

John Tucker: – give you information, I will.

John Kochiss: I am at Mr. John Tucker's house again. Today is June the 20th, 1979. Now what were you saying about...

JT: That's the original oyster house, the one that's there now, but it's been all remodeled. He's fixed it up lovely.

JK: Who is this?

JT: The building that you go to the museum. That's what they call the opening house. They used to have a big demand for open oysters at that time. He had about fifteen men in there, opening oysters. That's what they call the opening house. They moved that over to the museum.

JK: Now, the original one is where did you say?

JT: Where it is now, but it's all remodeled.

JK: That is over near Vanderberg?

JT: Yes, that's right next to it.

JK: Now was that right opposite where the museum's oyster house was? The opening house?

JT: The opening house was just north of the road.

JK: North of the road. South of the road was the original.

JT: Yes.

JK: When do you think the opening house was built?

JT: Wasn't built too long ago. I imagine that the regular oyster house must be about 100 years old because I was a kid, and it was already built then. I've been here eighty years. It was just as much as long as I can remember that was there. So, it must have been close to around 100 years old that's there.

JK: I found in a magazine of 1908 that an opening house was built by Rudolph.

JT: Yes

JK: It fits the museum opening house.

JT: Well, that's the [inaudible].

JK: It was an opening house. Now, when you said the original one was, they just opened. They

culled, and they did what?

JT: Well, they just handled shell stock in the original house. Then you built this other smaller building. It was quite large, for open oysters.

JK: As far back as you remember it, what did the inside – okay, if this were the inside, and you entered.

JT: Well, it was not too elaborate, an oyster building. They had benches in there where the oyster steamer would come in. They all went in wheelbarrows at that time and wheel them all across the road and throw them on the benches there. Then the fellows would open them.

JK: Were the benches around the four walls, three walls, or what?

JT: Just on one side of the building. They had the windows and the roof. Spotlights, so the light would shine down.

JK: That was the south side or north side? What side?

JT: It was on the south side.

JK: South side.

JT: Yes.

JK: The bench, was that a wooden bench?

JT: Well, cement,

JK: Cement. I guess it was required.

JT: But with wooden uprights. I guess they opened quite a lot of oysters with that one time. I guess the man came out. He only had one opener when I worked there, when I was a young kid.

JK: Well, did the bench have holes in it for the shells?

JT: Yes.

JK: Now how did the openers open? By the cracking method? The side open –

JT: Cracker.

JK: Cracker.

JT: Yes. Most of them that were out here stabbed them. Boy, it was very fast. Some of those mainly. They made their boat up in the wintertime. Then they'd go work in the oyster shop,

open oysters. They were cracker jacks. But then when I was there before I went in business for the south, while he had this one cracker, he can save them. Then he had this little hammer knock the end of the bill off and stick the knife in quick. Good.

JK: He had a little block with a chisel in down there.

JT: Yes, he had a little block, and there was a sharp chisel-like. Then he just laid that out there and give it a tap.

JK: Then when he opened it, did he throw the shells into a hole in the [inaudible]?

JT: The barrel was partly, from under the bench, about that much. So, he just dropped the shells in there.

JK: There was no hole in the bench.

JT: No.

JK: Where were the oysters? To his left or in front of him or what?

JT: They were just in front of him. This place, for instance. That's the bench over there. They were all there. They'd roll down, see, as fast as when they'd rolled out. He got a wife that's not very good to him. The older fellow, I meet once in a great while. He still goes down to the shore and looks at the bay.

JK: Who was the original [inaudible], William?

JT: Yes. That was their grandfather. He lived right over here. The second house up here.

JK: From you? Down this side?

JT: Yes.

JK: What was his son's name?

JT: He had an adopted son, George. Some boy from New York, he adopted, and he ran the business for him after he got too old to bother with it. He was a good guy for running the business.

JK: Now, who are the Rudolph's living today?

JT: Just the two grandsons. The older one, he's very good. The youngest one's not very good.

JK: Now, who is this Rudolph who said that lives across the street, down the way here? Is that one of his grandkids?

JT: That's Harold. That's the oldest son.

JK: Is this an adopted son too?

JT: No. Well, he was George's, sons, the one that they adopted from New York. That was his two sons. He lives right by that house, but it was burned. Did you notice when you came to that house that was burnt?

JK: No. When did that burn?

JT: There was a fire. It was vacant. A girl lived there, and she died. She was old, my age. She died. I think the vandals set it afire.

