

Pat Moore: Today is January 24th, 2009. My name is Pat Moore, volunteer coordinator of the Oral History Program at Bayshore Discovery Project, Delaware Bay Museum. We are meeting at the John Wesley United Methodist Church, Ogden Avenue, Port Norris, New Jersey, to hear our guest panel of shuckers telling their tales at our annual January storytelling session. Meghan Wren, executive director of Bayshore Discovery Project will be today's moderator.

Meghan Wren: Nice crowd today for our storytelling. This is one of the series we do on storytelling about life on the Bayshore. Pat was just saying we are like oysters in a can here today. [laughter]

Multiple Speakers: [laughter]

MW: But it is great to see you all out. For our shucking tales, I think for the shuckers tales, we are going to start with just going around the room and letting people introduce themselves, where you are from. Some people are here because they want to learn about what happened here along the bay. Others are here because they have something to share. If you just give us a little bit of indication as we go around, that might help when it comes time to ask you some questions and things. That helps to know who is in the room. So, maybe we will start at the very end here and ask you to introduce yourself and where you are from.

Bill Stotz: To start with, I'm the oldest guy here.

MS: [laughter]

BS: Ninety-nine in March.

[applause]

BS: My name is Bill Stotz, S-T-O-T-Z. I worked for Windham Energy for seventy-eight years before I retired. I was a younger man. I did a lot of work down here. I can't remember the names, but there aren't many houses I haven't been in over the years. I'm retired. Glad to be here. I want to know something about oysters. For you who like oysters, next Saturday night up the Pole Tavern, they have fried oysters. But aren't they good? Thank you.

MW: Thank you.

[applause]

Lorraine Jackter: I'm Lorraine Jackter from Camden, New Jersey. I'm just curious. It's been something I've loved all my life. I wanted to come and hear more from them.

MW: Very good. Welcome.

Claire Jackter: I'm Claire Jackter, and I drove.

MS: [laughter]

CJ: I also like oysters from all neck of the woods, whether it's here or far-flung.

Male Speaker: [inaudible] from LAC. I'd like to learn more about oysters.

Female Speaker: My name is [inaudible] and just to learn all about the area.

PM: That is why I wanted to sit here. Ask everybody to sit here.

MW: Pat reminds me, we have one microphone in the middle here. We are trying to record today's session. There are lots of stories. It will be back and forth. We also want to know who is here. So, if you will speak loudly and maybe keep the background noises down, that will be a big help. So, I appreciate it.

John Radell: John Radell from Mauricetown. We just moved in. I thought it would be interesting.

Charles Seeker: Charles Seeker, Elmer, New Jersey. I had some contact with the people that have shucked here in Bayshore. But I just came down along to see a shucking house.

Gordon Moore: I'm Gordon Moore. I'm from Millville. My wife trusted me to carry all the stuff in today.

MS: [laughter]

GM: Other than that, I [inaudible].

Irene Moore: Irene Moore from Bradway, Hancock's Bridge. Just interested in learning about the industry.

Sarah Beth Frost: I'm Sarah Beth Frost from Ocean City. I love oysters. I just want to know more about the industry.

MS: I'm her buddy. I ditto on that.

MS: [laughter]

Annette Perry: Annette Perry, Money Island. Just sounded interesting.

Joan Hickman: Joan Hickman, Port Norris. Just wanted to hear about some of the oyster tales.

MS: I'm with her. Bless her heart. I'm here hoping it rains at the football game.

MS: [laughter]

[applause]

MW: [inaudible] [laughter] When were you going to the football game?

Earl Dixon: My name is Earl Dixon. I'm here a few years and thirty-five years in the desert, so oysters are [inaudible]. Thank you.

John Sam: My name is John Sam. I never shucked oysters much. I dredged them [inaudible]. But I never shucked oysters.

FS: [inaudible] from Clayton. I just want to know more about oysters.

Martha Ranger: Martha Ranger from Pitman. I've had my roots in South Jersey for a long time. I'm interested in South Jersey states.

Marty Rudolph: Marty Rudolph, Turnersville. The roots people brought us along.

MS: [laughter]

Jessica Rudolph: Jessica Rudolph from Turnersville. I'd like to know more about oysters.

Grace Mullen: Grace Mullen from Westfield. I'm just interested.

FS: [inaudible] Mullen from Westfield. If there's any argument with Mike Dryer or Lou Dryer, I'm related to them.

Grace Dennis: Grace Dennis from Washington Township. We came to hear the stories.

Clyde Phillips: Clyde Phillips from Mauricetown, originally from Port Norris. I'm here to learn what I can about the oyster business.

MS: [laughter]

MW: The babysitter story too? [laughter]

Carol Magal: I'm Carol Magal from Millville. I thought it sounded interesting. So, when my friend Lou invited me to come along, I was thrilled. My grandfather and my great-grandfather worked on oyster boats. So, I thought it'd be nice to know something about it.

Mabel Miller: I'm Mabel Miller from Millville. My father used to bring me down often to watch the shucking. It's hard as I've tried, when they put the knives out for you to take the free oyster. I could only get it that far. Then it broke.

MS: [laughter]

Harry Taffers: I'm Harry Taffers from Mauricetown. I run an antique shop. But I came down here to learn about the oyster shucking.

Lou Dryer: I'm Lou Dryer from Millville. Came to learn and see all I could about oyster shucking.

Christian Peterson: I'm Christian Peterson, part of the Peterson family that was in the business here in Port Norris for years.

FS: I'm the widow of Christian Peterson, Jr. So, he was in the business too. C.J. Peterson was named after his grandfather.

MW: How about that. We can go on from right there from Peterson.

MS: We're in the same gang.

MS: [laughter]

Karen Peterson: [inaudible] I'm Karen Peterson.

Christian John Peterson: I'm Christian John Peterson IV. I was named after C.J. Peterson.

MS: I'm John Shepard from Millville.

MS: [laughter]

FS: I'm [inaudible] from [inaudible]. My great-grandfather was [inaudible] Peterson.
[inaudible]

Laura Harris: I'm Laura Harris from [inaudible]. This is my son Derek and my whole family. Harold Denkins took over the business in Peterson after C.J. Peterson, just in honor, with Emma.

MS: I'm Brad [inaudible] from [inaudible] in those boats.

MS: [laughter]

Kate Gibbons: I'm Kate Gibbons. I'm from Cape May County. I'm originally from Maryland. So, wondering more about oyster shucking.

MS: Where in Maryland?

KG: Oh, north Eastern Shore. [laughter]

Susan Ford: I'm Susan Ford. I'm from Newport. I know oysters from the research engine, worked for many years at the Haskin Shellfish Laboratory. I thought it'd be interesting to hear things from another point of view.

Michael Henderson: My name is Michael Henderson. I'm from Lindenwold. I grew up in

Newport. I've had a lifelong interest in the bay and the Bayshore area.

Ruth Grace: My name is Ruth Grace. I'm from Newport. Years ago, my daddy was a milk delivery man for (Sniker?) Dairies that used to deliver down here when all the little houses were still here on the way into Shell Pile. Many a cold morning I've had to...

Brooke Kennedy: I'm next?

MW: Yes.

BK: My name is Brooke Kenedy from North Wildwood. I love to eat oysters and just came up to learn more about everything on oysters.

MS: I'm [inaudible]. I'm from along here on [inaudible].

Mikey Winfield: I'm Mikey Winfield. I'm from Delaware Bay. I'm also a volunteer on the [inaudible]. I went to shuck oysters this last year, want to learn a little bit more about it.

FS: I'm Liz [inaudible] from Millville. I'm here to learn about the history of the area and hear the stories.

Ned Forbes: I'm Ned Forbes. I live in Millville. I'm interested in oysters.

Ted Worrico: I'm Ted Worrico. I live right down the street where the old walls of nursery used to be. I'll be here two years in April. I'm just a little bit curious about what my neighbors are all about. That's why I'm here, to find out.

MS: [laughter]

MW: We have got a few keys here. I think that should move up forward.

FS: Except Georgia.

MW: I wonder if we can squeeze a little bit on the back here. We can bring some more too. We can actually get you right over here. Get you next to – there you go. We were going through the crowd here. I think we were at Mr. Smith.

Richard Smith: Richard Smith, Port Norris. I was born and raised in Port Norris. My grandfather and great-grandfather were in the oyster business from the 1800s until about 1928.

MW: Very good.

Frank Mathers: I'm Frank Mathers from Elwood. I worked in a research lab one summer. I'm here to hear the stories. I also brought my grandson, John, hoping he'll get a history lesson.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Excellent. Did we have some folks who came in after we went around the room? We have got [inaudible].

FS: My name is [inaudible]. I lived at a property that was in [inaudible] East Point Oyster Company from 1950 to 1963. I'm interested in the oyster business.

MW: Excellent [inaudible].

MS: [inaudible] North.

MW: Family connects you. Thank you.

