

Tape 1 of 1
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Interview by Nancy Solomon of LIT
Bill Hamilton of Brookhaven Baymen's Association
Patchogue, NY

Can you tell me a little bit about the history of BBA from what you can recall?

It's been, I believe they established it back in the 70's, was when they first, you see originally I'm from Islip Town, I was involved in Islip Town, I've been in Brookhaven Town now about 17 years, and of course when it first was founded membership and everything was you know booming because the bay was booming, and essentially in the beginning it was mainly involved with clamming issues, it was never been too involved with fishing issues, it's mainly been revolved around the use our town, lands, underwater lands and that, which mainly involves clamming and oystering.

Do you know who some of the original people were in the beginning?

I know Grant and John Mensal, they were originally from Islip Town, they were involved in it, Doc Murray, he was involved in it, you had ummmm, I'm trying to think of the one guy, he smoked a pipe, I can't think of his name, but he was big on it too, Flo would be more familiar with a lot of 'em. But I remember the Mensal' they were very involved in it, in fact I got involved with BBA when I was in Islip Town, because this was back when they was trying to start the union, they had the barmen's' alliance that Mario Carerra had tried to start up and we basically tried to pool resources since both of our townships worked in Brookhaven waters basically you know, Islip Town, most of us worked in Brookhaven Town waters. Not too much in Islip. But those are the guys that I remember, Doc Murray, because I did go to a few meetings with them, like Senator LaValle's office, Owen Johnson's, you know, but they were some of the original people that were involved in it.

What were some of the issues that you recall at that time?

A lot of the big issues was on prices, there was price fixing going on, another one was they wanted to try to stop Islip Town people from working in Brookhaven Town waters to do away with a reciprocal agreement, there was also talk about limiting licenses and that back then, you know trying to put a cap on it, because as it was you could walk from boat to boat out there just about, back in the 70's, you know middle to late 70's, basically it was all clam related issues.

Any idea how many people were part of the association?

Well, at one time, we had probably upwards of 300 members, and then additional members, like that weren't actually directly involved in the bay, some part-timers, some family members, or just people that were just concerned and that. Now, unfortunately,

we're down to very few, a handful of people, due to the fact that quite a few people have left the bay, they're not concerned. In fact we probably have more input from some of the part-timers than you do even the full timers. Most of the full-timers that are out there haven't been that involved or they've distanced themselves from the organization you know because they just don't want to be bothered. It takes time out of your busy schedule, you know, people have families and that. Like the Mensals' really aren't involved much in it anymore, occasionally if there's some big issue they'll come out, but usually not. We had a town meeting back a few months ago where we set a few new town laws where that established like a sporting sanctuary and to make it illegal harvest clams and that and of course for our winter grounds, that they could ticket you, and we like 2 part-timers that showed up at the town meeting, so that shows you, besides me and Flo, how much interest we have, it's pretty much waned. It's pretty sad.

How often are you guys meeting now?

Well, basically, at this time, we haven't had many meetings. Me and Flo will get together and I'll call up Greg Lovece now and then and we'll get input from them. The last couple meetings, because we were allowed to use, Post Morrow's got a building down here we can use, me and Flo showed up, that was it. It's pretty much waned.

Would you say that the focuses of your efforts are on town policies or state policies or both?

Well, basically, I've always been involved myself, even not as an official of BBA and going to meetings about fishing, clamming, crabbing, those related issues with the state, I always want to be there and hear what they're trying to force down our throats.

What are some of those bodies that you're going to and talking to?

Usually, like the fishing advisory meeting, shellfish advisory meetings, any of the special meetings, like the DEC calls up on crabbing regulations, fishing regulations, I try to make it there. Horse, foot, crabs, checking on that, you know you have to be there, cause next thing you know you've got a new order, you didn't want.

Are these meetings usually held on Long Island or does it mean going up to Albany?

No, they almost always have them up at DEC, Belle Meade, Stony Brook, that's where they have most of the meetings, now and then, I haven't been up there myself but we've sent people up to Albany for certain things like they have the seafood, I guess it's like promotion, you know they go up there, you know and then we've had them go up there on the Raritan Bay clamming issue one year when they didn't have the budget passed and they were going to possibly shut down the program, the program did start late, we sent people up there to spur 'em on, then we'll have private meetings, like I'll go see some of the different assembly people from the state, like Edenton or Mazzarelli, I was in touch

with her back when we had a lot of trouble with licenses and that, where a few of us lost them, I lost my fishing license in absence of renewal on time one year, they'd never had that, but they'd passed some law up in Albany and next thing you knew there was like 200 of us that lost lobster licenses and fishing licenses because they put a moratorium on it and it went from that date, even though there was never an expiration date on licenses, you know, yeah, we got caught in the legal loophole, you know, so then I had to go to meetings.

So, what were some of the more important things that you helped prevent or helped instill in terms of some of the legislation?

Well, I kept on Mazzarelli and quite a few of the other, you know, state people, all be getting this rectified with the licenses, which we did have rectified, it took 2 years, but we did get that done. Another thing I've been work on at the town level would be on this spawner program, getting the spots set up out in the bay and basically the town's got to appropriate money now and we have to go, they screwed up in the bidding process on a few things, they missed the one bid, so basically that's stalled right now but it's all set up, it will be a go once we have bids in on the shellfish and then they can purchase them.

Will this be for different kinds of shellfish?

No, this is basically just for clams. We established 2 zones out there, one out in the middle of the grounds, along Blue Point's property line, and another one in the uncertified waters up here in Patchogue Cove, based upon the dye tests that they did, where the spawn would end up, you know, and those are the 2 areas, we might have some future ones.

When you talk about these spawning projects, where will the seeds come from?

From the clams themselves, we're going to purchase Cherry and Chowder clams.

Okay, so these are going to be wild clams and you're using the seeds from the wild clams?

Yeah, we banned pretty much, that's where us and Kassner don't see eye to eye.

I know, I know, and I know there's been a lot of disappointment over it.

Well, to us it's just a waste of money, Blue Point's out of business; they spent more money than the town could ever hope to spend on seed clams, growing these things, this is like their own little pet project though, Tom and Jeff, like they had some little pet project they wanted to do up in Mt. Sinai, they wanted to close off one of the most productive areas in there for harvesting oysters and clams and make that into a little area to let the clams grow out, just to see how they did, but to us it was like, you know, Tom

wasn't real happy because I guess this was like a project he'd worked on for a while, but oh well, you know, we wouldn't let them close off the area. But to me it's like their own little experiments, they have their own things where they want to further their credentials and stuff, you know, and we've done this, we've done that, you get to go give talks on stuff, you know, lectures and stuff, you know, so that's their own little project, us, we're not fond of it, because to us, we call it crab bait, they're just growing stuff to feed the crabs. Because first off they're Notates, Flo will tell you, I could go out here and dig all day and not catch one Notate clam, the only place where we really only catch any is on Blue Point's property, if you go on their property or along the line.