JK: Oh, boy.

JT: So, that just stands there. The fellow next door, he tried to buy it. "They want so much money for the land," he says, "I didn't consider it." It's an eyesore. I said, "That's an eyesore for you there."

JK: Now we were talking about, if that is the bench, did that bench go down the whole wall from one wall to the other wall?

JT: The door in the west end and the door in the south end. That went the whole length of the building.

JK: What was on the other side of the other wall, the opposite wall?

JT: Well, I suppose that was for the paraphernalia, you see. But they had a great big back part. It was a cement floor, and they used to put oysters in there. That was before the Board of Health got so strict. They used to store oysters in there. They must have put about 1,0000 bushels of oysters in there.

JK: On the floor?

JT: In case the bay froze over.

JK: Right on the floor? Right in front of there?

JT: Threw them on the floor. Of course, they wash them and everything. But they kept good because it was cold there. It was like a cellar.

JK: When you had the bench, what was on the wall of the bench? Was that cement?

JT: Well, that was supposed to be cement in the back. I don't know whether it was that then. But I know when we had our shop, we had had cement on the back too. It had to be all because it was more sanitary that way.

JK: Now, when they opened the oyster, did they put the opened oyster, the meat into a can of some sort?

JT: Yes, they put them in tray. They had large trays, about as long as this table, square.

JK: Three feet long.

JT: They'd put in there and wash them good. Then they'd let them stand in the water for a while. So, they'd float a little. Then they'd pack them in these, not tin, but tin containers. They were round and then with a cover. Then they'd set those in these wooden containers with another wooden cover. Then they'd pack ice all around this.

JK: The container was round, was it not?

JT: Yes.

JK: On the bench again, when they opened it, where did they throw the oyster meat? Not into the big square.

JT: They had a gallon container with holes in it. You have to open fast. If you didn't, we wouldn't make much money. All these holes in the side of the can, the liquid would run out through these holes. You have just nothing but a gallon of solid meat. If you were a slow opener, why, you wouldn't make too much. But these fellows, like I said, they were experts. They can scallop a gallon of oysters in no time.

JK: You were paid, obviously, by the number of gallons.

JT: By the gallons, yes.

JK: Did the oyster meat just fall right on the bench? I mean the liquid?

JT: Yes, but they washed it all up when they got through. They had a holes. Every time that they ended, it would be all washed up. It was a dirty, sloppy mess, but with a lot of liquid. They just have to stand there with an apron on, and boots, but they'd wash it all up nice and clean with a hose.

JK: After you fill the gallon thing – what did you call it, just a gallon container?

JT: Yes.

JK: Is there any particular –

JT: Just a round gallon container with two handles.

JK: What did he do when that was filled? Did he take it someplace? Did he take it over to the tray?

JT: He takes it to the foreman. He was in charge. He'd keep tally how many gallon he opened during the day. Then as fast as he'd open them, he'd take care of them, wash them, and give them a drink in these trays. Then they get so many gallon on hand, and they'd ship them all.

JK: Where did they wash them? Was there a separate room to wash?

JT: Yes, there was a separate place. They had a little bench. It was tin at that time, but it was clean.

JK: Where was that in relation to the wall?

JT: It was just a few feet away.

JK: We are looking at it now, looking south. Was it to the right or in back on the well?

JT: More or less, it was to the left.

JK: Oh, left.

JT: Yes.

JK: Was it a part of the same bench?

JT: This was the same building when I was there. They didn't use that opening house. They only had this one opener. On one end was all the shelf stock, which you had to sort.

JK: On the right side.

JT: On the right. You'd walk to the south end because that was west.

JK: West, yes.

JT: So, then he empties this gallon of meats out into one of these big trays. Then the foreman would take care of – check how many gallon he opened.

JK: What I am trying to say is, if we are looking at the south wall where the bench was, where would that drinking tray be? To the east side?

JT: To the left.

JK: To the left. Would it be on the same bench?

JT: No. They got a smaller bench, and that was all by itself, away from the other oysters. They just used that to wash the oysters up and prepare them and then put them in these containers and ship them all.

JK: Now was there a faucet, or was it a hose that they –

JT: It was a faucet and a hose. Yes. It was all...

JK: Did the bench end over there someplace and then there was an empty space then this other –

JT: It was just a small bench for them to wash and clean the oysters. That's all that was used for, just to take care of that.

