

**BAYSHORE CENTER AT BIVALVE
DELAWARE BAY MUSEUM**

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTION

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/17/2013
TIME:
SUBJECT: LOCATING LOCAL AREAS IN CUMBERLAND CNTY
NARRATOR(S): LOUIS PETERSON
LOCATION: MR. PETERSON'S HOME –
28 MacDonald Lane HEISLERVILLE, NJ
INTERVIEWER: Patricia Moore, Volunteer Delaware Bay Museum

TRANSCRIPTION

COMPLETED: August 7, 2023
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INTRODUCTION:

The interview with Louis Peterson took us on a journey covering areas in Port Norris, Heislerville, Maurice River and several other areas of Cumberland County where his family settled and worked as farmers, oyster boat owners, captains, shucking house owners. He covers the period from the late 1600's to present day. Mr. Peterson is a very knowledgeable man in regards to where businesses that supported the oyster industry where located. He shared who lived where and when. He also gave detailed information as to who owned what business. He also shared where docking and oyster beds were located and the history of how the beds were purchased, resold, and marked. This is a very informative oral history.

Patricia Moore: No, I'm going to just casually record this. Yeah?

Louis Peterson: Well, this shop was built by oyster money. I had a good year one year, and I had this shop built. If you look at the end of it, you'll see that the end of it comes out. That was so that I could build boats or whatever I wanted to and pull it through. I didn't have to back it up or anything of that nature. But that soured. I did go ahead and make the machines. The first machine I made wasn't here. It was for Luther Jeffries over to Bivalve for the *Eva Blanche*. Now, what I wanted to do was to bring you back here and show you the tongs. Everything in the oyster industry was brought about over a period of time. To begin with, it started with farmers that needed a winter income. So they began harvesting the bay. Now, you take these tongs here. That top row of tongs was my dad's. They're older than I am. They're a pair of eighteen's.

PM: Eighteen feet?

LP: Eighteen feet. And they was made to work in Dennis Creek. They had discovered some oysters in Dennis Creek, and they was made there. But dad never used them much. He always

said the men that made the most money in the oyster industry tonging used sixteen feet and under. Now, Bobby Lee made these here out of [inaudible]. Now, they're a scientific thing that developed over a period of time. You see where that pin is in them?

PM: Yes.

LP: Oyster tongs are about a quarter of their length. You put the pin. And then that allows you when you're opening the tong, to open. Clam tongs are less because you need the extra leverage to dig the clams out because oysters are on top, clams are in the mud. So you'll find that. I've got over here quite a collection of things. I've got things – and these are old-time hand-forged clam tongs. See how long [inaudible].

PM: Do you remember who forged them?

LP: No, I don't know who forged them. They came actually from Bargaintown. There are two sets of them there. Anytime I can get anything of historical thing, I save it. As you can see, if you look around here, I'm a collector. I never throw anything away. [laughter] You take these old engines and stuff here; they're engines that I saved to overhaul because there's nothing really wrong with them except they burn a little oil. This one here was thrown away, and it only had five hours on it.

M: Yeah, it looks new.

LP: It was thrown away because the man that owned it – it was on a power washer. He let the power washer freeze, so he just threw it away and bought another power washer. More money than I got.

M: That's right.

LP: Anyway, if you come over here, this old scow is twenty-eight feet long.

M: Did you build it?

LP: No, I didn't build this. This was built for Dick Riggins by Ed Washburn over in Port Norris. Now, take a look at that boat. See how long the [inaudible] are on it? Where are you going to find cedar today without any knots in it that you can go all the way down twenty-eight feet?

PM: Can we photograph this?

LP: Photograph it? You can have it if you want. [laughter]

M: OK, let's take it. [laughter]

PM: With your phone?

M: Put it back in your car.

LP: But if you want to know the tale of this boat –

PM: Do you have it?

LP: You go see Dick Riggins over in Port Norris. It was built for him and his brother. He used it in Great Bay and in the Maurice River Cove out here, and it was built for him. He can tell you many adventures. Now, I bought it off of him and his brother, and I never used it for tonging. I had a fish reel on it, and I used to net fish nights and stuff out here in the Delaware Bay in the summertime. That's what I did. It was on that old Garvey that I become a member of the Emerald Green. I don't know whether you know what that is or not.

PM: No, no.

LP: Well, if you were looking over an expanse like a desert or a body of water, and it's calm. When the sun first breaks the horizon, there's a flash of green light. And it's something that if you've never seen it, it feels just – you'll actually just blink and [inaudible] because it just feels like a piece of sea or something is going to hit you. It's that flash. Very few people see it. I looked for it for years and years and years. I had my net set before daylight, waiting for the light to come up on the – on me nets because that's the most confusing for the fish, and that's usually the best set of the day. I happened to be looking towards East Point when the sun broke, and I was out – number one, the sun broke, and that flash of light come down there and hit. I've looked for it since, and I've never seen it since or anything else.

PM: So that's how you become a member?

LP: A member of the Emerald Green. But anyhow, to get back to this boat, it was made for Dick Riggins, and I bought it, and I used it to fish out of. I fished everywhere from Cape May right on up to almost – I thought I was going to drown one night out there off of Reeds Beach down there. I had some nets set down there in the daytime. My neighbor, when he was young and stuff, I taught him how to hang nets and stuff. He had a big Sea Ox, and he was down there with me in his boat. We set our nets, and the sea come up southeast, and we started picking up our nets. We was going to allow the nets to get – let the sun go down and set on them and just have a good catch. The squall made up, up in the northwest, and it was coming down on it, and it [had] come on. We just took his nets and my nets and put them all in this boat. I had six hundred pounds of fish and about three thousand feet of net, ice and everything else in it. She only had about this much freeboard.

PM: Oh, my god.

LP: Well, when that squall hit us, I was headed for Dennis Creek. I told Dan – I said, "Head inland." The wind will be offshore and head for Dennis Creek. So we headed for Dennis Creek. Well, I was sideways to the sea, and the sea just broke over, and then I stopped right away. I started to see how the pumps are, the electric pumps. The pumps was going, and I grabbed a bucket and bailed. I got her all bailed out, and of course, the storm was still going on. Anyhow,

I put her and get her going, and she took another one. What I did was I tied all my net buoys around me. I said, “Well, if I drown, they’ll find me.” I tied all my net buoys around me, and I had to bail her out. I just rode the storm out. No sea ever come over as long as I didn’t try to move her. If I tried to move her, sea would come in her. But as long as I just let her go, sea didn’t come in her. So that’s more or less how I survived. When the storm was over, we come on in.

PM: Oh my gosh.

LP: But another time, I got the hair standing up. That was a long time too. But my hair stand up. I was out there next to the channel. I had me nets overboard. And actually, I was bringing them in, and I looked up, and here come this light. Big bright light across the water. No sound, no nothing, just up in the air a little bit coming across the water. My hair stood up on the back of me neck and everything else, and after a while, when it got so close, I could hear it was an airplane [that] took off from Dover Delaware Airport base. They just had the landing lights on.

PM: Oh, gosh.

LP: But you talk about something making your hair stand up.

PM: You thought the almighty was coming.

LP: Yeah. [inaudible] But anyway, this old Garvey made – I fished out of it for two years. I had a nice engine in it. But the reason I’m showing you this is because when I was eight years old, dad started taking me. He had an old boat called the *Tommy*. Back in those days, boats were called after the people that had them built or something like that. If you went to the shipyard and hauled your boat out and had it overhauled, they’d say well, we’re ready to overhaul old *Tommy* today or whoever it is. It wasn’t the boat name; it was the name of the owner. So the *Tommy* was named after a person who was cross-eyed. They called him Cockeyed Jack. The old folks were really neat.

PM: Oh, I know.

LP: You would take Old Possum MacDonald and Old Tooth MacDonald and Stompy Lloyd and all these old guys around here; they all had names that described them more or less. Anyhow they bought it, and Howard Lupton, over to Dividing Creek – I don’t know if you ever heard tell of him or not. Well, he was a large man and stuff like that. Didn’t have any engine in the old *Tommy*. And they bought a Model A engine off of Howard Lupton. He took it out of the Model A, transmission and all. And they just put it in the boat that way, transmission and all – clutch, transmission and all.

PM: Oh, my goodness.