FS: I think we'll find out probably a lot of us are related. [laughter]

MW: [laughter] I want to say a huge thank you to the two women who pulled this all together and spent a lot of time thinking about this and organizing it and reaching out to folks to bring them here. We have a pair of Pats. We have Pat Moore [laughter] and Pat Smith. If we could give them a huge round of applause.

[applause]

I know that Gordon and probably Richard were enlisted to give a hand here also. So, thank you very much.

[applause]

I want to introduce our front table here. We have one more seat up here. We have another guest with stories to share, making her way forward. If you could come just around back here and we will set you up right next to Ms. Georgia May and Pat. Gosh, I wonder if we could count how many years. There must be several centuries of shucking represented all combined here up front. So, we will start here. I think what I would like to do is ask each of you to say a little bit about your history with oystering and when you started. I think just as a quick introduction, maybe a short version. We will get into some more detail after we know who everybody is. So, I guess we will start with Mr. Beryl Whittington.

Beryl Whittington: Well, I think everybody here is better hearing my history. I told through Bay Day and every day. I didn't really come today to talk. I don't feel that good. But I just came to listen to you all talk. But I did start shucking in 1935, is when I started shucking. I shucked down through the years for that low price. That's what I'm doing it in New Jersey today because the price was little better than Crisfield. That's all I'm going to say about it.

MS: [laughter]

Margaret Towner: My name is Margaret Towner. I was born and raised here. I started shucking

in [19]47. I don't like oysters.

MS: [laughter]

Anna Young: My name is Anna Young. I came to Port Norris in 1945. I started shucking in 1949. I've been to various jobs in between. Believe it or not, now I'm back shucking again. I love shucking oysters. I'm just grateful that I can still do it.

Freddie Smith: My name is Freddie Smith, born and raised in Port Norris along the lake. Tom Smith and Sue Smith were my father and mother. I started working when I was 15, on the boat. I left the boat. I went oystering. [inaudible] I've been there. It's been thirty-seven years, September 1st. I like going oystering, working indoors.

MS: [laughter]

FS: I run boats, tongs, and carry shells. I liked all that. So, thank God [inaudible] to come here today to see you all.

MW: Thank you.

MS: [laughter]

Florence Robinson: My name is Florence Robinson. I came to New Jersey in 1940, to Newport, New Jersey. Then I went from there to FF East Oyster Company at Maurice River. Then I transferred from there and went to Stoneman Brothers. I worked for Stoneman Brothers for twenty-five years in oysters. Between Stoneman Brothers and Bob Morgans, I worked there. Then I went back to a place called Rock Hall, Maryland. I shucked there a while. My husband and I raised our family on shucking oysters.

Georgia Robinson: My name is Georgia Robinson. I came to Maurice River in 1927. I'm from Crisfield, Maryland. Down in Maryland, I picked crabs. When I came to Maurice River, I shucked oysters. I can't tell you when I started that because it was a long, long time ago.

MS: [laughter]

GR: Because I'll be 93 years old next month.

[applause]

I like shucking oysters. I worked for FF East, and I worked for Stoneman Brothers. After that, I went on other jobs.

FS: This is my mother, Sandra King. I'm going to try to get her to contribute as much as she can. But anyway, mom, how long did you shuck oysters?

Sandra King: Oh, I was shucking oysters in the [19]50s. During the flood time, we were

shucking oysters. We had to leave home where we were and go and stay in the church when the water came in. That was a long time ago.

MS: [laughter]

FS: How long did you shuck oysters? How many years? Do you remember?

SK: About forty years.

FS: About forty?

SK: Yes.

FS: About forty years she said, she used to shuck oysters.

MW: Well, just to set the stage for when shucking started in this area, I wanted to read a paragraph just to give you a little bit of background from a document that was called, *Shucking Oysters: One of New Jersey's Growing Industries*. That was written by William Dumont in 1925. "Until three years ago, no shucking was done in New Jersey outside of Keyport and a few minor points. Prior to industrial expansion called forth by the World War, the flood of industrial waste has rendered much of our land unprofitable for oyster raising. Keyport was the center of thriving oyster, opening oyster industry, large shipments of shucked oysters being sent as far as California. In 1923, three opening houses were established on the Maurice River, Delaware Bay." I understand FF East was one of the first, right?

GR: Yes.

MW: "The following year, saw two more in operation, the larger employing as high as seventy shuckers. As the shucking industry is new to this part of the state, it seems best at this time to give to the growers and shippers such information as is available from other shipping points, which may be of assistance in fostering this young but growing work. There are two great advantages in marketing oysters shucked rather than in a shell. In the first place, it allows the shipper to produce a more nearly standard product as every oyster is seen before being packed. In the second place, it keeps the shells at the receiving port where they may be utilized for shelling natural and private grounds to the great benefits of the industry. The one disadvantage in marketing opened oysters lies in the possibility of the introduction of water or contamination of the product during or after shucking. It may be pointed out, however, that the chance of introducing such foreign materials are no greater than with any raw food, notably milk, which must be handled prior to shipment." It goes on into great detail about the differences between shucking oysters that have been floated and oysters that are coming straight from the bay. But just to give some context, one of the impetuses for shucking oysters was the prevalence of typhoid and the lack of cleanliness of the water that was right up in the river here. So, it made more sense to bring the oysters from the bay where it was cleaner, up, and shuck them and send them to market that way rather than in a shell. So, I just thought it was an interesting way to start the day to think about when it started here. So, Ms. Robinson who came in 1927 was here just a few years after the very start of oyster shucking in this area. I think we have a good

representation of the whole gamut here. So, let us see. Would someone like to give a description of what it was like maybe in the earlier days? Maybe what the process meant? Maybe Ms. Robinson, do you want to start with that?

GR: I don't know how you mean.

MW: Well, how did the oysters come in and how were they allocated and how did it work at the shucking house?

GR: Well, I know they came in, they were floated oysters because they had large oysters, big as my hand, big oysters at that time. I'm sure they came from out in the bay.

MW: I have seen some of the shucking stalls in the photos. I do not know if everyone has seen how the shuckers were all in line. How were the oysters delivered to you when you first started shucking?

GR: They were delivered in the shell. We had, well, I call them stool. They had a stool. You had a block of wood where you stabbed oysters on. You had a piece of iron and an iron stuff where you cracked oysters and shucked them like that. That's how we got into them.

MW: Were there different styles of opening oysters?

GR: No. Well, there are some people who were breakers there. They had a block. They would break the mouth of the oysters and shuck it like that. But we were stabbers. If I'd thought, I'd have brought one of my knives and showed you just what it looked like.

MS: [laughter]

GR: We stabbed the oysters like that.

MS: How did you get paid for what you shucked? How many did you shuck?

GR: Well, when we made \$50, we were almost rich because we got 25 cents for a stove pipe for it. I think it got one because they were bigger than that. Had shucked one of those big, tall things for 25 cents.

MS: Twenty-five cents.

MW: For finished oysters.

GR: Huh?

MW: Well, the oyster without the shell for 25 cents.

GR: Raw, yes.

MS: How long would it take you to do that?

GR: Well, some people were pretty fast, didn't take too long.

MS: Half an hour, an hour?

GR: Then they had different sizes. We had the larger one, the medium ones, and the smaller ones.

MS: They went in different buckets?

GR: They went in different buckets, yes.

MS: Twenty-five cents for a bucket of oysters.

GR: Twenty-five cents.

MW: So, you had the buckets in front of you. You had to separate them, and you sell?

GR: Had the buckets on the side like the smallest one, the mediums, and the large ones. Of course, you got more of the smaller ones than you did mediums. You had the block in front here. You cracked oysters. You opened it that way.

MS: So, you got to be a millionaire doing that?

GR: Yes. [laughter]

MS: [laughter]

GR: Yes, we got rich doing that.

FS: Well, speaking of millionaires, I read a little article that said that during that time in Port Norris, there were more millionaires in the Port Norris, in this area, than they were in the United States.

GR: Well, where are they at now?

FS: Oh.

MS: [laughter]

FS: But that is what the article said that there were more millionaires in this area.

GR: Oh, yes.

FS: They said there must be millionaires because of the oyster industry.

MW: I have certainly heard the same thing said many times.

MS: The business went from being millionaire producers to, as my cousin used to say, that he had the fourth, the sure way of becoming a millionaire in the oyster business. Now, this was in the late [19]70s, early [19]80s. He said the best way, the only way to become a millionaire in oyster business today is to start as a billionaire.

MS: [laughter]

MW: A little different than in the [19]20s, then.

MS: Right. He said his clam business got him oystering, was the only way he would stay in the oyster business.

MW: Maybe if we start here and move down. Maybe tell us which of the shucking houses you worked at, and if that was a different era, how they were different from each other. Beryl?

MS: I think they're all the same.