JK: Just on the east side of that.

JT: East side, yes.

JK: So, the big bench was here like this. Then it ended or so. Then over here was the –

JT: Little small bench.

JK: Little small bench.

JT: Where they wash and...

JK: So, there was probably a space, a couple of feet –

JT: Yes, there was space in between.

JK: This fellow here washes under this faucet?

JT: Yes.

JK: How deep was the tray?

JT: About 4 inches deep.

JK: Was there a hole in there so you can let the water out, or how did it –

JT: Yes, there were holes in there, but they'd generally pick the oysters out and put them in these clean containers where they ship. Then they'd just throw the water down. There was a drain where it would run into the basin. Then all those meats, those pieces of oyster meats that was left, it would go down with the water. You talk about little fish there, we call them minnows. Mummies, we used to call them.

JK: Yes. Mummies.

JT: I never saw such monsters. They lived on all those pieces of oyster meat. There were millions there [laughter] in the basin. It was clean. The water was clean, just the oysters was in it. There wasn't no dirt or anything in it. It was just pieces of oyster meat and water.

JK: So, there was just a plumbing fixture there, like a pipe underneath it.

JT: A drain.

JK: A sink, a drain, and that would just go out to the basin.

JT: Yes.

JK: You had a different way of washing your...

JT: I just had a cement container. Then I used to wash a bushel of oysters and let it drip. We used to put little Clorox in the disinfectant.

JK: They were the shell of the oysters.

JT: Yes. They used to have floats years ago.

JK: We talked about the Rudolph oyster house, but they outlawed floating quite a while.

JT: They had to have them all inside. They were mostly all cement. They had big drains in them, and they'd have to drain the water off. They'd leave them in this Clorox water for so many hours. Then they drain all that. They'd have to pump all new water from the bay again and then keep the oysters float, alive.

JK: But the Rudolph house now, was there an office section there?

JT: Yes, a little, small office.

JK: Where was that?

JT: That was on the north side. The shipping room was right next to it. I said to Mildred, "That was the most terrible shipping room of all the money they had." You had to lift all those big heavy barrels of oysters, bodily." I say, "For a man that had the money he had, that was a terrible thing." I used to have to do that. He was a truck driver. I used to come and pick him up and take him to the depot. "Boy," I said, "that was some terrible work, lifting those big heavy barrels."

JK: The barrels were little over three-bushel barrels.

JT: Three bushels, yes, about three bushels and a half.

JK: I am going to draw a picture of a plan of the building. If this is, say, the south, west, east, and north, you said there was a door on both east and west, right?

JT: Yes. Over here would be the cold benches. That was the main building when I was there. Of course, it might've been changed, but this was the main building. It had all big cement

benches here, where you'd put maybe 500 or 600-bushel oysters on. Then you'd walk from there, and you'd come over here. This'll be a little square. That would be thing where they washed the oysters. They opened the oysters.

JK: Opened it?

JT: Yes.

JK: So, that would be a bench.

JT: Yes, that would be a little tin bench-like, sanitary.

JK: For opening.

JT: That was when I was there. They only had one opener at that time. But they had a whole lot in the other building like the museum has now.

JK: Now I am talking about the museum's building. This is the building. This is south, east, and west and north. Now, as far back as you remember, you said that there was a bench along here.

JT: Yes.

JK: Wait, there was a door here and a door here.

JT: Then there's a door here. That was where that cellar was, on the north end. That was quite a big...

JK: Down below?

JT: No, right on the same...

JK: But you called it a cellar.

JT: Yes. They had the cement floor. Then they'd store the oysters in there in the winter.

JK: All right. This is the –

JT: That's the north end.

JK: Over here, did the bench extend on the south side, all the way over to about, like this, you said?

JT: Somewhat, yes, because there was a door here and a door on this end where they moved them in. They'd have to empty the shells out. They'd have to take wheelbarrows that time. Then they have the barrel...

JK: They go off this way.

JT: They'd empty them in the wheelbarrow. They'd have to go up on these planks. There'd be shells a couple of hundred feet high, shells.

JK: So, you would take them off this?

JT: Yes.

JK: The opening again, was here.

JT: Yes.

JK: Now, was that bench about that long or half this length?

JT: Well, they put it in the whole length of the building.

Mildred Tucker: It was the whole length of the building.

JK: It was?

JT: Yes.

JK: Oh, I see.

JT: They did a lot of opening at one time there.