LP: Now, it had to lay down because of the dip system for where they burn their front [inaudible]; they couldn’t cock it up. So what they did [was] they put a universal behind the transmission and put a thrust bearing on a cross-member so that the propeller would thrust

against the thrust bearing, and you could lay your engine down. You didn't use the clutch. You left it in gear.

M: Oh, really?

LP: Second gear. You run it in second gear. Dad sold the –

M: Push it in

LP: Yeah. Dad sold the things – never used reverse. Dad said, never come into a dock where you're dependent on your reverse because you might not have it.

M: Yeah, that's for brakes too. They're wonders. That's how you break.

LP: Yeah, well, the old *Tommy* on this rudder [inaudible] was rounded off. The proper way, they'd just go this way. Well, hanging on to that, that would allow this to come up, and that front would drop down and bang your finger on this stern seat. I hated that boat like you've never seen anybody hate just because of that. But actually, when I got this boat, I put a tube in there so that this wouldn't leak. Now, this would leak because it's fastened here and here. It didn't make any difference how bad that dead wood is because it would – it couldn't leak because of the tube. And she was keel-cooled. There's her keel cooler under there. In case – the brass pipe.

M: Oh, yeah, the pipe.

LP: I put a six-cylinder Nash engine in her. Originally, when Dick had her, she had a four-cylinder Gray. When I got her, I – but anyhow, she's cedar and oak. She was built over to Port Norris for Dick. Now, to get back to the *Tommy*. The *Tommy*, I steered my first job with her when I was eight years old, was steering down a trot line because of crabs. You didn't have things like that. In-between jobs, catching oysters [inaudible], either oysters or crab, one or the other. Once in a while, he would fish, but not very often. So, whenever he didn't have a market for oysters, he would go set a crab line. That's what he started me on when I was a kid. We used to go down the Maurice River and right down there – well, there was no bank there on the reach – I would run the nose of the boat right into the shore, and he would go to shore, and he would cut – he would cut reeds and put them in the boat. Then we would go out and set our crab line. And how they used them old big hampers back then [inaudible] bushels. You'd fill your hamper up, half with crabs, and then you'd put some reed in there, wet reed, and then you would put more crabs on there, and you would get them down. But you had to have your crabs in to Matts Landing by noon to catch the truck for Philadelphia, or you didn't have a market, see? So that's the way the things were. When you got all done, you picked your line up and baited it.

M: What did you use for bait?

LP: Eels. About four inches long, salted eels. When you set that, you had to let that line go through your hand to keep it tight. The salt on that line, on that eel, got in them cuts that you got when you was cutting the reeds, so that felt real good, I'll tell you.

PM: What years were this?

LP: I was born in '35, so that was around '44 or '45. Right around that time. But anyhow, that's the tale. That's how I got started in the boat business, was when Pops started taking me. Now, up until I was eight years old, I lived down the road. When I was eight years old, Mom and Dad bought that house that's green over there. That's how far I got away from home. But anyhow, they bought that, and we walked – my parents didn't have a car – we walked from there to Matts Landing and went down. The *Tommy* actually – when they discovered oysters in Dennis Creek, they built a house on the *Tommy*. She was a good bit wider than this boat. Same length, but a good bit wider. Took the engine out of it, and she was wide enough to put a double bed in sideways. Dad and his brothers and grandfather stayed all week down there. Now, their market was Dagestines over to Port Norris, Dagestine Transfer. Tony had a market in New York, and there was a lot of oysters up there. So they went down. They went down there and started catching them oysters. They'd have to row up every day, and Dad didn't have no engine then because they took the engine out and built a house on the boat, you understand? [laughter] But what he done – he got to buy a bateau, and he put a new bottom on it, and he worked out of that tow. They was all making good money. But one thing about a waterman you've got to understand – oystermen, fishermen, clammers, they own everything in that bay individually, and they get greedy. That's what happened. They started trashing Tony. They might have been loading their boat, but they wasn't making enough, so they started trashing him, and he lost his market.

PM: What does trashing mean? I don't understand.

LP: Small oysters, or shells, or whatever. Your oyster had to be three inches long. You shave them just a little bit, get it two and three quarters, or something of that nature, or even when you're at market, and you knock all the shells off the oysters. So your customer gets all oysters.

PM: What year was this?

LP: Well, it would be after I started going with Pop. I guess I was about ten years old, maybe. So that would be about –

PM: '45?

LP: '45. It was during World War II. World War II wasn't over yet.

M: Now, were the oyster boats still under sail or power at that point?

LP: At that point, the only ones that had sails – they wasn't on power because during World War II, they allowed them to use power. But the last ones to take their sail off was Robbins Brothers. They had what they called a half-mast. They cut their mast off, but they kept their sail on because they didn't trust their engines. So they always said it steadied the boat, which it probably did with the wind pushing on it. Pop used to tell me – working alongside of them and stuff, he says, "That's just extra work for them men. That's where it is because when you had

sail, if the wind was pushing you too fast, you had to reef down. If it wasn't pushing you fast enough, you had to raise the sail. So you was raising the sail and reefing down, raising the sail and reefing down. That, besides getting the oysters in. But one of the neatest things back in them times was you could hear. You could hear a bell buoy dong. You could tell when every boat up that bay was winding (pulling up oyster dredge) because they had them old Hettinger's or old Palmer engines in the middle of the deck, and when you wasn't winding, they would coast. They'd just make a clinking noise, *clinky, clinky, clink*. Then when you started winding, it would go *pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop*. You could tell when they was winding.

M: They were like one-cylinder engines?

LP: Yeah.

M: Yeah, single-cylinder.

LP: Those were one-cylinder engines, and your winders was made over in Bridgeton, Hettinger Engine Company.

PM: Yeah, we've worked with them.

LP: And your winders was the horsepower of the engine. If you had ten-horse winders, you had a winder of ten horses. [If] you had fifteen horse, you had a bigger winder, and so forth and so on. That's what determined the horsepower of your winders for what it was.

PM: You're talking about the dredges?

LP: No, I'm talking about what wound the dredges in.

PM: That's what I mean.

LP: What brought them in? That's what your chains wrapped around to bring them in. Now, I built dredges over at main machinery. This shop was built specifically to build boats and sorting machines. How I come to do that, I was working at the shipyard. And Luther Jeffries –

PM: Excuse me, what shipyard? Camden?

LP: No, Leesburg Shipyard [inaudible] Dorchester owned it then. Henry Eastmont was the boss. Anyway, they had the railways fixed, and they was cheaper than Dorchester railways. Anyhow, Luther brought the *Eva Blanche* up there to have a pipe put in the bottom for shells to go out from the sorting machine instead of just chucking them over the side. Well, I was the welder, and he come up there, and I asked him different things. Well, he was impressed by my knowledge of angles and this, that, and the other to make shells go down, and he told Hoppy –he said, "That guy's pretty smart." Hoppy said, "That's the reason I got him working here." Anyhow, I put the thing in there for him. Actually, it was an [inaudible] piece of pipe, iron pipe. When I got it in, he asked me if I was interested in a job. I said, "Nah, I got a job." Well, he said he would pay me so much, and that changed my mind. So anyhow, he hired me to go over

nights after work and built a sorting culling machine in what used to be Archie Jackson's blacksmith shop over there to Bivalve. He owned it at that time. So I went over there after I got done with the shipyard and started welding. I built this machine. They was culler sorters that him and Bob Morgan had figured out how big to make. Now, I didn't design that machine; I built it. It was the first one that was working on the Maurice River.

M: That's a culler?

LP: Culler. Turned like a drum.