MS: I'd really tell you a lot. A lot of them telling you how it made out, but they didn't tell you what we were doing and how we were doing and the prices that we were getting for a call on 8 pounds of oysters. I'm pretty sure all of them know what I'm trying to say. How you taking 9 and 10, or 8. We were getting 55 cents when I came in New Jersey. Maryland, we were getting, I think, what, 45 cents a gallon. Now, they go by the pound, but you still get your – don't care how they go. But that place on the Maurice, the cullers that paid you a whole lot. They gave you nothing for what you're doing. I shucked oysters before a lot of these people even hardly knew what an oyster was. I can tell you a whole lot what I went through. I know it was a lot of them went through. So, I came in New Jersey. It was almost just as bad as Crisfield [laughter] when it came to oysters probably. I worked when I first came to New Jersey in 1946 to shuck oysters. I shucked for the Bivalve Packing Company of William Sharp. He was running during the time from Blue Point. It was [inaudible] the way I call it, taking those oysters. I'm pretty sure a lot of you know (Bert Alco?) who used to live up at Port Norris Express, you that lived in Port Norris. But I'm telling you, he run the cup over and knock it in the floor, said to give them back to you. [laughter] They'd take them after you leave and pick them up on the floor and put them in the door. That's where you got them. That's where they made all the money. We made nothing. I've shucked for 20 cents for 8 pounds myself. I've shucked for 20. That was in Crisfield place and of Andrew Marshall, I think a guy that owned at Baltimore that run above Port Norris Express. Not Port Norris, the Big House down there and all the fellows. These oyster houses were run by people out of Baltimore, Maryland. These oyster houses right here run by, I think, it was the Lottman's and the (McInnis?) House down here called the Big House. I think Freddie East, he'd come up here to Baltimore. He's the one that started New Bay down there, wherever Robin Brothers used to have. Then the Big House was called the McInnis House back there years ago. The fellow would come up here to Baltimore and right back before any of these fellows in Port Norris have their own oyster house. He knew about the oysters because they had them. That's why those folks came up out of Baltimore, Maryland to start these oyster

houses back there in the [19]20s, [19]27, [19]26. I think the [19]26 was the first year they started running. Fred East, he came to Baltimore. He was running New Bay, that was one. Then Newcomb used to run. I think he was head of McInnis House that – I can't recall the guy that would run that during time, but he was a Newcomb anyway. But I'm telling you, all these oyster houses were running down here years ago. It was those old fellows that came up out of Baltimore. Then they turn them over to these fellows here because these fellows had the oysters. They used to rally them up. They were New Bayers there when Fred East, when he first came here. Fred East left them off this side, went on Maurice River side, down, and put up an oyster house with Stoneman Brothers and those over on Maurice River side. A lot of people were over there. I'm telling you Sammies, but it was a send where we had to live. Those houses they had holes in them that big in the wintertime. We had to take the pasteboard boxes those young cans come in and put up inside. Those houses were just that bad. Summertime, you could put up with them, but wintertime, you couldn't. I'm telling you how it was. I'm going to tell you the good part, and I'm going to tell you the bad part because I know better. [laughter]

MW: How many of you started living there?

BW: I can't say nothing too good about none of them because it was slave drivers, like I said. [laughter]

MW: How many of you lived in that...

BW: Like I said, I told a lot of this at Bay Day that everybody knows Bay Day because people from everywhere want to know about oyster shucking. I know if anybody knew about it, I knew about it. I owned the boats. I worked in the oyster house. I was culling those oysters for the big ones, separate. They had the small ones to shuck, sent the big one to Philadelphia. We had to shuck the little, small stuff. That's the way it went. They had a house there in Port Norris, had an oyster house there. There were three oyster houses right on reach, about four of them, Dubois, Clyde Phillips, William Sharp, and Dr. Sharp right there on that water. You'd ship oysters on the train to Philadelphia, bagged oysters. [inaudible] would bag up and send it. He was sending two or three box cards a day to Philadelphia. Well, I do know Ray Smart at Port Norris. I thank the Lord that he let me live this long to tell some of them.

MW: Well, we appreciate you sharing. I am curious to know how many of you started out in the houses that were provided through the shucking houses. I do not know during what time that was. Did most of the people that worked in the shucking houses live in housing that was part of that? Or did some people come from someplace else? I think you said you went to Newport when you first came. How many of you started off in the shucking houses provided?

FS: I did until 1950. I came here in [19]45. We lived here for five years. Then we moved up West Main Street. Then my mother moved in town.

MW: Did a lot of people use it as a starting off point to get situated and then...

FS: I think so.

MS: Could I ask you a question? There used to be a trolley that ran I think all the way from 553. I think it came out of Bridgeton and went all the way down 553, all the way to Port Norris. Did a lot of the shucking people ride on that?

FS: Oh, I don't know about that.

MS: Was it in existence when you were shucking?

FS: I don't remember.

FS: Not in the [19]40s.

FS: I know there used to be a railroad track that ran out to Memorial Avenue.

MS: Because we have old pictures. I don't know what the date is. You can see the trolley at [inaudible] here in Cedarville. We have a picture of our house with the trolley in front of it.

FS: Really?

MS: So, it was there. I don't know what date.

FS: Yes, I don't know.

MS: I don't know when it stopped.

MS: I came to Port Norris in about 1933 and was a local young then. I never remember the trolley running in Port Norris. I lived in Port Norris until I went to college.

MS: What year was that?

MS: About [19]33, [19]32.

MS: Thirty-two, there was no trolley here.

MS: Well, I never saw the trolley run on the track.

MS: So, it must be before [inaudible].

MS: Probably before 1940. That's a wild guess.

FS: I know there was a train, but I don't know nothing about the trolley.

MS: From the time on the buses. I remember the train down. I remember the [inaudible].

FS: The train used to come right down there where the municipal building is now. Remember there used to be a train station there?

FS: Station there?

MS: I remember they used to go down [inaudible].

FS: The chain.

FS: Yes, that's what we were talking about.

MW: How about the equipment? There are some pieces here from some of our collections. I do not know what era they are from. Do you guys recognize the various items there? Would they have been before when most of you were working?

FS: I think they were before my time. I don't remember seeing them.

FS: All I remember is the breaking block and the bucket and...

FS: The bucket.

FS: The bucket. There was that gallon can.

MW: Can you talk about how this was used?

FS: Yes. That's a special metal.

FS: There was a metal equipment. There was metal put on here. That's what you would hit the oyster on with the cracking [inaudible].

MS: But that's brick and block.

MW: Now, the other one?

MS: A brick and block is round.

FS: Yes, what they used the hammer for.

MS: Yes. But that's what we stabbed oysters on.

BW: I'm going down there next week.

MW: This one here has holes in the bottom.

FS: Yes, I don't know about that.

FS: I don't know what that was for. I don't know.

MW: I think that...

MS: That was a major level. There would be a bushel or shell stock. We used to offload the bushels in those.

MW: So, this was not actually for the shuckers?

MS: Not for shuckers.

MW: That is good to know.

MS: Some of the companies had a trolley like it run through the house where they dumped things right where the oysters came in overhead. They would dump the [inaudible] or whatever they were. I don't know if they used those for that or not, but they dumped the day one shuckers in ditches. Our oyster company did that when Morgan was in charge of it for some years.

MW: I have seen pictures of the motorized little track that would bring oysters around to the shucking stalls. There are also pictures of people doing that with a wheelbarrow. Can you tell me a little bit about what that was like or what you remember? Ms. Towner?

MT: They would bring the oysters around in boxes. They would have maybe six more baskets on the thing that you could pick up and push. As they come through, they would tap your box. That meant you could get down. Once you got down, then they would take the basket, throw the oysters up on the box, and then they would do the next person the same way. Well, then after you shuck the oysters, the shells went down beside the box. Then they had another person that came through with a wheelbarrow that would scoop the shells out, put in the wheelbarrow and push them out, take them outdoors and dump them up. That's the reason why they called Shell Pile, Shell Pile because you could always see a pile of shells.

MW: A pile of shells. I know that you were paid for how much you shucked, so that was a motivation to be quick. But was there any kind of a feeling of competition to see who was making them come get the shells quicker? Was there much of that kind of competition amongst the shuckers?

MT: No.

MW: No?

FS: No.

MT: Because you worked hard to get the shells out. A lot of people needed the job. So, they got the shells out like they were supposed to.

FS: The only competition is the shuckers would be competing against each other to see who could get a gallon the fastest.

MS: I used to shuck at 60 cents an hour.

MW: Sixty cents an hour.

MS: Take 60 cents an hour over here, dump them out, and come on back.

FS: What was the most gallons anybody ever shipped in a day?

MW: Does anybody know the answer to that? How many?

MS: Thirty-five. Well, some of them would go higher than that. Like I said, it was gallon, but they were partial [inaudible], almost feel like. The highest was 30 gallons out here if you're talking about this shell, 30.

MW: How many of the folks...

MS: Like I said, you were gallons. [laughter]

FS: Yes, they were. [inaudible]

MS: The highest I ever shucked was 22. [inaudible] possible. Of course, like I said, I would shuck right now if I wanted to. But I don't mind.