JK: Well, now again, opening. On this end, there was a space here. This is where they washed them?

JT: I think this was a space here where the open door was, where you went down to the dock.

JK: Oh, there was another door.

JT: The wheelbarrows. Then you'd go down to the oyster steamer, and it would all be in bushel baskets. You'd have to put two on a wheelbarrow and wheel them in. That's the way they – it was all manual labor at that time. There were no machines.

JK: But on this side, right here on the southeast, was this where they washed them?

JT: That was where they washed them. Over here, it was quite a large place. They have all their nice, empty clean barrels there, what they used to ship in the shell stock.

JK: Where was that?

JT: That was on this end.

JK: Around this end here?

JT: Yes.

MT: On the north was the shipping room.

JT: Yes, shipping room and a little office.

MT: The big cake of paraffin. He had a huge, as big as that table and as high. [inaudible]

JT: Of course, I'm only telling you this, while I was there. Now, they used to tell me, they had an old fellow who used to go with me on the oyster steamer. He used to tell me, he says, "We didn't have any time." He said, "We'd just go to work in the morning. We work till dark. We couldn't see any longer." He says, "The shells would be under the bench. We wouldn't bother to take them out every day. We leave them under there a whole week." You can imagine the smell.

JK: Oh, boy.

JT: He says, "Then we clean them all out on a Saturday and wash up whatever it needed." "Ninety cents a day," that's what he said, "I used to get when I first started. Then it got to be \$1." I said, "Boy, that's a lot of money [laughter]."

JK: By the way, where would the office be?

JT: Over here.

JK: Was it a separate room?

MT: Yes.

JT: The office was somewhere around here. Then the shipping room was here. That was a little bit of a dinky thing.

MT: The shipping room was there. The office was –

JT: Next door.

MT: – off the shipping rooms. It was quite big.

JK: Let me ask you. If this is the south side, the opening, that is the east side. That is the west side. This is the north side.

MT: Yes. Well, it was on the north, the shipping.

JT: Yes.

JK: The shipping.

FS: Yes.

JK: Now, was it a separate room or just a space?

MT: It was a separate room. The office was off the shipping room.

JT: That was the main building where the shipping room and the office was.

JK: I am talking about the museum building. The building the museum is.

JT: They just used that for opening oysters. I was referring to the main building. This is the main building we're talking about. But they just opened oysters in that building where the museum is now.

JK: What about the different walls in the building though? See, we are interested in restoring that particular building.

JT: Yes. Well, as far as I can remember now, they just had two-by-fours. Then then they nailed the boards on the outside. See. That's all it was. There was nothing finished off nice or anything. It was rough, rough and ready.

JK: In that building, if that is the south and north, were there benches on both north and south or whereabouts?

JT: Well, there are benches on the south.

JK: Just the south.

JT: Where the skylights were. See, lights would shine now, and you'd have plenty...

MT: The benches were on there all along, as I remember.

JK: If this is the south side where the skylight is, the benches were all along there?

MT: Yes.

JK: What about this side?

MT: There was some on here too.

JT: Well, I can't remember anymore. [inaudible]

JK: Did they have any kind of an office in that building?

JT: No.

MT: No.

JT: Just in the main building.

JK: Did they do any washing in that small building?

JT: Not that I know of.

JK: Well, where did they carry the open oysters? They carried them into the [inaudible]?

JT: I wouldn't know. See, that was before my time. I just happened to come there when it was dormant at that time. Now whether they washed them in the main building or not – they must have washed them where they opened them.

MT: I think they washed them all in there. I was only a little tiny thing –

JT: I remember.

MT: – when I was in that place.

JT: The building was there. When I first started to go down there, I was big enough just to have pants and know what was what. The building was already there.

MT: I'm sure they washed them in there.

JT: Yes, they must've.

MT: Because I was only a little tiny thing when we lived in there [laughter] , only this small.

JK: Going back to the old building though, they would have the office, say, someplace here.

JT: Right along the road. There was a window.

MT: Yes.

JT: You could look right out. The road was right by it.

MT: The shipping room was alongside the [inaudible].

JT: [inaudible]

JK: They're near you from the building.

FS: Yes.

JK: It was enclosed too?

JT: Yes, it was enclosed, a door and windows in it.

MT: It was a large door. The truck used to stand there, and they'd roll the barrels out.

JK: Oh, I see. Now, where would they do the culling of the oysters for barreling it? Where would they barrel it?