M: Like a drum, it's got –

LP: Now, they was made with staggered bars, one inch apart. They found out that shells was less than an inch, and oysters was over an inch. So the oysters would stay in the cage, but the shells would fall through and go out the pipe. Then, when I got the machine built, he hired me to run his boat – not catching seed, but to run his round, his market stuff. Then, it just mushroomed from there, and I got into welding and making machines. The thing of it was, I'm a ship's carpenter by trade, and I could alter the ship or the boat to – I could make the machine fit the boat. If I had to alter the boat, I could do that too, and it would be a job. Anyway, that's what this was. Fifteen years I spent in here, making machinery for the oyster industry and stuff like that. I've got machines from New York up there to – [inaudible] up there in Long Island Sound, clear down to the Carolinas. Of course, they're not operational anymore. They're obsolete, actually. The first culling machine that we built was powered with electric. You had to put an electric plant in your boat to generate the current, and then you had to figure out the ratio of your travel or your belt, so you didn't overload your machine. All that you couldn't alter. Well, then they come up with draw – so you could control it with hydraulics. Because with hydraulics, you could adjust the flow to whatever you needed. You could slow your belt down, speed it up. You could speed your cullers up. You could do whatever you wanted to. It was much handier. So that morphed into using and installing hydraulic equipment instead of electric equipment. Plus, it done away with your generator for 110 power. Well, then, after that, they discovered that they liked having an extra engine up there, so they put an extra engine up in the hold to do their generating, and then they could speed their power up and down just to speed the boat, without changing anything on the machine. So that's how it developed over the years from when I started.

PM: I have a question for you. Going back to the culling machine that you built, who designed that?

LP: Luther Jeffries and Bob Morgan got together and designed that. What they used was a cement mixer. They put oysters in the cement mixer and let it turn, and they worked it out. And Billy Bradway made the one for Bob Morgan.

PM: That's what I was thinking about.

LP: And I made the one for Luther Jeffries. I was a little faster than what they was, so Luther's was first, and Bob's was second. But they was the same design, designed by the same two

people. That's how I got started. I worked out of the back of my truck over there. I got an old Miller welder back there that I run for fifteen years. They said I would never last [and] I would be sorry that I ever spent the money on such a thing. Well, I can go back there and start it now, but she's worn so bad that she'll blow oil right out of her exhaust system. But she'll run.

PM: That's amazing.

LP: Now, if you come back here, dredges are a scientific thing. If you look right there, you'll see a ring. That's in two feet of concrete. That's for straightening dredges. What I would do – I would put the dredge out here, hook the end of a long bar underneath that ring, push down on the bar, and I could straighten the dredge. Now, dredges, I can go back here on the floor. I can show you all this machinery wasn't in here.

M: So the weight of the concrete gave you that extra force?

LP: No, what gave me the force was the bar in that ring. If I wanted to bend something out here, I'd put that in there and push down and bend it.

M: Now, where was the concrete, then?

LP: Well, the concrete floor would be here.

M: I meant the ring, yeah.

LP: See, you would put whatever you wanted to straighten out here. Put this underneath the ring, and press down on whatever it was, and that would bend it however much. You could control your bend that way. So that's how you straighten them.

M: You could do it cold? You didn't have to –?

LP: Didn't have to heat it. Well, you bent them cold so you could straighten them cold. That's the way it was. I've got a piece of soapstone here. I'll show you some. A dredge is designed to fall on its teeth when it's thrown overboard. That's accomplished this way. You had your tooth bar. The sides would be like this. Now, if that dredge hit on its side, it would trip this way; it would go on its teeth instead of going back on its back. You didn't want it to fall on its back. If it was straight, it could fall either way.

M: Oh, I see.

LP: Now, the nose of that dredge would be bent. And it would actually come back here, and you would have your teeth in your bag out here. What that bend did, was turn your dredge. When you pulled it up to the side, and you put pressure on that, that would turn that so that it would come up on the roller right. Now, you had mud dredges and hard bottom dredges, and that was all done with the rake of the teeth, the length of the teeth, and how high this back bar was in here. That was all done at the blacksmith's shop, and it was developed over a period of years and time to [inaudible]. I used to have a [inaudible] right up there on that cross member,

and I would hoist a dredge up right here and bag them, and so forth and so on, and overhaul the dredges.

M: Do you have any now? Any dredges now?

LP: No. I had to get out of the oyster business. I got sick. Every spring, when I got ready to go up the bay, and I should have been working on my boat and getting it ready, I was either in the hospital or something of that nature, and I couldn't get my boat ready. I said, "I got to get out of the oyster business." So I sold everything I had.

PM: What year was that?

LP: Around '85. But anyhow, I told Kitty, my wife – I said, "I've got to get rid of my grounds too because if I've got them grounds out there, I'll be back in the business. That's all there is to it. I'd buy a boat." That's what happened in the oyster business.

PM: Who did you sell your grounds to?

LP: Bivalve Packing. I was in debt to Bivalve Packing. When George Jenkins was running Bivalve Packing, Hanby – his name's John Hanby. I don't know. Anyhow, he owned a Chesapeake [inaudible] tow, and he put it up for sale. It wasn't a lot of money. It was around twenty thousand dollars or something like that. *Mary Coleman* was the name of the boat. I went to George – you don't go to banks when you're buying boats; you go to people that'll understand what it is you're doing. I wanted to know if he would loan me twenty thousand dollars to buy the *Mary Coleman*. He said, "I'll do better than that. I'll do what my father-in-law did for me." He says, "I'll overhaul that boat, fix her up first class." He says, "There ain't no sense in going up the bay with something that's not right because you won't make nothing." So he says, "But you've got to sell me your oysters, and I'll give you the going price. Whatever it is, I'll give you." So I said, "All right, that sounds like a deal." What's he doing? He's buying me a boat, fixing it up, and saying, "Here it is, Lou. You can pay me back with your oysters." I mean, how can you beat it? Well, I'll make a long story short. He spent \$250,000 dollars on that boat. He put her on the [inaudible], and he rebuilt her. He repowered her. She had a boot engine in her. He repowered her with a GMC, took her down to Allen's, and put a hydraulic system on it. When he got all done, I owed George Jenkins 250,000 dollars. [laughter]

M: [laughter] It didn't work out the way you thought.

LP: But anyway, that's what happened. Now, what happened was Steve Fleetwood undercut George and got control of the running of the Bivalve Packing, and George retired. Well, Hill (Hillard Bloom) didn't trust Fleetwood too much, so he put Harold Bickings in charge of Bivalve Packing. And Harold Bickings wasn't George Jenkins. He come down, and he says, "That's a terrible contract," this, that, and the other. And he says, "Hill says what you owe against it" – I'd paid off a considerable amount. He says, "What you owe against it, if you'll sign your boat and your grounds over to him, he'll cancel the debt." I says, "Fine with me," and I got out from under it that way. That's the way it was. So my grounds and my boat and everything went that route, but it didn't end there because when I retired, I bought an old burnt-out party boat and put

a single dredge on it. Me and my brother went up the Bay and sold oysters to Bivalve Packing to plant.

M: Great. Did you actually own the grounds or lease them?

LP: Well, leased them. You can't own nothing.

M: That's what I thought.

LP: Every year, you have to renew your lease. There's no such thing as owning bottom out there (Delaware Bay). It's all leased. But as long as you pay your lease before the end of the year – if you let it lapse after the year, then you've lost it. So before the end of the year, you go, and you pay the [inaudible], your grounds are all surveyed. Every corner is surveyed.

PM: How large was your grounds?

LP: Well, they varied in size, but I had 250 acres altogether.

PM: That's what I meant. Yeah.

M: Did you use trees for the corner posts, the corner markers?

LP: At first, yeah. As a matter of fact, after planting season, when they stuck the grounds up when I first got in the oyster business – that's how I made summer money, was staking. And I hired a couple men, and a lot of times, the owners would go out with me. I had a pump on the boat, and we would pump the stakes down and mark, but at the end, all we did was make concrete blocks and put a piece of plastic pipe on there with a number on it and throw it overboard. It was a lot easier.

M: Was that by the Miah Maull and the fourteen-foot –? Were you out that –?

LP: Yeah. Well, actually, it's from Cape May right on up. You've got sections out there. You've got A, B, C, and D sections. Your numbers start anew. If your ground is number fifty-three, A section, that meant you were down towards Cape May. If it was D section, it was up off of False Egg Island. So, that's how they was. And then, they had survey tripods at each section. The surveyor would go out there and survey. I'll tell you how accurate. I can't remember his name now. But you would take him out there and use a survey boat, and he would stand out there with two sextants. He would stand out there, and he'd say right, left, straight ahead, right, left. When he got on the mark, he'd kick a cement block with a milk jug overboard. And a lot of times, that milk jug went right in a bunch of stake stubs that had been broken off in the winter.

M: Right on the mark.

PM: Unbelievable. Right on the mark.