MS: When you say the oysters were as big as your hand, do you mean after you shucked?

MS: No.

MS: [inaudible] oysters as big as your hand. Big oysters, not directed from the whole [inaudible]. Newcomb had some of them, which I shucked in Philadelphia on what they call a raw box that we used to stand up in Philadelphia. He had some awful large ones down there. One thing that carrying that lump that's floating now, he had scows alongside there from now there to where the arena used to be. He had scows where he'd put his oysters and float so they'd get fat, from that ridge, coming in all the way in that where the clam house is. That's where that little place where he had floats where he put the oysters. Just [inaudible]. Couldn't cut them no bad way.

MW: Is that like the tonged oysters now?

MS: There weren't too many people who oysters of that measure.

MS: The heat where they shucked.

MS: [inaudible]

MW: Is that like the tonged oysters now?

FS: It was.

MW: Is that like the tonged oysters now?

MS: Well, the tonging now? The tonging was not [inaudible]. See that? That's the little groove where you tonged now. Some of the grooves were caught from the shells. Not tonging oysters I'm talking about. That was oysters that I'm talking about. The shell wasn't like that. These shells on the tonged oysters dissolve, crack, crumble along if you don't just did like that. Those shells were solid.

FS: Hurt your hand.

MS: The shell never broke. You'd break your knife before you cracked it.

FS: Hurt your hand. [laughter]

MW: There was a question over here about whether there was heat in the shucking houses. I wonder if someone could answer that question. What it was like comfort-wise in the buildings? Was there much in the way of heat while you were shucking?

ED: Yes, there was heat. But it was not the kind of heat that they have today. Now, you had those coal stoves, old pot on the coal stove, one or two in the oyster house. You had to get off your oyster box to get down and get water around. I don't know whether any of those ladies down there have done that or not. But you have to get off that oyster box and get around that stove to get warm. A lot of them would put their gloves on top of them, the muddy gloves, to try to warm it up so they could go back on the oyster boxes. I've done that in Crisfield, done it right up here in Port Norris. Yes, sir. Big House and they didn't have any kind of heat that they have now. Old cold stove, those old pot on the cold stove, that's what you had, two or three of them.

FS: [laughter] Oh, it's just that it didn't have [inaudible] for these.

MW: I was wondering of the shuckers. Was it more women or more men who were shuckers?

MS: Shucking business.

MW: Was it equal?

GR: It's about equal.

MW: About equal? What did you wear when you went to work? Did they give me a uniform, or can you tell me?

MS: [laughter]

MS: No. All [inaudible].

GR: You wore pants and sweaters and whatever you put on to keep warm.

FS: [laughter]

GR: There were no uniforms.

MS: How long was your work day? When did you start working in the day?

FS: Oh, it was at 2:00 p.m.

GR: 6:00 a.m.

MS: What time did you end?

GR: Until the oysters were gone. I guess they stopped around 3:00 p.m.

MS: Now, how many days a week?

FS: From 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

GR: Five days.

FS: It was until 2:00 p.m.

MS: You worked from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

FS: [laughter]

FS: Oh, about time.

ED: At 6:45 p.m. 5:30 p.m. for our union was the only time that we got that time cut down from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Yes, sir. It was from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. or 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

FS: From 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

MS: If you didn't work, you didn't have no job.

FS: If you're staying, you stay.

MW: They are asking about standing or sitting down there.

FS: You mom and daddy used to go out there...

FS: Yes, no sitting down.

MW: Did you have any kind of breaks?

FS: Yes.

MS: [inaudible] any time now. You couldn't do it then. You come in at 10:00 a.m. There was nothing too much then. The people who were coming back there at 10 a.m., you had no job. You'd get up at 4:00 a.m., 6:00 a.m. [inaudible] was same way.

FS: I got flowers [inaudible].

MS: You had time to spend your coins. [laughter]

FS: I remember a whistle blowing, but I can't remember what the whistle was blowing for. But I do remember a whistle blowing.

MW: Can anyone answer what the whistle was?

MS: 9:00 a.m. break.

MW: 9:00 a.m. break?

MS: We had a 9:00 a.m. break.

MW: Would that be something that all of the shucking houses would do?

MS: Yes, [inaudible].

MW: Where did the whistle come from? Was it at one of the houses?

MS: The one that I worked at, we had a whistle blow at 9:00 a.m. to get off from oyster picking and go for coffee, sandwiches, [inaudible].

MW: Was there another break later in the day?

MS: Not until you're done.

MW: Not until you are done.

GR: Well, that must have been the later years because when I started, we had no break, only for lunch. You had a half an hour for lunch. We didn't have no break. Of course, if you want to stop and get off, it was up to you if you took a break. But they didn't give you no break.

MW: Now, one of you said that you shucked at the house over Maurice River. I am sorry.

FS: Ms. Robinson.

MW: Was that Ms. Robinson?

GR: Yes.

MS: Yes.

MW: Did you live over that side of the river, or did you come back here?

GR: It was when we first came to Maurice River. Everything was done by boat. There was no road there then. Everything was like an island. There was no road. The kids went to school by boat. Everything was by boat.

MW: So, you lived on that side of the river?

GR: Yes.

MW: You had to come to Port Norris for groceries and that sort of thing?

GR: Yes, and then go back. We used to come over there and take orders. Then whatever you ordered, he'd bring it to you. Of course, I know the pounds were short. But he'd grab whatever you ordered. He'd bring it. Now, whether it was right thing, I don't know.

FS: [laughter]

GR: That kept me from having to go to the store. They never [inaudible].

MW: How many shucking houses were on the other side of the river?

GR: Two, Freddy's and Stoneman.

MW: Did all the people that worked at them also live on that side of the river, or did some come back to shore?

GR: Well, at that time, you had to live over there because everything was by boat. Later years, they put a road over there. Then people lived in their own homes and came over there by cars.

MW: There was a question back here.

FS: I'm just wondering what the season was. Then when the season was over, then what did you do?

MW: Go on [inaudible].

GR: A lot of people went back to Maryland when the season was over. We started in September until April, I believe it was.

FS: September all the way to April.

MW: Mary Ellen?

FS: You said something about having to fill up so much. In other words, when you cut the different oysters, you said they were different sizes. Did everybody get different sizes, or did some get smaller ones, in other words, when you started shucking again?

FS: [laughter]

GR: Yes, there was three different sizes, the smaller ones, the medium, and the large.

FS: They were mixed.

MW: So, then you sorted them?

FS: Yes.

MW: When they came to you, they were all together. You sorted them.

FS: You sorted them when you put them in the cans.

MS: After you shucked them, you sorted them.

FS: After you shucked them. [inaudible]

FS: She's still working as a shucker some?

MW: Yes.

FS: How is it different now?

GR: It's fun now.

FS: It's fun?

MS: [laughter]

FS: You have a nice stool and a moving belt.

GR: Pardon?

FS: You have a moving belt and a nice stool to sit on?

GR: Yes, the air condition if it's hot.

FS: More breaks?

GR: Yes, you can break when you want.

FS: [inaudible]

MS: [laughter]

GR: This is my foreman.

MS: [laughter]

FS: Everything is good.

MS: [laughter]

MS: You shucked from September to April. What did you do in the summer months?

GR: A lot of people from [inaudible] all did nothing.

FS: I think the one woman...

MS: Because now there's no work anywhere.

MS: I believe I saw [inaudible]. After April and June, I saw [inaudible] all the way up to there. It was all from there. That was years ago. You got \$4 a day. [inaudible]

FS: [laughter]

MW: You had a question?

MS: Yes. Once you filled the container full of oysters, did someone come along and pick that up? How did you keep track of what you had or what you turned in as a full container?

FS: You take it to the skimmer. You yourself take it to the skimmer. When I started, they were paying by the gallon. All over the gallon you had, they would give it back to you. They call that a block. But now, they take everything that you put in. You get paid by the pound.

MS: But you'd get some sort of little ticket or a mark up here?

FS: Yes, they write it on a card.

MS: Then you turn them in at the end of the week?

FS: No, that card is for you to keep a count. But he writes on a big card when he weighs the oysters up. That goes into the office.

MS: Turn it in every night after you're done shucking.

MS: That's [inaudible]?

MS: Yes.

MS: When was it in the beginning?

FS: When my dad was running the shucking house where skimmer was, he was in the packing room just on the other side of the wall of the shucking room. They would come in and dump it into the skimmer right there. He would measure it. I remember my dad paid by the count. But it probably was a gallon.

FS: I think so.

FS: Probably was a gallon because they always poured back what didn't quite make it.

FS: Yes, almost a gallon.

FS: But there was a piece of plywood alongside the door that would come in. He would write next to the shucker's shucking box number. Each one of the boxes had a number.

FS: With your name.