MT: Right in the...

JT: The west end was the cold banks. I'm talking about the main building now. On the south end...

JK: Was the opening.

JT: Where they have very big slabs of – it wasn't concrete. It was some kind of stone. They put these barrels, and there was a crack there, run this way. Then they put this barrel over there. It'd come up out of the floats and dump the oysters in the barrel. Then they'd shake them down. When they thought they got them down, that's what they called double head barrels. That was shell stock. Then they'd put these wooden covers on. You weren't allowed to put things any more. There were five, six nails. That's how tight they were. My father said, "I can't get over it." He says, "Five or six nails into a hook to hold the cover of the oyster barrel on. Boy, were they tight." I think he must have left about 10 million when he died.

MT: Well, people were frugal in those days.

JT: Yes, they were.

JK: By the way, his office, was it a clean place? What did it have? A desk?

JT: It was a nice little place.

MT: He had a nice desk. Yes, it was very nice.

JK: He had a desk, a chair, and anything else?

JT: Well, they had the ledgers there, where they used to keep track.

JK: On the desk?

JT: His wife used to do that all, was a bookkeeper. Georgie, that's her name.

JK: Did he have any pictures on the walls or calendars or something?

MT: One or two calendars, yes, and a large calendar he had.

JT: I wouldn't remember whether they had pictures or not. I didn't really take [inaudible] of that.

MT: Yes, he had a couple.

JT: Yes.

JK: Did he have a file case to keep his records?

JT: No.

MT: No. I think he had a little table that he kept things on, and a huge desk. The huge desk was always very disoriented.

JT: They didn't have any typewriters or anything at that time. But in later years, maybe he might've gotten a typewriter.

JK: The table, was it right next to the desk?

MT: Yes.

JT: He had one of those little sloping desks, the old-fashioned kind. They used to sit there with a chair. They had a light. Then they used to do the paperwork.

MT: The little table was right off the desk.

JT: Yes.

JK: To the right or left?

MT: At the left.

JT: That was when I first started to work in the oyster shops. I was a young kid.

JK: What do you keep on the table?

MT: Books, ledgers, and so forth.

JT: Yes. All kinds of different papers and things. They must have shipped all over. They shipped to Europe.

MT: Oh, yes, because when we'd go over at the home, they'd have their letters and advertisements piled that high. We used to put them –

JK: Five feet?

MT: – seal them for.

JT: He used to have a piece of ground there that he said, "We'll ship these oysters to Europe." He says, "They're not too fat. By the time they arrive in Europe, they'll pick up, and they're liquor. They'll be all right." He used to just keep that ground to ship to Europe.

JK: What would you consider Rudolph's place? An average-sized oyster business?

JT: Yes, good average size.

JK: Okay, good. What would you consider yours? A small operation?

JT: Small operation.

JK: What about Vanderberg?

JT: Well, that's about average. They were all about average buildings. There was some, as I said, places in sail and bay port, but they were a little smaller than average, some of them.

JK: Getting back to the oyster house, what did he have up on the walls? Were the walls inside painted or –

JT: No, they never painted them. They just painted the outside of the building. It was just the boards were put up, and that's that.

JK: No painting.

JT: No painting or anything.

JK: What about later though? I suppose they painted.

JT: Well, yes, they did a little later when I was around. A brother or sister he meets, he says, every one of those oyster shops look alike. They need paint." Yes, they do. [laughter]

JK: Outside and inside?

JT: Yes, outside and inside. Some of them didn't really paint too good, but...

JK: What was the outside usually, white or gray or something?

JT: Well, yes, brown, gray. Would never have much white paint. It was mostly colored paint.

JK: Getting back to the opening, in the building that the museum has, how many openers would you think – fifteen would be in there?

JT: I imagine there were about fifteen at that one time there. When I got there, it was all

discontinued. They just used that for storage, but that was before I was there.

JK: The man who tallied or took track of the oysters also watched them. Is that right? Was he the man?

JT: No. He was the foreman really. He'd take charge of that and have that to do.

JK: Would he give the openers little chips or little coins as a...

JT: No. He just keeps tally in the little book there, he had.

JK: Did he have it up on the wall and just mark it?

JT: Yes. It was a cardboard thing. He just had the man's name on there. Then he'd just make a mark, leave a mark whatever, how many gallon he had that day.

JK: What did he go, one, two, three, four, and then five?

JT: Yes. I imagine.

[end of transcript]