LP: Right on the mark. Now, when George overhauled the *Eva Blanche*, he put a little (LORAN) on there. That was more accurate than what we have today with these digital things that got away. They worked on the triangle. They had three things, and when all three of them come together, you was there. I could set my numbers in that, and when that bell dinged, you was there. I mean, there was no fifteen feet or twenty feet or whatever it was. You was there. That was it. So that's how I found my grounds eventually. Of course, when I first started, it was all dead reckoning. So many RPMs on your engine on a flood tide, so many on the ebb tide. So many minutes on such a course. Now, that was pretty accurate, but a lot of times, you was running around the fog, too. Snow was the worst. Snow was worse than fog.

PM: Was it?

LP: Yeah. You got snow going all this way. If you got fog, you do have some sense of direction. Snow, you have none. I never did. Some people might. Now, let's see. That's about all I can tell you here, other than this is where I worked for fifteen years, from six o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock at night.

M: I think I might not have heard you when you spoke, but did you ever have any high sea danger where your boat was —?

LP: Oh, yeah. I was out there when I shouldn't have been, boated when I shouldn't. My first boat was the *Elva N*. I got pictures of her in there. I bought her off of Danny Hines over to [inaudible]. I repowered her with a GMC and stuff, and I rebuilt her. I rebuilt her from one end to the other. I was working at the shipyard at the time, and they had had a fire. The lumber sheds burnt down, and they gave me all the lumber that was in those lumber sheds, and all I had to do was clean it up. I would clean the burnt part off, and this, that, and the other, and I rebuilt her. Anyway, she was a Navy lifeboat. She still had her things in her keel that they put shackle in to lift her up. Brass. Great big piece of [inaudible]. Well, I completely rebuilt that boat. It took me about a year, a year and a half, something like that. And I was up the bay, and I wasn't doing very good. Had men. Didn't have no machines, just men, and I didn't make them keep my load back. I used to load from the pilot house ahead. And, of course, men are like men all over, so I just was actually discouraged. Ah, hell, I worked until noon, and I didn't have anything bigger than a [inaudible] on the deck. Anyhow, around one o'clock, I hit a haul, and I started catching oysters. The men — they was going. Well, I loaded from where they was ahead. That made her head down like this. Well, it was ebb tide. When it come quitting time at three o'clock, it was ebb tide, and I started down, and the further I got, the harder it blowed. After a while, she was dipping her bow clear back to the winding post before she'd start back up. I mean, lazy, going down, coming up. Well, she had a hatch on the front, so I went up and nailed the hatch down. Took a hammer and some nails and nailed the hatch down, and then one of the crew was there. He says, "Captain, if I didn't know you so good, I'd be worried right now." He didn't know how worried I was.

M: You couldn't show fear.

LP: Yeah. But anyhow, I made it down. They got the oysters shoveled off, and everything was all right. The other time was with the *Flora Jackie*. That was the second boat that I had. I

bought it off of Floyd Jenkins over to Cedarville. And I was working at a bed. The wind was southeast, and actually, John Robinson lost a man overboard that day. But anyhow, I was working up there, and I had a little bit of oysters on the boat, and she started handling sluggish like she was loaded. And I said, "That ain't right." So I looked, and both pumps was working. I had two of these little pumps on there, both pumping a full stream. So I went up in the bow and looked. There wasn't no water on the bow. I come back, and I had a hatch underneath the helm there. I reached down, picked it up, and there was water about that far from me feet.

PM: Oh, my lord.

LP: So I told the crew – I said, "Shovel all the oysters up on the bow. Shovel them up on the bow." I couldn't see anything coming in around the engine. So they shoveled them up on the bow, and there was a gap between the bottom and the keel that you could stick your hands in, like about that far. What had happened when that boat was built, they scabbed two pieces of wood on the keel, and they fastened the bottom to that scab. The fastenings – the bolts that went through to the keel had rusted out, and that allowed the bottom to come away from the keel. Well, I didn't know what to do with her ahead like that, so I had a shirt similar to this on. I tore me shirt up and took a screwdriver and poked it down, and slowed it up enough so the pumps would take care of it. I come in and shoveled the oysters off at Jack King's and went right on up the river and had her hauled out and rebuilt her. So, I've had fun up there.

PM: Yes, you have. [laughter] You have.

LP: One of the mornings that – in the fog and stuff like that, I was running the boat for Mr. Jeffries by the name of [inaudible] at that time. Scott Bailey owns her now. But she was a flat boat, wide – she was twenty-two-foot wide. What makes a boat smart or dumb is how sharp they'll turn. If it takes a hundred acres to turn it around, that's a dumb boat. But if she'll turn around in half the distance of the length of her, she's smart. Well, the [inaudible] was the dumbest boat in the bay, I'll tell you that. It took a lot to turn her around. She was actually back up – she was working in the wind. When you come about, you come about and into the sea, and even with the engine going, she would come back a little before she started ahead. Well, anyhow, one foggy morning about five o'clock, I was going out, and I was following up close on the north side of Northwest Reach, and I was watching the grass. I'm over here, and the grass is about far as from here to that thing there, and I'm going along, and I'm going along. "What in the world is going on?" I look on this side. I had grass on this side. At the end of Northwest Reach, there is a wide ditch. I had reached the end of Northwest Reach and went right up that ditch. Now, the tide was falling, and I didn't know how far up I was. Well, I started to back up, and of course, the prop wash will crowd your stern, so I'm working, I'm getting her back, and I finally get her back to a cross-ditch. I get her turned around to head out. Well, the tide had fell off by the time I got back to where the river was, and she [inaudible] up along the bottom. Oh man, there ain't nothing worse than being the laughing stock of everybody. "Yeah, look at old Lou; he's up there on that ditch. So I backed her all the way up as far as I could get, and I opened her up just as hard as she could go. And this is the truth, I would have been stuck there, but I had enough momentum, and she had enough weight. Well, she hit the bank, and the weight of the bow took her down, and she slid down the river.

PM: Oh, my word. [laughter]

LP: And I was a happy young 'un. Don't you think I wasn't?

PM: Oh, that's a good one.

LP: Yeah. But them kind of things –

M: You said Robbins lost a guy overboard?

LP: (Robinson?), not Robbins.

M: Robinson?

LP: It was the day that I loosened my keel up. He went overboard with a dredge, is what happened. Your sea is going back, and he went to heave the dredge, and he lost his balance and went over with the dredge.

M: Was he lost then?

LP: Oh, yeah, he drowned. They didn't find him for a couple weeks. Anyhow, just as soon as – he was working alongside of me, and I seen he was anchored up and everything. I called him on the radio; I said [to] John, “Are you broke down?” He said, “No, I just lost a man.” So he waited for the Coast Guard and stuff to come, and they searched for him, but they didn't find him or anything like that.

M: Now, in a given season, was that fairly common for someone to, you know, drown on the bay?

LP: Not always drown, but men got hurt real bad. My dad, I'll tell you about that. I'll show you – on the *Henry Clay*, the reason he sold her was because his nephew got ground up in the winders. She had Thorpe's hip? winders. Her winders went across the boat this way. They had a pinion gear that went up here that turned them. The chain went down and come on [inaudible] and went down and come on here, and the [inaudible] was out here. That was [inaudible] ship, across the boat instead of being in line, see? Well, Joe was his sister's boy. He quit school at seventeen, and there was a close tie there, and he wanted to go up the bay with Uncle Fred. So Pop took him, and he come to live with us. Slept in the same bedroom with me. He was about three years older than me. He had took his wages from the year before or the week before and bought a brand-new raincoat. Brand spanking new. And he was all proud of it. If it was raining, he put his rain gear on. He told Pop when they slowed down to go to work; he said, “Uncle Fred, put your winders in gear, and I'll grease them for you.” Because Pop always took care of that his self. So Pop let him have his grease gun, and Joe went up and jumped down in the hold. When he did, they hollered, “Take it out of gear.” So Pop took it out of gear. Well, what happened [was] when he jumped down in the thing, the tail of his raincoat had caught between the ball gear and the pinion gear and pulled him down into the winders and ground him. They had a closed casket because he was just all messed up. They're putting their keel back, and dad come up to

see what was the matter. He looked down there and seen Joe, and he went into shock. Right away. Right away, just like that, he went into shock, and he started walking towards the aft of the boat, and he would have walked overboard if somebody hadn't grabbed him because that's the way it was. I was fourteen. I'm going to tell you something, I've never forgotten it. It's a terrible thing for a fourteen-year-old to witness. My father cried and said, "Joe's dead. Joe's dead." He sobbed like a baby, like you've never seen. The whole time he was awake. Dr. (Butcher?) told Mom – he said, "I can save him if I can keep him alive for a week." He says, "That's how it is. He'll either die in a week or he won't." And gradually, he started coming out of it. It almost killed Pop [inaudible].