FS: If he didn't know the shucker well enough, he asked for the number. But a lot of those skimmers knew the numbers of most of the shuckers anyhow. But he would tally by tally marks. There was no card at that time from the shucker. But the shucker had a good memory. [laughter] He would watch him, skim, and he would watch. The shucker would know the count. He would make sure that what was there – because the skimmer after he marked it, would put it back out where he could see it. That way, they kept track of it. That stayed with the hierarchy of the shucking house. Now, the skimmer, at the end of the day, would take that off of that board and take it to the office. Then the girls in the office would make sure that the people got the money.

MW: Rita?

FS: Did shuckers ever have any way to move up, so to speak?

MS: [laughter]

MS: Absolutely we did.

MW: Even among yourselves, like you were really good or really old or whatever, you got a better box, better location, or you were [inaudible] with the skimmer?

FS: Well, I had...

MS: When there was water.

FS: Well, that had to do with their interest and whether or not they could [inaudible] they were good shucker. If they're a good shucker, we'll leave them in the shucking room.

MS: [laughter]

FS: Since there were so many people who wanted to get work in the shucking house, I guess you all had to really be on your best behavior. What would ever get you fired?

FS: Beryl can go.

FS: Which is not to say any you were ever fired.

MS: [laughter]

GR: Cutting up the oysters.

FS: Not going.

GR: Cutting oyster.

FS: Missing a lot of time from work.

GR: Some people couldn't take the oyster out the shell. They were cutting it.

FS: She said cutting the oyster as it was being taken out of the shell was not good.

MW: So, if you didn't show up, if you damaged the oysters, didn't do a cleanup. What else?

BW: They all got wasted to go get checked up.

GR: [laughter]

BW: [laughter]

MW: Wasted in what way?

BW: Huh?

MW: Get wasted in what way?

BW: Get wasted going in and out. You start to cut them up like that real man will tell you. A couple times, keep on cutting while they're at the door. You hang on three engines in and out.

GR: [laughter] Oh, boy. [laughter]

MS: You have cans here. I'd like to know if you know what happened to the oysters after you shucked them. Were there any canning operations going on down here, or were they shipped somewhere else?

MS: You packed them.

MS: All the shucked oysters, you were putting them in the cans.

FS: For market.

MS: Were they for market? Were they canned here?

BW: Yes, it used be. They went to [inaudible] after that. When you're done, you put that there. You came upside down from the oyster house and iced them down. That way, you got a nice view, and you shipped out.

GR: Got them shipped out.

MW: It is the only one in operation. They just send them someplace else to be put in cans. They all did it. They all had their own cans.

FS: Which were packed in oyster houses.

MS: Was it done in the oyster house?

FS: Yes.

FS: It still is.

MS: Everybody worked just exclusively at the canning operation? They had to have some [inaudible], or was it all automated?

FS: No.

MS: All done by hand.

MS: Done by hand?

MS: The only place I saw automated was there was one of our punch maker, Nick Holden, the punch maker. Noticed that they got a flare top on it. That the top on this one, this kind of can was put on by a machine. Right at the time, that went into the machine. It was handwork. They were filled by hand, put in machines by hand. The machine just went around the circle. It would drop a lid on it. Then it would have a ring that spun around. It rolled the top. So, it looked like what the bottom looks like.

MS: These are the same way?

MS: Yes, but some there, I thought I saw a pound can there that had a hand in there.

MS: But these are all originals?

MS: The one that has a lid-like gallon can. Is there a pipe? A can has a lid, like a gallon can.

MS: Yes, that other one.

MS: Not a lid. For a lid like a gallon, I thought I saw one down here.

MS: Yes.

FS: No, I don't think there was a short. It was the long one then.

FS: There was a short but not long.

MW: Kate?

FS: I was wondering if people cut themselves very often.

GR: Yes.

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

FS: Now that you are older, do you have some arthritis in your hand?

FS: [laughter]

FS: Yes.

FS: Dumb question.

FS: All over.

MS: [laughter]

FS: When we go to take a tour for the lookout, I got two of them over there, the machine. Put the pipe in, weld half pipe all over that building there.

MW: Freddie, they asked about cutting. You told me something about when you first started. You did a little bit of shucking before you got into other things.

FS: Back when I was first shucking, I cut my hand. The mark is right there. I quit.

MS: [laughter]

BW: My shucking career started when I was about 5 years old. We used to shuck open oysters for mom. Dad and I would go down to the basement, open oysters. We put them in the pot, and then another put in the mouth.

FS: [laughter]

BW: The other one went in the pot, and the next one went in your mouth. One for the pot and one for the stomach. I did the same thing. The knife was named stabber. [laughter] It was a stabber knife. It went through. That was the end of my shucking career. In fact, I didn't eat the oysters until I was, I think, 45 after that.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Were all the shuckers in the shucking houses African American?

GR: At that time, yes.

FS: At that time, yes.

MW: I understand now there are some folks from Mexico?

FS: Spanish-speaking.

MW: Were there any other races in between, or any other folks that worked at the shucking houses?

GR: Not at any time when I shucked, it wasn't. In these later years, maybe.

MW: What can you tell us about the – oh, I am sorry.

MS: There was a question earlier when you were talking about the number of hours they worked. But there was a comment about when the union came in, the hours got shorter. Could you talk a little bit about that experience?

MW: That is exactly what I was saying. It was about the union. Can you talk a little bit about the union and how it started and what it changed?

FS: I didn't belong in those unions.

GR: I did. If you didn't pay the union, you didn't go to work.

FS: I was somewhere else then.

GR: That's when it started. Right, Freddie?

FS: Yes.

GR: If you didn't pay when you're supposed to, they'd pull you off your box.

FS: They wouldn't work.

GR: Couldn't work.

FS: All summer.

MW: What about the benefits that it brought? How did it change the pay scale?

FS: They got \$8 a day, and with the union, about 12, twelve hours a day. 7:00 a.m. [inaudible].

MW: What year did the union come in?

FS: It was in the [19]50s.

MW: In the [19]50s is when the union came in?

FS: In the [19]50s.

GR: Yes.

FS: In the early [19]50s.

MS: What did you get paid a day for a gallon of oysters?

GR: \$4.

FS: They only shuck by the gallon. Actually, they shuck by the pound.

MS: What would it amount to? Any idea?

MT: Varies, depending on how much you put on there. It's \$1.10 a pound. It depends on how much you put on the pot. I've seen people go out with 15.

FS: 17, \$18 a week.

MT: 17 and \$18.

GR: When I shucked, whatever you put on the pot, when the stove pipe was full, they'd have

something to level it.

MW: To level it off?

GR: To level it off. I don't care how much was on there, you got 25 cents in my time.

MW: So, if it was not filled, they called it a bluff and sent it back?

GR: If it wasn't filled, they poured it back. You took it back and filled it up.

FS: [laughter]

MW: But if it was overfilled, they did not pay any extra?

GR: No, they skimmed it off and gave it back to you.

MW: Oh, they do give it back to you.

GR: Yes.

FS: Did you get the small one once in a while?

GR: I didn't like them. [laughter]

MW: How about you, Mrs. Florence Robinson, did you like oysters?

GR: I didn't like the oysters.

FR: But I didn't swallow any of them. Now I didn't cook, I had these raw oysters.

GR: [laughter]

MW: Mrs. Robinson, did you like oysters?

FR: No.

MW: Did you like to eat them?

FR: Not Jersey oysters, no. I didn't like the [inaudible].

MS: [laughter]

MW: Strike that from the tape.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Other than there, do any of them...

FR: I don't eat none of them.

GR: I eat Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia.

FS: I was wondering if you were standing or sitting on a bench or stool.

GR: Standing.

FR: How close were you to each other? Could you talk while you were working?

FS: All day you would.

MS: [laughter]

FS: You cut up all day. Can laugh and talk all day.

MT: Because otherwise she would be bored.

FS: Be bored to death.

MW: When did it switch from standing to being able to sit?

MT: When you take a break, that's the only time you're sitting.

MW: Still standing. Maybe we can pass this down, but just to have a visual for any of you that have not seen them. The *South Jersey Magazine* had a South Jersey oyster industry piece put together. There is a page on shucking here. I had it marked. You can see what the older shucking houses looked like. Maybe you guys can pass this on down.

FS: Is there any place to sit once you are [inaudible]?

MW: Once in a while, but I do not think there is anyone who has a stock that shares them regularly. They used to carry them all, obviously.

MS: The bogarts in Millville.

MS: The bogarts in Millville [inaudible].

FS: Or we can catch them [inaudible].

MS: [inaudible] efficacies.

GR: Bogarts.

MW: It's now Bogarts.

MS: Oh, it's now Bogarts.

FS: Did they ever find any pearls?

MW: Can you talk about finding any pearls?

FS: I don't think they'd be sitting here.

MS: [laughter]

MT: A lot of you people say they found them. I never found any.

FS: I found them. [inaudible], it has a very irregular, tiny pearl in it. Supposedly, it came from an oyster. My grandmother had this oyster. She lives in Millville. So, anyhow, somebody in the Millville family found that oyster, that pearl and that oyster, and made it to George Barns. It wouldn't bring any money. It's small and very irregular. So, we have it. [laughter]

MW: That is nice.

