegging? I have read a lot about the area and how busy they were making and shipping lots of alcohol when it was illegal.

LC: Oh, no. Prohibition, it was big time stuff. I don't know whether the steamboat played a part in that or not, but the buy boats did.

DJ: Really?

LC: Oh, yes.

DJ: I heard the steamboats did too.

MK: What was the story on that?

LC: Well, I mean, it was just like running marijuana and drugs today. These boats were used to haul liquor. Some of them would actually build false bottoms. They'd have two bottoms [laughter] and the lower bottom would be filled with barrels of rum [laughter] and liquor. In this latest book, there are stories about guys owning boats and rum runners wanting a boat. So, they'll pay them. They gave them twenty-thousand in gold and things like that in the 1940s [laughter] and [19]30s – well, I guess [19]20s, whenever Prohibition was. I don't know when it was. But, yes, I've never heard anything about it on steamboats, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised. But it certainly went on elsewhere. [laughter]

MK: I guess liquor has always been a major pastime or cottage industry anyway.

LC: Yes. I mean, of course, I come from a strong Baptist background and temperance movement that my great-grandmother was involved in that. But Episcopalians had a way of enjoying themselves. My great-grandmother, she didn't like Methodist either, but she couldn't stand Episcopalians. I mean, they just had a way of making her very angry. [laughter] I'm sure most of them are in heaven today too. I assume she's up there, [laughter] but a very opinionated woman. Not that I knew of, but my father knew her very well. [laughter] We had a local group of men, fairly prominent men, in town who played poker on Saturday nights. There is a little



building that still stands as you go outside of town that was a slave quarters in the beginning and then it was converted to an outside kitchen. After that, it became sort of a storage room and then it became the local Saturday night poker house. Supposedly, one night, fairly late, of course, everybody stayed out on the porches in the summertime to keep cool. My great-grandmother, Ms. Lizzie Sadler, and probably my grandmother and Mary, my great-aunt, were all out on the porch. They came out of this little house, staggering by, and my great-grandmother supposedly said, "There goes those no-camp buzzards." Forever, that little building became – of course, they heard it. The men heard it and they thought it was great. So, they became known as the Buzzard's Roost. [laughter] I did a story on the last of the buzzards, a guy named Virgil Gill, who about twenty years ago, [laughter] he talked about that night, [laughter] when they got their name. [laughter] Oh, well, that's my aunt.

MK: Aunt?

LC: Yes.

MK: Lived where?

LC: Still does. Lived in Hampstead. I'd go up there and there was an old country store called Dario Store right down the road. We'd go in there and – it was still, but by the time I came along, Bristol's, which is on the corner down here, that had been a general merchandise store. Harper's store was – yes, maybe in the early years of my life, it was still there. Haywood store, which is, as you came into town, you looked on your right. It's got the Wild Bunch, the name Wild Bunch. That was Haywood Store. They were still going. But by [19]49, when I was born, and then into the [19]50s when I could remember, a lot of it was changing. We were becoming the urban movement that is really what I think came out of– well, it came from World War II, but it probably goes back even further. I think that the North and looking at the South felt like they ought to be more like them, and the urban movement came out. It's a northern thing. It's not a southern thing by any means. By that time, by the [19]50s and the [19]60s, so much of the country store aspect was already gone. If it wasn't gone, it was on its way out. I mean, I saw it, but by living in a town too, I didn't see it as much as somebody who lived out in the country that still used that little store.

DJ: They turned into bus stops after a while.

LC: Exactly. Right. Yes. Now, a lot of them are little gift shops [laughter] which is fine. But just the way things evolve.

MK: But these...

Unknown Male Speaker: I mean, like I said, I worked on the York River Bridge as a layout engineer from start to finish for three years. I watched the ferry boat across the York die because when we dedicated the bridge, that was the end of it. That was a quite a business that lost a point. I mean, we had people worked in the shipyard and all the government institutions over at Navy Weapons Station, the Coast Guard Station, Cheatham Annex, and I mean, this, they had, we had backup lines a mile long to catch a ferry. Like I said, we got that bridge in there in 1934. My grandfather lived right down here on Carters Creek. We used to go down for Sunday

downers and I used to hear my two grandfathers argue about where the York River Bridge was going to go. This was 1934. Well, the federal government had gotten into the picture. This cousin of mine, Otis Bland, who was Senator Bland, Schuyler Bland, was his name. Anyway, he called his brother-in-law and told him, he says, "The York River Bridge is going to go across to Gum Point," which was just in shore of the lighthouse. So, he said, "You better go down there, buy some land." So, he went down to Roseville and he bought what? Four-hundred acres for \$3,500. Well, [laughter] I'm just a child listening to all this. Well, the bridge wasn't built until 1949. [laughter] So, my cousin got the wrong information [laughter] and he was still stuck with the four-hundred acres, which I surveyed for him in 1961. He told me the story about his uncle telling his father to go buy that land because that's where the bridge was coming.

MK: Pretty nice land?

Unknown Male Speaker: It is. Oh, yes. Next to Roseville. Oh, yes. Well, he paid \$3,500 for it. He sold \$45,000 worth of timber and then he sold the land for \$90,000. I told him he gave it away. So, that's a whole lot between \$3,500.

MK: Yes. Those were the days.

Unknown Male Speaker: And his initials, it was Schuyler Otis Bland, and his initials were S.O.B. [laughter]

Unknown Male Speaker: That's bad.

DJ: Poor fellow.

Unknown Male Speaker: Poor fellow. [laughter]

MK: Thank you very much. I hope we are going to have time to talk to you some more. [laughter]

DJ: Yes. Hope this is just the beginning.

Unknown Female Speaker: I hope so too. He is so busy that to get these two hours out of him is a real treat.

Unknown Male Speaker: I am not kidding you. I have got people setting up right now when I have not put a...

[end of transcript]