PM: Amazing. You guys want to take a break, and we'll go in, and you have some things you want to show us?

LP: Well, I've got to take you for a ride first.

[Recording paused.]

M: Your stories are very informative.

LP: Well, I'm on the National Register of folklore and stuff like down in Washington, DC, because I'm long-winded, and people come around and talk to me.

PM: Well, you have the knowledge and the history, and we need to keep it.

LP: Oh, yeah. Well, I was always disappointed because nobody was really interested on the other side of the river, and I'm going to tell you about Bobby Lee. Bobby Lee built my first tonging Garvey. He not only built it; he took me up in the woods where I could get cedar logs to get the lumber. Nothing is ever mentioned about Bobby Lee because he made tongs, he made boats, he done everything there is. Nobody ever said anything about him.

M: We sure would like to.

LP: You want to put your – this is how I tell when to put gas.

M: Oh, the miles?

LP: I'm at 151. If I get to 185, I need to put gas in.

M: That works. Dead reckoning. That's more than a dead reckoning, right?

LP: Well, I go out this way because the other way is dangerous. It's got a bad bend there.

PM: That's all you need to do.

LP: You're in family here. That's my brother back there. My brother did own this, but now his son-in-law owns it.

M: Was your father the first generation that worked the oysters, or –

LP: No, indeedy. He was maybe the fourth generation? Petersons are an old family. They came over here in the late 1600s or early 1700s. I have, for years, researched family history.

M: Good.

LP: I've got a lot of tales in there that don't really have too much to do with the oyster industry. My brother lives there. He's pastor of the Methodist church.

M: Oh, in Port Norris?

LP: Yeah.

M: I saw his name on the sign, yeah. I wondered if he was related to you.

LP: And this was Uncle Aaron's house here, Dad's brother. He's dead. Aunt Esther's dead. All of them is dead.

M: So your family did dredge under sail power, probably.

LP: Oh, yes. Grandfather never did anything that couldn't be done in the boat. Well, he had several boats, but the one that's probably the most interesting was the [inaudible]. She was a sloop. He sold her and got a boat called the *Jenny Chance*, which was a little bit bigger. She was also a sloop. He had a couple little boats that he dug up out of the mud for his kids. The last boat he had was the *James R. Lee* – I think it was. He was a schooner, and she – her bones is up in [inaudible] Creek. There's where my Aunt Anna and Uncle Walt started housekeeping. It didn't look like that. And that's where I moved when I was three years old. Now, right down at the end of this road, there used to be a house called the Block House, and that's because a man by the name of Block owned it. He had a saloon in there and did well. Mom and Dad moved from Port Norris over here in the fall when I turned three that winter. Dad's sister Edith lived here.

M: By herself?

LP: No, her husband was Uriah Foster, U.E. Foster. He was an oysterman too. He had a boat called the *Arthur Stuart*. Uncle Aaron said he was on the deck with Uncle U.E. when they come out of Nantuxent Creek and never turned around but just went right on down to the False Egg Island Point and had the *Arthur Stuart* loaded when they got down there. This was the old Block House. Now, that was a very old house, and that was the first house I remember living in. Mom moved from – dad moved from over to Port Norris. They had lived in a house they had rented off of Berry – and I think it was Brown Avenue or something like that. George McConnell lived there on this same road. You know George.

PM: Yep.

LP: But the house burned down eventually. There you are. Well, you got a turkey. Do you want a turkey?

M: They're everywhere. I know Hal Bickings. Not the one you just – I know a man named Hal Bickings. In fact, he was at the Bivalve just on the second Friday, last Friday.

LP: Well, Hal Bickings married Chris Peterson's daughter. Now, old Chris, he got smart when they started hogging in the oyster business, and see he went to Delaware and got out of the [inaudible]. Well, Hal, when Chris died, inherited all the business that Chris had on both sides of the Bay. He let his boats go down. He wasn't the best – he took whatever he had and just run it to pieces, that's all. He ruined a –

M: He didn't maintain them?

LP: No. As long as he could keep them afloat, that was all it needed. And when he sold out, then they – I was working in the shipyard up there for George Jenkins, and they was all rebuilt – Dorchester Shipyards. C.J. Peterson, J.C. Peterson, and all of the boats that Hal Bickings had, Bivalve Packing overhauled and rebuilt, or they wouldn't even be around. This was a dirt road when my dad was a boy – sand road. He said it was full of snakes and sand burrs.

M: Now, was this the road that took you to Maurice River?

LP: No, this takes you to East Point.

M: East Point, okay. Oh, there it is.

LP: There's Bivalve over there. Now, this bridge up here is a branch of Andrew Ditch. Now it don't mean nothing until I explain it to you, but that's what it is. This goes out there, out that way. It's crooked as a – see, I've been down it on high water with an outboard, but this is Andrews Ditch, part of it. See, it goes here. Now, I was always curious how things got its name. How did the South Woods become the South Woods? How did Andrews Ditch become Andrews Ditch? So forth and so on. How did the beds out here get called Andrew Ditch Beds? So I always ask questions, and I ain't going to tell you what Pop used to tell me, but –

M: [laughter] We can turn this off.

LP: Well, he used to say I was worse than a Black kid.

M: No, I get your drift.

LP: Those weren't exactly the words.

M: I understand.

PM: So why is it called Anders Ditch?

LP: Because Ander Ayrton owned the land that it was on.

PM: How do you spell Anders?

LP: Well, I don't know. It'd just be short for Andrew, I think.

PM: Oh, OK. Oh, Andrew's Ditch.

LP: Anders Ditch, yes.

M: Just contracted there, I guess.

LP: Dad lived in this lighthouse about three and a half years in the '20s.

M: He did? Right here?

LP: Now, you're not going to find that – you're not going to find that in the government records because I come, and what the family says, and the friends of the family that lived in that time say what they have in there, is different. It's no way that way. In the '20s, sometime – I got the exact time – grandpop moved from the old Orr place over in Port Norris to the East Point Lighthouse. There used to be a ditch out there that went in there. You can wind your windows down or open the doors or do whatever you want. They delivered all of their stuff on the old [inaudible], sailed up the ditch, unloaded their stuff, and moved into the lighthouse. Now, this is very shallow. Very, very shallow. If you was to take a boat out there now with an outboard, you would run on the bottom. When I was little, it fell bare on the northwest wind. All the way bare. You could walk from here pretty near to the thing. There are oyster beds out there, all over. In the wintertime, when the river was froze, the creeks was froze, dad would come out here with me and Fred, and we would walk out there to these oyster beds that were where Pop knew where they was. We would pick up these little oysters. Now, they never got very big because in the wintertime, if it got too cold, they would freeze and die. So you had an oyster bed that caught – it grows every year, and however big they got before you went out to get them, that's how big they were. Right out here by this number seven buoy, see – it's so foggy, I don't think – so hazy – number seven buoy is the Pepper Beds. Now, you see over here where this red buoy is; that's about where number nine is. Then your number seven buoy would be out here. But Pops said they was named after a man by the name of Amos Pepper who liked to work out there on them Pepper Beds. There was more than one bed there. But the one that gives the oystermen the worst trouble is the one that goes across the channel because right there, abreast of that number seven buoy, the bottom raises up. If your boat draws too much, you bump across the (Pepper Bed?). Now, out here, you see that turned buoy out here where that boat is, out there?

M: The green one?

LP: Right out here, yes. That's where your Battles Beds are. That's another high place. The channel comes up here and actually turns, the way it goes there and goes down toward number seven and then goes to number nine and then turns and goes in. When I was little, number nine

was the first buoy out of the river. You couldn't come across here. You had to go down to the old range lighthouse and come out. You had nine. Right in here was where Pop used to set his crab lines when he was crabbing. I used to [inaudible].

M: This is where you had the trotlines?

LP: Yes, right here in this cove here.