CP: I found one as big as my little fingernail, almost perfectly round, had a lot of grey in it, probably working up. I still have it at home. I got that when I was working in the packing room as a skimmer. So, the shucker in the process of shucking let it go through.

MS: [laughter]

CP: Well, I had another one that I chased all the way down the drain, but I didn't quite get it.

MS: [laughter]

CP: It was white and really [inaudible] at all.

MS: Clyde, when you were skimming, you know the little crabs you have in there.

CP: The crab, yes.

MS: Did you let them go through, or they had to be out?

CP: They went home.

MS: They went home.

CP: My mother used to make crab fritters. I'm telling you, it was the only seafood I like.

FS: There was a salad that my mother made it.

CP: I worked thirteen years in the Oyster Lab. In those thirteen years, I think I saw three pea crabs.

MS: We see a lot of them on the boat when we [inaudible].

CP: Recently?

FS: Oh, yes.

MS: Yes, in the last how many years that we've been on the boat.

CP: Well, there's a lot of small crabs down there. There's a lot of pea crab. The oyster crab lives inside the oyster in a small house.

MW: [inaudible] quite good.

MS: Their taste, they're quite good. They're always small. You have to eat an awful lot of them.

MW: I heard a comment about a crab salad.

FS: My mother used to make a salad out of them.

MW: How about that? Like a vinegar-based salad?

MS: I guess it's like a seafood salad.

MW: With mayonnaise?

MS: I never ate it because I couldn't imagine those claws.

MS: [laughter]

MW: How many people here have eaten a pea crab?

CP: Break their mouth and go for it.

MW: [laughter]

CP: Shove it all.

FS: You did shove.

FS: We used to send them for somebody.

MW: Other questions from the audience or anybody? There are some relatives of folks with shucking houses or in the industry here. Was there something that you came that you wanted to share? Memories from Peterson or other...

CP: I got a couple shucker stories. That my dad never fired anybody because he didn't put out oysters. They had no number that you had to make. We had one man in box number, I think it was 4, that constantly shucked about a gallon and a half a week.

FS: [laughter]

CP: He was an old gent. He just was lonely at home. So, he came to work. Dad gave him the stall so that he could work and talk with his friends and just have a good time. The other fellow that liked to talk but I can't remember their names, but number 13, Fox. This guy had to have number 13. He was such a good shucker that dad says, "You can have it." Number 13 just happened to be on the right-hand side of the skimming room. Now, all he had to do was get out his box, and he was right at the door, saving time for shucking. The trouble is it was box number 13. He said, "Captain Bud, I can't work at box number 13. Can you change the number?" Dad says, "Yes." So, he put a one on it, 113. My dad said, "Your number's been changed. You can do much better." He says he was really happy. His number had been changed. He went up there and looked at it. It was 113. "Captain Bud, I can't work with that number." There was a guy in town by the name of Nelson Lanning. Nelson Lanning was the undertaker. That was his telephone number. It wasn't on the [inaudible].

MS: [laughter]

CP: So, dad changed it to 131.

MS: [laughter]

CP: Of course, he was happy. By the way, he put the 113 knowing what it meant.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Jeff?

MS: This had to have been prior to World War II, so I was just a kid then. But I believe it was the Big House. Dad didn't have a shucking house then. We went down to the Big House. The shuckers – I'm just going to go through the motions of this – shuckers up there can tell you whether or not I'm right. But they had their area. I'm left-handed, so I'm going to be doing these left-handed folks. The stove pipes were for them because we graded in four different grades, standards, selects, extra selects, and counts, from smallest to the biggest. Our oysters are right here. The shucker would move the head, get an oyster, bring it down to the cracking box or block. He would take the iron on there. Here was a block of wood that had a little piece of steel sticking out toward the edge. You would lay the brick down top that, hit that with the rod. Then as he was going this way, he would put that stabber down inside and cut that first muscle and blow the one shell over his shoulder. Then he would cut the bottom one. The knife would be

under the oyster and the index fingers all on top. Then he'd drop that shell down alongside of him and go like this and put it in whatever pot it had to go in. Well, this was just a steady motion back and forth. Then down the Big House prior to World War II or maybe during World War II, they sang old spirituals. Of course, they were keeping time with the music. So, I think, just about all shucked the same amount of oysters. The only difference would be where they could pick up the oyster, and they'd open it. It wasn't an oyster in what we called the box. There was no oyster in the shell. That would cost you one. So, you had to go home, or something else would happen. You sometimes pick up one. You look at it. The shucker is the ultimate culler of oysters, culling oysters and picking out the good ones from the bad and all that kind of stuff. The shucker is the ultimate culler. They cull them on the oyster boats out in the bay, get them away from all the trash. But there were many times when the shucker would look at it, and I'm not saying any of these folks did it, [laughter] but they'll know what I'm talking about. It'd be an awful small oyster. It would take too much time to open that oyster to make a big dent in the pot so that that oyster unshucked would go into the shells and would be carried out into the shell pile. That would make a change. I got a whole bunch of little, tiny ones, small ones, too small, shucked oysters as far as the shucker was concerned, that would go in the pile. So, that would change the number. End of World War II, when some of the young fellows came back from the war, they'd been outside town. They knew that the things were better out there. They knew what money could do for them if they had it. So, they would shuck a little faster. They wanted to shuck faster than everybody else, so they can go ahead and shuck when the singing stopped. That to me was a great loss to the shucker who, it was a game. But to me that was a great loss. But that was the process right there. Then they would go dump it in at the end of the shucking pile.

MS: Well, I've made reference to the Big House. That's [inaudible].

MS: Yes, we had real [inaudible]. Yes, I'm quite [inaudible].

FS: Well, Clark right now, we got to try to do the same thing. That's my job. When the oyster gets its [inaudible], they go down there. I put it in the holes, blow the whistle, you either crate it or you go home.

FS: [laughter]

CP: I worked for thirteen years in the Oyster Lab.

MS: It was something small with [inaudible]. There wasn't one pair of [inaudible].

FS: Too many were down there.

MS: They weren't shucking oysters.

MS: I was here. I was shucking.

FS: Well, there's Nantucket.

MS: Nantucket, no way. I think oysters take an awful lot in that pot. That takes a whole lot fewer oysters. I forget the numbers. Does anybody here know the numbers to the gallon for the different sizes? I'll just pull some numbers out the hat. We'll say...

MS: Three hundred for selects.

MS: Say it again.

MS: About 300 for selects.

MS: Three hundred for selects, that sounds awful high.

MS: Or maybe medium. I know there's 300 in one gallon or something.

MS: Anybody else have an idea?

FS: Three hundred is close to the number there are in a bushel, right?

MS: There's about 300 oysters in a bushel.

MS: A bushel is a gallon.

MS: Is it really?

MS: But therefore, the standard would have more, maybe 400. But when you get up to the counts, there may only be a hundred in there. So, if you're going to get X number of cents for dollars for a gallon, makes a whole lot more sense not to shuck the little ones. I'd be fired.

MS: [laughter]

FS: A lot of the small oysters are fat. They got meat inside of them.

MS: Oh, yes. Like I said, it takes just as much time to shuck the small ones as it does the big ones. But it takes a whole lot more little ones to make a gallon or a pound.

FS: Now, when I started shucking oysters, if you didn't make those oysters right, you didn't have no job. You didn't have no job. They would call you right back or wouldn't even leave you, let you leave and just, you dumped a pot of oysters there. It was all mixed up with different sizes. You had to stand there and pick every one of them and put them where they're supposed to be.

MW: How did you learn in the beginning? Did they ever let you work with someone else until you...

FS: Someone would show you.

FS: Someone different would come and show you how to shuck them and how to grade them.

Then it was up to you. If you wanted a job, you better do it.

FS: Once you get into the habit of doing that, it's hard to break from it. I know a lot of people I see can shuck. They call it shuck straight up. That's putting everything in the same pot. I can't do it. I've tried it, but I can't do it.

FS: You can't.

FS: Because we were taught better. It's embarrassing when they have you standing up there because I was one of them.

MS: [laughter]

FS: That's how I know. [laughter] That meant don't cut too many either. [laughter]

MW: Because then they are going to look at everyone, right?

FS: Those oysters that are being shucked here now, are they all open oysters?

FS: Open oysters.

FS: Was there ever a time when they shucked oysters that were not from here?

MW: She was asking if all the oysters that are being shucked today are from Delaware Bay, or do you bring some in?

BW: No, down up here [inaudible].

FS: Right, same here.

MW: Has that always been the practice? [inaudible] You want to repeat what you said on where they are coming from?

BW: Some come from Maryland. Some come from Connecticut, come down from [inaudible] was going on in there. Some [inaudible].

MW: When there were more shucking houses in those other places, do you know way back whether oysters were brought in from outside of Delaware Bay?

BW: Back then in [19]45, some would reach them out there in the basin and put them out there in the woods and lift them and bring them here. The head would float, but you had your own oyster.