M: When you were eight years old, you were out?

LP: This, when I was a kid, was probably a hundred yards farther out than what it is now. It had a bulkhead there, and Gus Hewlett had a boat rental place here, that you could come down here and rent a boat, during World War II. You see that ripper out about there?

M: Yes.

LP: About four or five years ago, that was land. That was throwed up on the land to try to stop some of the erosion. Grandpop said East Point come back a thousand feet in his lifetime. I know it's come back that far in my time. If they don't do something here, East Point lighthouse is going to be in the Bay in another few years. Now, right straight across here – well, if you see them cedar trees, or them trees over there [in] Bivalve, if you go right across there, that's where your high beds are, off of Dividing Creek, where your mosquito fleet used to work all the time, out of Dividing Creek. I don't know whether you know about the mosquito fleet and stuff or not.

PM: No.

M: No.

LP: The mosquito fleet was quite a large fleet, actually, and the boats were so small. They were sailboats, and the men used to sleep under the bow and stuff. Now, sometimes, there wasn't much room in the bow, and they would have to come out from under the bow to turn over and crawl back in. But what they done was, they sailed out of Dividing Creek or wherever they was, usually Dividing Creek and Orennoaken over there, and they would work them high beds there off of Dividing Creek. They would sail the boats. They would unstuck the mast, put the sail down, tong and work, and then put the sails back up and go sell their oysters or stuff. But they actually would live on them little boats if they wanted to. They could sleep in them and everything else.

M: What, they just had like one mast or something?

LP: Yes. Well, yes, a mast like –

M: One mast.

LP: Most of them were hard [inaudible] boat, bateaus, and I don't think any of them was over sixteen or eighteen feet long. They wasn't big boats. But they called that the mosquito fleet.

They were sailboats, and there's pictures of them. There is pictures of those, of the mosquito fleet. I've seen them. I don't know who's got them, but there is photographs of them.

PM: I'll have to ask Olin McConnell.

LP: Yeah, well, Olin would be a good one to ask.

PM: Yeah, because he has –

LP: Or George, either one.

PM: Yeah, George who?

M: Now, that boat is dredging out there, isn't it?

LP: Yes. That's *Least Bottom*. He's out past the Bower Spit. Your tonger's bottom used to run the line that they couldn't lease. The line that was set across for tongers used to be out there where the bell buoy was and the entrance buoys, the red buoys, and run all the way up to [inaudible] up in that way. All inside that was tonger's bottom. There should be a map around somewhere that has that on there. Now, when they declared the bottom polluted, then they moved the summer line in from East Point Lighthouse to Kenney's Point. Kenney's Point is just a little ways up there.

PM: What time was that? What year? Do you know?

LP: I don't know when they changed it in, but it was the way – it was in force the whole time I was tonging, from the time I was twelve or fourteen, right on up. Matter of fact, it was before then because the oysters out here on the [inaudible] because they wasn't getting the plankton and stuff they needed out of the river to be fat, they would grow, but nobody could sell them. So what they did – they allowed the tongers to go out and catch them and sell them to planters for seed. My dad used to row from Matts Landing all the way down, clear out here and be to work at sunup. He used to – and he wasn't the only one. That was the way they were.

PM: How many years did you tong? Were you tonging?

LP: I'm still tonging.

PM: You're still doing it?

LP: Yeah. I got a license. I don't sell them anymore. There's an amusing tale. I used to be a little stronger than I am now. When I was about seventy-five, I was out here. I was working and selling oysters to Dexter up there, and he was giving forty-five dollars a bushel, so I only had to come out and catch four or five bushel, and I made a good day's work and didn't have to kill myself. This truck driver come in, and I went in there. I put my oysters on the dock and grabbed a couple of bags of oysters, one in each hand, and was walking up the dock, and this guy said, "I'll go help that old guy." He went down. Well, after I left and everything, he went in there,

and he says, “I don’t know how strong that old man is.” He says, “I thought I’d help him.” He said, “I went down there, and I couldn’t hardly pick up a bag of them oysters, and he was walking up the dock with one in each hand.” [laughter]

M: That was when you were seventy-five.

LP: I was around seventy-five.

M: A young man, yeah.

LP: Anyhow, I think this is all I can tell you about this place. But that’s where your bottom and your beds are. Now, the Outer Point used to come out quite a bit more, and that was the ridge over there. They called that the Sand Ridge. Oysters was found on that, but they weren’t worth as much. Joe wouldn’t pay as much for them as what he would for the ones off of [inaudible] and stuff like that. He didn’t really want them, but he would pay a dollar a bushel for them. They was a dollar and a quarter off the [inaudible].

PM: How far up the Maurice River did they oyster?

LP: Well, I never knew them to catch oysters any further than the end of Long Reach (Bivalve), but the oysters will grow as far up as Leesburg. As a matter of fact, I think oysters now will go up past Maurice River – Mauricetown Bridge. The reason for that is because the salinity in the water.

PM: Yeah, it’s moving up. Yeah. Yeah, the Bay is encroaching.

M: Do you have to have a license to take oysters?

LP: Yes, sir.

M: From any place, or is there – from any place?

LP: I’m so old; I’m grandfathered in. Now, I can’t sell oysters or clams, but I can catch 250 clams on my senior citizen license. The oysters is unlimited, but I can’t sell them. If I get caught selling them, I’m in trouble. I’ll show you the senior citizen’s license here if I – maybe I will. Hurricane Sandy done a number down here.

PM: Wow, sure did.

LP: [inaudible] out there. This used to be Harry Badger’s Boat River place, and to rent a boat here; you had to walk out there across the grass for about a hundred feet before you got to the water. That’s how far back it’s eaten in my time. [inaudible]

M: So, this is more of a recreation area for people now?

LP: No, it's not really recreational. This was my commercial clammer's license. When I retired, I went into clamming.

M: Crab.

LP: That's my crab pot license. [inaudible] Somewhere here, I've got a senior citizen's license. It should be in a piece of plastic. I put it in plastic so it wouldn't –

M: Here it is. Oyster?

LP: Yeah, well, this is market stuff. Now see, in 2005, I was still out there making a living. I wasn't making a living. I was making extra money. Well, I don't know. I was going to show you, but I just ain't going to. I don't know what I could have done with it because I usually have it on me. I sneak out there every once in a while and catch a mess of oysters.

M: Do you ever take guests when you go?

LP: Well, I take them, but they have to go buy a license. They have to have a recreation license.

M: That can't be much.

LP: Well, I'm sorry about that.

M: That's OK.

LP: It's [inaudible], is what it is.

M: I believe you.

LP: But anyhow, when I retired fifteen years ago, I went over and got my senior citizen's license. [inaudible] I don't know how much time you folks have got.

PM: Well, let's see. Until 11:30, a little after 11:00. About another half hour or so.

LP: Well, I don't know whether I can tell you everything in a half hour.

PM: No, we're coming back.

LP: Oh, you're coming back?

PM: Yes, sir.

PM: If you'll have us.

M: If you'll have us, we'll be back.

LP: Well, that's entirely up to you. I've never had anybody interested. Dad had Bobby Lee to make him a pair of tongs to work on the bottom out there, soft bottom tongs. And they was practically new or looked that way because Pop kept linseed oil on them and kept them. They was wooden head tongs.

M: What kind of wood? What specie of wood?

LP: Well, wooden head tongs were made out of white oak, actually, what he made them out of. He made the whole thing. He went in the woods and cut the oak and seasoned the oak and done everything. But Bobby Lee knew how to set the rake and the tongs so they would catch. The difference in the rake made a lot of difference. If it was too rank, you would catch a lot of shells. The oysters were on top, so he knew how to set your tongs so you would catch oysters. Well, there were a lot of oysters on mud bottom out there, off of the outside of the [inaudible]. And Bobby was making these wood-headed tongs to work out there. So Pop took care of them. When Pop died, I didn't have no use for them because we wasn't working out here. I took them over there. I told who made them, what year they was made, and who they was made for, and gave them the tongs and a slip of paper. They put the tongs up in (Danny Henderson's?) garage. The guy come in, and he says, "Man, them tongs is good tongs." I said, "Sure, they're good tongs. They were took care of." I've never seen any tongs on display. I've never seen anything, where they come from, who made them, or nothing else. I don't even know what kind of – I don't know where they're at. There were a couple of other things I took over there, and that's the reason I don't bother with that over there.

M: I don't know who's responsible for that, but it would be treated a lot differently now. We have a museum now, and we have these things on display. In fact, we have tongs on display. It might be the ones you're talking about; I don't know. But we have tongs on display in our museum. We have a high interest in what you can teach us.

LP: Well, I'm going to show you the railroad. Now, I have never seen a picture of the Heislerville Station or anything, but the oystermen, in order to stop out there and measure how high the water comes on high water, the oystermen run a spur, a railroad spur in here to handle the Maurice River side of the oyster industry. The oystermen paid for that and brought it in here. Jim Gowdy and all of them have never seen a picture of the Heislerville Station. I got one, but it's not very clear. This is the road that goes back to General Cadwalader's farm. He owned everything from here to the river and everything at one time, and he banked the river to – so that he could harvest the hay. The fields was all – when I was a kid, they was corn and stuff of that nature back in there. I can take you back in there and show you hotbeds, where they used to fill the hotbeds with an ore so they would get the heat to bring the stuff up from the thing. Well, that house used to be right up here with the barns. The house used to be right in here, and the barns was across the thing. When the state got ahold of it, the barns was over there. There was a big barn that would hold sixteen teams of horses and the cow barns alongside of it. They hired Jesse Ford – John Ford – he dismantled all of it and took the beams and everything up to Batso Furnace, and the barns up there and stuff are them barns.

LP: Yeah, the barns.

M: The horses, you said they did some salt hay?

LP: Yeah. These was all fields when I was a kid. Both sides of the road, fields. You can tell that by the size of the trees. See the trees? That's young wood.

PM: Yeah, young wood, yeah.

LP: Now, this road was a sand road that went down between the fields. It didn't come all the way across here. Now, this ditch here empties into the ditch that I told you I had the *Eva Blanche* up out there. That's Northwest Beach.

M: That's where you almost got stuck and became a laughingstock.

PM: No, you became a hero.

M: Yeah. Could have become a laughingstock. Now, this was also hay and all in here?

LP: This, all this out here was salt hay because the river was banked all the way down, and it was all salt hay. All of it in here. My home, where I live, was right over there. Me and my brother were not allowed down here. So, of course, we came every day. bought some fishing poles, and hid them. We used to walk through them woods and come down here and go down through the mud digger ditch, what we called the mud digger ditch, and go crabbing or fishing. We used to go to mom's icebox – had an icebox on the refrigerator, and she always had these boxes of square Velveeta cheese. Velveeta cheese is the best catfish bait you can get.

M: [laughter] Where is all of the cheese going?

LP: The state dug a lot of these islands. Do you see these islands? Here, you see these islands? They built this dyke across here; the state did that. Now, this is where the train used to turn around to go back to Millville. I'll show you where it used to stop.

M: Would this be the bed of the tracks?

LP: No. This is the thing. The bed of the tracks – I'll show you where the bed started. There used to be a mound. This is the head of Anders Ditch. Originally, it drained the swamp up in here, is what it did, before they did the other stuff. Now, I played many a time in that place. We used to build treehouses and everything else out there. There used to be another two or three of them out there before they dug them up. This was the end of track. Right here, where these poles are and stuff like that, there was a mound so that the cars and stuff wouldn't go over into the marsh. This was the end of track here. This was the Y. This was where they turned the train around. This track used to go right straight here, and this would be where your frog was.

M: Where the what was?

LP: Was where your frog was, that turned your track. It was straight. It went down here. You can actually see it was a lot lower than what it is, but do you see that? Like that bank there, the

left street bank where them trees are? That was the old railroad bed. That was the old railroad bed that went up.

M: You can see the ties.

PM: Yeah, you can see some ties.

LP: This was the railroad bed, and it went down the Maurice River. Sandy took this out, and they just raised it up a great deal. They raised it up big time.

M: This is in the last few months? This is since Sandy? It's been raised up.

LP: Not here, but out here, and made it wider. I don't know that we need to go across there, because I want to show you something else.

M: Oh, this was the road they had to take to get out to –

LP: No, this was the railroad.

M: No, I mean after.

LP: This is what the train went down.

M: I mean, after Sandy, this was the way you got out after Sandy, right?

LP: But anyhow, that went right on down and wound around, followed the river around the bend of the river. It went down to the shucking houses on [the] Maurice River side. Now, this was railway bed here. This was railroad track. When they got ready to turn the train around, to head back for – well, they would turn the train around, put it on the other end of the cars after they drilled and pushed the cars down to the shucking houses because if they towed them down, they couldn't get back. So what they would do, they would turn the engine around and put them on the other end of the cars and push them down.

PM: What is this area called? This isn't Matts Landing, is it?

LP: No, Matts Landing is just a landing down there. Actually, this was all part of the Cadwalader Estate. Now it's state fish and game. When we built our docks for our boats, Lawrence Thompson and Lester Thompson, his brother, was in charge of the Cadwalader Estate and actually hayed it. They gave us permission to cut our piling in here, and we would come in here and cut our piling. This is a site, here, of the Heislerville Station. The frog used to be in here and go around, and that went straight down that way, and the station was right there. I don't remember the station itself, but I remember the well because everybody in town used to come down to the station and get their water in buckets and stuff like that because they was afraid of catching something on impure water because of diphtheria and stuff like that, that went around.

PM: Yeah, typhoid and all that.

LP: All the town used to come down here and get the pump, and it was a regular pump of the well, and that was right in there. My grandparents – the first place that I remember them living was over there. That's the station house.

M: So that would have been like a dug well?

LP: Yeah, it was a dug well. They filled it in. This is the Matts Landing Road. Some people call it the Station Road, but this is not the Station Road. It's the Matts Landing Road. The Station Road run behind the station, and I'll show you where it's at. We walked down here to go to work. Me and Dad, and grandpop and Uncle Aaron.

M: When you were dredging on the bay, did you used to come back at night, or did you used to stay out on the bay for days?

LP: No, we came home nights. Pop went, I think. I pitched hay on both sides of this road. They raised the water up so high it killed all the trees in there.

M: I'm looking at the birds.

LP: Yeah, well, they're them cormorants, and the stuff are always in there.

PM: Yeah, and egrets.

LP: In the spring of the year, the carp used to be so thick in here, going across the salt hay to lay their eggs, that some of the people went out other and caught them and sold them. The Jewish people eat them.

M: What would that be? That dock.

LP: Now, the Anchor Marina was where we used to sell our crabs when I was a kid to make extra money for – I think Lester Hunter used to pay us a nickel for white shutters, and he would set them out in soft shells and green shutters we would get three cents for. Of course, he got all of it because he would pay us for our crabs, and we would go into his store and spend it, you know? This was where Pop – this used to be George Ackley' Driftwood Marina here, and this was where Pop kept his boat and stuff of that nature until we got so big, had so many boats, that we come down here and built our own dock. That was down here. You could rent off the Cadwalader Estate all the bank you wanted for a dollar a foot. So what we did was we rented a hundred feet of bank off of the Cadwalader Estate, and where this Fishtails Marina is, is where we had our dock, where we had everything. That's where we kept the [inaudible]. We used to have a float log out there, and we'd tie up our Garveys and bateaus and everything behind the float log and stuff of that nature.

M: Now, is this the Maurice?

LP: That's the Maurice River. That's Jack King's over there. That's what you're looking at.

M: Okay. I know where I am now.

LP: This used to be down. The state raised this up. This used to be the road that you went down to the river on, down to the thing. Now, you would cross – you would cross the track. I don't expect you can see it. Now, here is the road. See it? You would cross the track here, and you would go down. There was a little bend to the right, then a bend to the left, and you would go into the shucking houses on the Maurice River. The railroad track moved along here. Right down there, about halfway between here and that bend where you see that gray-looking house, there used to be a blacksmith's shop in pop's time, not in my time. And there was a boat that was stuck up out of the water. Now, if you look out here, these barges – these barges are actually west of what used to be Basket Flats, and that was all bank. This was all salt hay [inaudible].

M: How about that? Wow.