MW: Did the shucking houses do any of the oysters from Chesapeake or from Connecticut back then?

BW: Yes.

FS: They came here because this is where the shuckers were.

MS: You know you got work for them. You had to. That day they would come. It took them the next day to go [inaudible] back then.

FS: I was wondering if people still have ties to Crisfield, if you go back forth or relatives? Sounds like so.

MS: I do.

MW: You raised your hand [inaudible]. You just raised your hand.

FS: We did an entire one of these sessions on that a few years back. You have got a number of people who are talking up here about when they go. There are also relationships with the churches. We had a session actually right in this church where we had people talking about the relationship from Crisfield and Marion Station. There was Crisfield Day here and Port Norris Day down there, when there were buses and groups of people who were down and celebrated together.

FS: Ms. Georgia, can tell you about that.

MW: Would you like to tell us a little more?

GR: I'll do.

MW: Ms. Robinson, would you like to tell us a little bit more about the Crisfield days and the affections that are still there?

GR: Well, this church has been communicating with Maryland ever since – well, I'll say over fifty years because they come up here, and we go down there. We go to Crisfield. I believe it was about a month ago, in October. Then is it September? When did we go down to Westfield in April, we go to (Westervelt?) not too far from Crisfield. But then Crisfield comes up here to us twice a year. We've been doing that for more than fifty years.

MS: Is it a certain weekend in October that you go to Crisfield? Is it always the same weekend that you go to Crisfield?

GR: Yes.

MW: Some other questions from the crowd?

MS: I heard there were some buried deeper in the desert and are this big. But I do know [inaudible].

FS: I heard the same thing of October [inaudible].

FS: Second Sunday in November.

FS: Are you sure?

FS: They come back up here.

MW: We have got such a big Peterson and [inaudible] contingency here. Can we hear some of your recollections of the family business?

MS: Well, I think I would think of one. Carlos is manning up to work on the boat from Crisfield in the summer. Every Sunday night, they come up, and Friday night after pay day.

FS: They come up and dredge the oysters?

MS: Yes.

MS: That was normally the cruise or bay season. My dad always had a big gang come up from Ellis Island.

MS: Yes, Ellis Island.

FS: I know my father-in-law paid the driver an extra amount of money to bring the men up and to take them back.

CP: Well, usually he was a recruiter down there. The driver probably would.

FS: Probably so, yes. My mother-in-law would bring the table down and meet the boats.

MW: I think it was similar for the New York family. I interviewed a number of the Earls. They had a fellow who was from the Eastern Shore who was their foreman and would head down in the spring and get a...

FS: But most of the men came year after year.

FS: A lot of them came my way.

MS: [laughter]

MW: This was exciting.

FS: Pardon me?

MW: It was exciting.

FS: Yes.

MW: You looked to see some of the same fellows who would come every year.

FS: They ate pretty well too.

FS: I have a friend who went on the boat for a week. It was enough for him in one week. He said he never ate so well.

MS: [laughter]

SK: Had nothing but the best. That's what they had on those boats, nothing but the best.

FS: There was a fishery meat market to get all the meat from.

SK: Nothing but the best.

MS: They didn't eat oysters.

FS: [laughter] My husband didn't.

MS: It's like cowboys never ate any beef on the trail. They ate beans.

MS: [laughter]

MS: You don't eat your profits.

FS: I was just going to say, you don't eat your profit.

MS: [laughter].

FS: I spent a few summers with my fellow cousins padding on the water. Yes, we were so young that we couldn't get jobs then. So, my grandfather would give us little odd jobs. That was an experience for sure. We had a real good friend of the family who came up every year from Virginia. His name was Thomas Hazelwood. He lived in Virginia. He lived at our home and worked for my grandfather. He was just a nice man, still close with the family. Then I would spend Saturday mornings cleaning the shucking house, the offices, and doing all the dishes that accumulated over the week in the sink. I can remember fondly hearing hymns, hearing them sing as they were shucking. So, that might have fizzled out I think at one point. But when I was there, that was a thing.

MW: Was there something you think would represent the shucking houses that was different in different shucking houses? Did people know that if you worked there, it was more fun? Or here, it was more singing? Was there much differentiation for what it was like to work for the different shucking houses?

FS: I don't think there was any difference.

MW: Pretty much the same for all of them?

FS: I haven't worked with them.

FS: I haven't been to two.

FS: Yes, but this is my third one.

FS: This one over here?

FS: Yes. I worked for Robin Brothers Big House. When did I start over here? After I retired on this holiday.

MS: [laughter]

FS: After I retired from the state, I went to work over at the shucking house over here.

FS: Today was the first time I had seen my friend Freddie since maybe my grandfather's funeral. As a child, I can remember Freddie coming to our home and sitting under our tree out back and just making us layup. He said to me, "I remember you used to bring me a glass of lemonade." Right away, the face instantly made an impression.

FS: [inaudible]

FS: [inaudible]

MW: That is very special.

FS: I was so young. But now we [inaudible].

MS: [laughter]

FS: I saw my friend Chris come over today and make me know him. I hadn't seen him for years.

FS: I worked great with Howard. I think one day in the garbage, and they went crossing the train. They were friends who I know. [inaudible]. He bought a round, metal rig [inaudible].

FS: [laughter]

FS: I tell you what, we travel here. He tried there. I had no time mining because I was nervous. He'd been here before sea mining. [inaudible] The fourth time I caught onto it. Well, he said, "I ate the sandwich." I don't make me another tow in. I threw out there, brought her on in. He said, "Don't keep it over too long, man. You are going to get it in." Said, "All right." I made a truck more out here going in there. I got back to the boat. He said, "Turn it over now." I turned

it over like that. I [inaudible]. He said, "Well, hand me that battery there." I took him the battery. "Wow. Let me count them down. You ever count them before?" "No." He put three in one hand and two in the other. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, like that. He said, "You want any?" He had ninety-eight clams in there. Those clams with their big...

MS: [laughter]

FS: Ninety-eight of them. You got ninety-eight clams in there. I tell you what, he worked that. I liked the big [inaudible]. He was a good man though. I like him.

MW: Well, I know that, Earl, a lot of your family had continued into shucking oysters. Was it something that many of you had? Did your families come with you?

ED: Yes, I listened to everything you talked about here today. One thing you didn't bring up, when you get tired, how the old folks used to start singing so you could keep going. You had to sing. It would the top from one person to the other singing different songs praising the Lord, give them the strength to keep going. I'm telling you, it would be some long days. I was just a young man, but I was in that room. I knew how it was. Like I said, I've been in this oyster business a long time. Really not ever, because the boys bring the oysters about every other day when it's payday when the dredging a trawler and shucking. I keep myself active, so I can do it. But I'm telling you, it was a time back then. Sister Robinson knows me when we came from Maurice River. Times they had flooding, they would come from Maurice River to over there at Bill Sharps in Bivalve. Well, I said Blue Port, Bivalve Packing Company, I call it now. But when she came over there, she knew those people were safe. But it was still a little better than it was back there. Like I said, twenty-eight up until thirty, like I said, until 512 got in here, the union. He had to be the man that did it because he had ourselves too. So, when he got that union, hey, it was all right. But we still had to say, "Praise the Lord," and keep moving. It was all from one to the other, were singing them old kind of song. Some of them songs that I bring you all during Bay Day, that's where I patronize from them older folks years ago. Just be so tired, they just put up the God give respect nothing is not the same. But he isn't so tired. From 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., it's only that time that you get down. You'd be so tired. That's the only way it works. That's the way I try to show them and tell them. That's how they had things work back then. Let me see what I got. I don't know. At my age, my mind is pretty good. My mind is going bad, I won't believe you, but my mind is pretty good. I still think about them old days my mother and father pulled down years ago when I was a boy. I'm telling you, it just comes a long way. We've come a longways from taking all that. Taking all the hollow up pounds. I worked in Northtown shucking when they started pound too. But he took away so many oyster pounds when you shuck the body down. Don't you let nobody fool you because I [inaudible] whole environment. They don't take no bull from me. I was the phone, and the boss man said, "You should say nothing. [inaudible] I don't want my oysters to be taking weight grade like that." But they take away much with those pounds too. They set those scales and didn't get what they want. Don't believe that. I shut them with scale and shut them with the gallon. So, I know about oysters. Yes, sir. It may seem pretty good now, but when they want something, they're going to get dirty. You better believe that. I'm really proud to be here. The one thing I got to say that before I leave, because I'm on my way next to Down Napa [inaudible], same thing I'm saying today. You represent New Jersey and Port Norris. That's what I go for. I was just asking

for when the wooden purple, I got one that I shucked down there during the Santana, just like that wood. But it's just about one since 1984? Yes, 1984.

MW: I have seen that one. You brought it to Bay Day.

ED: They decided to come down, a teenager too. Is she back there?

MW: She is here.