LP: Now, when Sandy came in here, if they hadn't put this bank up here, the road was washed out, this was washed out, you wouldn't have stopped the river until it got to Leesburg. That's the importance of this bank. Now, like I say, when I was a youngster, we used to come down here, and they used to have them big long floating logs out there, and they was great big cypress logs. We would stand on them logs, and we would fish. We would walk out and stand out on them logs, and when we wanted bait, we'd just reach down underneath the log and get a handful of shrimp out of the grass under the log, and that was our bait.

M: What kind of fish did you catch?

LP: Perch, catfish, and in the fall of the year, what we always called puppy drum, and I think they was sheep heads, but they still insist that they're a drum. I don't believe they are because there are so many of them, and they don't never get no bigger.

PM: Did you ever know the Warwick family?

LP: The (Warwicks?). Yeah.

PM: Yeah, they were – he was a big salt hay farmer.

LP: Yeah. I can show you right where he lived if you want to see it.

PM: No, I know where he lived. I interviewed his wife.

LP: You interviewed his wife?

PM: Yes, Ethel.

LP: Yeah, old Tommy Warwick used to come up through Heislerville. He was the first one around that bought a truck and hauled his hay up to Haddonfield for strawberry hay. He used to

come through Heislerville and go up to Cox because Cox had a scale. He'd pull on the scale and weigh his hay.

M: So this road was lost after Sandy for a while? Did Sandy take this road out?

LP: Yes, it did. There it is over here. This was salt hay, once. But this whole road went back.

M: This is a new road, yeah.

LP: And that's Leesburg up there. It wouldn't be anything to stop it.

M: It would become bait front after a while.

PM: Yeah, I read that they had just opened this.

LP: Yeah, like they used to call it rope hay because it was low and it would be long, great big long hay, and they used to take it over to Port Norris, over to the rope factory, or over there to the pipe factory, and it was used to form pipe over there to Port Norris.

M: But we have a rope winding machine at Bivalve Museum to make the rope.

LP: That probably came out of that same place. I used to go over there with Ezra Cox and unload. You used to back up, and you used to pitch your hay down into the floor that they used to form their clay around the stuff.

M: To cast the pipe, right? That was inside the pipe when they cast it?

LP: Yeah, then they'd burn the hay out, and then you'd have your pipe. Now, right here, there was two sidings. The railroad used to run in here. One of your sidings out the hill was your backstop, and the other one was right in here somewhere so that your cars wouldn't go off the track. And the station was over here. Your track, actually –

M: Peterson's Lane.

LP: Actually runs down here, actually run in here somewhere. They tore it up. I can't really tell you exactly where it's at. This is where my grandpop used to walk out. When me and Pop walked by, he would walk out the track. This is Peterson Lane. It used to be a sand road. You couldn't drive a car here without getting stuck. It was just a little two ruts going back here. Grandpop and grandmom lived here, and my uncle and his family lived here, and it was called Peterson Lane. There used to be a town trash pile over in here. It got cleaned up, of course. It wasn't until – oh, I don't know – maybe '75 or '80 – that the township put this road in here, and you could come back here.

M: I wonder how many boxcars they shipped every day in the oyster –

LP: I wouldn't know that. They used to have a pretty good string of boxcars, and they used to bring the cars through the sand plants in here, like the hoppers and the gondolas. We would play there. Now, this has got to be quite a settlement back here. When grandpop and grandmom lived here, that house right there was grandpop and grandmom's house.

M: This one?

LP: This little one-room house.

PM: The shingled place, yeah.

M: The shed there.

LP: This brown place. That was Grandmom and Grandpop's house. It consisted of one room. One room only.

M: How many kids?

LP: The kitchen was in one end, the dining area in the other end, and the living – or the dining area and the kitchen area, and then you had the living room down on this end.

M: You had an outhouse, I suppose?

LP: Yeah. The outhouse and the chicken coop was toward the track.

M: How many children lived in that house?

LP: This house?

M: With your grandparents? Did your grandparents have children while they lived here?

LP: Not here. They had nine kids.

M: But not here.

LP: Not here. Things is all changed. All changed. It's nothing like what it was. But this is where the railroad track was. Right here. This is where the railroad run down, right here. It went right on down here, and that was it. And there was where my Uncle Jack lived, over there – dad's brother. But that was his shack. He wasn't a very – he lived like most of the old piney tales. He had tar paper on the outside, and the inside didn't have any sheetrock or anything. It was just studs. He had about half a dozen kids who lived there. He was lazy. He never done anything. I can't ever remember him working. He was smart, though. But Pops said the only time he worked was when grandpop worked. My cousin had that house – moved in here when he come out of the Navy. Then he sold it, and that's when they built this road up.

M: So it was just a two-lane little sand road?

LP: No, this was a two-rut sand. You couldn't even walk down here without getting sand in your shoes. They used to park cars out at the station and walk in. I'm going to tell you, right here was the road. That goes out down there. When grandmom and grandpop got old, my brother and I used to stay one week in the summertime. I would stay one week, and Fred would stay the next week, and so forth and so on. The reason for that was, if they got down and needed some help, we could go out to town and get them some help, some assistance. I was always afraid of the dark. Something was going to get me; I knowed it.

PM: [laughter] Yeah, we all were.

LP: This is the station road. Now, you see this road here? That is the real Station Road. There used to be three houses here, and they was all alike. The station master, Rob MacDonald – they called him Possum – Rob MacDonald lived in this one, and he was the one you bought your ticket off of when you had to go or something. Henry Anderson or –

PM: So the train was a passenger –? It had passenger cars, yeah?

LP: Oh, yes.

PM: Plus hauling oysters?

LP: Yes. It was a passenger. My neighbor Elsie MacDonald and her husband walked down here, caught the train to Millville to get married. And old [inaudible] used to ship strawberries, watermelon, cantaloupes, and everything else there, and old Rob Butcher told me in his lifetime that the wagons used to be back up the whole length of Matts Landing Road and start down Heislerville Road – farmers with wagon loads of tomatoes and watermelons and cantaloupes and string beans and lima beans and stuff like that to load in them cars to ship.

M: The early 1900s, like 1910? 1920?

LP: This was all farm cornfields here. All the whole length of this road. This was Cox's asparagus patch, where they cut asparagus every year. But like I say, it's all changed. Where there used to be corn growing, there's trees this big around. Used to be a big house here on this corner. It was old Lou Henderson lived there. He was a local preacher, and he was a sexton for the school. He used to go over and get the fires going and stuff like that, the coal fires and stuff like that. They used to raise their own patch of stuff there and sell it.

M: Now, when your kids were growing up, you had elementary schools here?

LP: Yep.

M: Up to what grade?

LP: Eighth grade.

PM: So you went to school in Heislerville?

LP: I went to school right here.

PM: Where are we? Heislerville, yeah.

LP: This is where the old Heislerville school used to be, right here. This is where I went to school. This is where I lived. When the last bell started to ring at a quarter to nine, that's when I headed for school. [laughter] I could be in me seat.

PM: Did you go to high school also?

LP: Yeah, but I quit. We went to Millville. We was bused to Millville. But this is – when I was eight, this is where Dad – this house was off the beach. This was just a yard. But this is where Dad and Mom lived, and there was a house in between that me and my brothers tore down when Pop bought the lot and made the garage out of.

M: Now, see that Peterson is spelled with an S-O-N instead of S-E-N.

LP: Well, that's the way Ed Peterson spelled it.

M: Oh, yours did?

LP: That's Peterson.

M: You are S-O-N?

LP: I am S-O-N, that's right.

M: Oh, I had that wrong.

PM: We'll get it straight.

LP: Now, this is MacDonald Lane. I lived on MacDonald's Farm, and I kid you not, I can prove it.

M: "Old MacDonald had a farm."

LP: That's right. Originally, it was 112 acres before they sold it off before I got it.

PM: My best friend's last name is MacDonald, and their license plate is "E-I-E-I-O."

M: That makes sense.

LP: Anyhow, I bought this farm. I bought twenty-five acres of ground and the house, and the barn. This used to be where the corn crib was. There was an old thing that I cleaned up. The

farm was growed up when me and my wife bought it. She never really wanted a farm, but she supported me in everything I ever did. She would argue and fuss with me, but if I went ahead and did it –

PM: We all do. [laughter] But we usually give up.

M: I don't know about nowadays how it works.

LP: I filled you in on the background. Now we'll go in.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 2/2/2023

Reviewed by Patricia Moore 9/7/2023