ED: Yes, indeed. She came here in [19]83 and organized us. We went down there. Ever since then, I've been going Sandy Hook, Jersey City, and all around the place meeting my family. Like I said, the Lord blessed me with this age. I still got my mind. I still got my mind and don't have to have nobody to hold me up. I still can walk.

MW: Is that not beautiful?

ED: That's the beauty part.

MW: Just for a minute, I wanted to ask Ms. Robinson, what was your experience like and what are some of your favorite memories or some of your least favorite memories of shucking counts?

FR: I didn't have it, one of my favorite ones or the least favorite. I enjoyed shucking oysters. I enjoyed being around the workers that I worked with. That's all the boys who knew it was something that I could enjoy.

MW: How many years did you shuck for?

FR: For about forty.

MW: Forty.

FR: Where I shucked, you had to sort your oysters.

MW: You had to sort them.

FR: I did the extra selects, selects, counts, standards, that all had to be separated. If you didn't, you couldn't work.

MW: Which of the houses did you work in?

FR: Huh?

MW: Which of the shucking houses did you work in?

FR: Stoneman Brothers.

MW: Stoneman on the other side of the river. When you started, did you have to take the boat also?

FR: No, not back then.

GR: There was a road when she went there.

MW: Did you two work together?

GR: Yes, we worked at one time in the same house. I think in all the shucker houses, you had to separate oysters. We didn't put them all in one pot.

FR: If you did, you didn't have any job.

MW: I have heard some stories about some individuals that wanted the pea crab saved for them, or did each shucking house have a different – did some people save them and some people not? What was your practice with pea crabs?

FR: They all had the same laws, the same thing.

GR: But I never saved crab. I didn't have time for that.

FR: I think it was up to the individual.

GR: We had to move crab that came in.

FR: Sometimes people would ask you to save them for them.

FS: I think it was up to the individual. I didn't have time to save them either. I was trying to make the dollar.

MW: Did you like to eat oysters?

FS: I loved them. They were my favorite. That's why I went in the oyster houses.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Now, were you ever allowed to or was anyone ever given oysters to take home?

FR: Yes, we did. We kept oysters.

GR: I don't know if we were allowed to.

MS: [laughter]

FR: We used to find from them. Certain times we would go in the autumn and pay for them.

But it wasn't like they are now. You scoop out an oyster now, you get \$100.

FS: I just stab the little thing and take them home.

FR: I was a left-hand stabber.

MW: Oh, a left-handed stab stabber. Were there many lefties in the shucking houses?

FR: No. My husband used to shuck beside me. Every oyster that went passed his bucket and went in mine.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Guess it all comes to the same place, right? [laughter]

FR: I was sucking like I wasn't supposed to. I used what you call a birth board. That's what you call the birth board. I used that to stab.

MW: So, this was more for the stabbers and the breakers would use the round with the...

FR: With that metal thing on it.

MW: We have a square one. I do not know which shucking house it was from, but it has a flat end of a file on it.

FR: That machine for a wash that you put your oyster on and it would hit that shell and break it. I didn't like it because it would break the shell off in my oyster.

MW: So, they started trying to automate the breaking of them?

FR: Yes.

MW: Was that over at the Stoneman shucking house?

FR: No, back at the second house. Bradway's, wasn't it?

GR: I don't know. I didn't know about that because I never saw a machine. All I did, I shucked by hand. But Ed Bradway's was right when I was quitting. He brought that breaker into here?

MW: Over here?

MS: He brought the truck over here.

FR: Yes, driving will do that to you. We don't have that.

MS: [inaudible]

FS: Sidney gave him.

MS: Sidney, yes. [inaudible]

MW: Sidney is a stabber?

FS: Breaker.

GR: I never saw that machine.

MW: The rest of you are stabbers?

MS: I crack the mouth.

MW: You crack the mouth. Well, that makes you a breaker, does it not?

MS: Yes.

FS: To a breaker, that's shucking joints most as opposed to the shell.

MW: Oh, because you are hitting it as opposed to breaking on the...

FS: Yes.

MW: Any other questions from the group?

FS: Which ones easier to do, the breaking or the stabbing?

MW: I am guessing that was a personal choice. I think if you asked a stabber, they probably say stabbing. If you asked a breaker, they would probably say the other. What do you think?

FS: A lot of people would say breaking is easy, but I never tried it. It looked like too much stuff I had to in my thigh. I took the hammer and...

MS: [inaudible]

MW: A breaker?

MS: I do both.

MW: Do you?

MS: Yes, I do both.

MW: So, if you do both, which do you say is easier? Which is easier?

MS: Stabbing.

FS: Yes, me too.

MS: Breaking is too much of mud and stuff [inaudible].

MW: You must have been ready for a shower at the end of the day.

GR: Not at the end.

FS: Sometimes you have to go wash your face before.

GR: I'm telling you.

FS: How long did it take to learn to be a good shucker?

MW: How long before you felt like you were being quick?

FS: I don't know. It took a while because when you break while with cracking on, you have to regulate yourself for cracking, so you won't hit them too hard.

FS: So, you won't hit them too hard.

FS: When you hit them too hard and then that breaks the shell off. Then you have to stop and pick the shell back up. But once you get the hang of it, you knew how hard to hit in order for its mouth to come open. That was the main thing of hitting the oysters because its mouth is closed so tight. Then sometimes you could just go in and stab them. But a lot of times you go to stab them, they close up. Then you know you didn't have to hit it that hard.

MW: Do you know of any stories that your mothers told you that you might want to share?

FS: No.

MW: No?

FS: No.

MW: We are getting close to the end here. We will have a tour of the shucking house. But before we break up, I just wanted to give people a last opportunity to share any story or thought or anything about your experience that you would like to share, something that is most memorable.

MS: No.

MW: No? Ms. Robinson, anything else you wanted to say? Did you want to share anything

else?

FR: No.

MW: No? [laughter] Freddie, I know we will hear from you whilst we take the tour. Was there anything you wanted to...

FS: I'm [inaudible].

MW: Thank you very much. Ms. Young, anything else you would like to share?

AY: I am just glad to be here, glad my friend Martin came.

MW: It seems like a very social way to work. You really build nice friendships. That seems to be a big part of it. Ms. Towner?

MT: I just can't [inaudible].

MW: Beryl, anything else you want to say?

BW: Maybe I just want to say hi to everybody.

MS: [laughter]

FS: Thank you, sir.

MW: Oh, was there another question?

MS: Just wanted to speak for everyone in the audience of how much we appreciate them taking the time to come and share their experiences with us. I think we owe it to them.

[applause]

MW: I think a number of people came, and their attentiveness is evidenced. Everyone really appreciated you for sharing your stories.

FS: Surprises me, all these people.

MS: [laughter]

MW: Well, I do want to say this is even news to the folks that helped put this one together. But we are thinking about having another one in the spring again.

FS: Bay Day?

MW: Well, actually before Bay Days. Maybe we should probably talk before I go public.

MS: [laughter]

GR: Well, I have pictures of the shucking house. Had I known it would be like this, I would've brought them so we have another one. I will bring pictures of the shucking house with people standing at the box shucking oysters.

MW: Very good. We have a museum. Right now, the collection is in storage. As we restore the shipping sheds, we will be presenting information about shucking and about the oyster industry in the museum as we open up. The restoration of the shipping sheds is underway right now. After you finish the tour here, if you want to take a look, we are not open officially yet. The contractors are still on site, and Bay Days, which will be June 13th this year, where we will do a grand opening and invite people in to see. Sometime prior to that, we are going to have another session where we are focusing especially on the shipping sheds themselves to talk about what happened in them and to ask people to share their recollections of the shipping sheds. So, whether that is an official storytelling or a kind of a lecture series timeframe in the evening, we will keep you posted. Please, if you heard about this from the paper and you think you might not happen to pick it up the next time, we have something, please leave your address and email so that we can keep you posted as we do this sort of thing. Especially if you are people with family ties to the industry, we would love to be able to get back to you and ask you more questions. We have the ability to scan photographs if you are ever interested in letting us have access to photographs that you might have that can help us interpret the industry to the public in the museum. Also, as we build more information on our website, we are going to be adding more of the photos and stories onto the website in the future. So, if you have resources you want to share with us, you do not have to give them to us. Though, there are some things that would be nice to have to present artifacts as well. But with photographs, it is just as easy to have a copy and present it. So, if you have any interest, let us know. Pat Moore, you had an announcement?

PM: Yes. Our next storytelling will be in the spring sometime. We are kind of looking at April. The subject area that we are looking at right now to cover is retail businesses that were in the Bayshore area. So, I would like you all to put your thinking caps on or start talking to friends or whatever and contact me through the Bayshore Discovery Office to let me know of some of the businesses that were going on in Bivalve, in Newport, in Dorchester, the whole Bayshore area. That is what we would like to invite some speakers and the public to talk about at our next storytelling.

MW: Well, let us have another round of applause.

[applause]

So, we are going to head over to the shucking house and have some refreshments. I do not know if you want to grab something.

[end of transcript]