

Lowell Ockers
February 3, 2004
Tape 1 of 1
Interview by Nancy Solomon

Side A

001 Bishop boat yard – south bay boatworks today – built boats and went bunker fishing. Had contract to buy tar – Ben Bishop. In Patchogue on west side of Patchogue river. Fishermen had to tar traps there. Built oyster, clam boats. Sailboats mostly – later converted to motor power. Lots of boat builders. In W. Sayville – Jim Lamden, Walter Lightner, Sam Jurgensen, Dykstra before Lamden. Was there when he was a kid – 60 years ago. Chris Jensen’s machine shop. Drank too much. Worked on propellers during WWII. Shaft ran through middle of the building. – between Sam Jurgensen’s and Lightners building – is gone today. Near boardwalk today.

050 Sam Jurgensen’s boatyard was 1 building – 40-foot and a 50-foot building. Jensen’s was 20 x 45 (w x l) Sam was Swedish. Jensen was probably German. Lamden was from Maryland- bought Dykstra’s building and then Jergensen bought it. Boatyards operated for at least 60 years. Lightner’s burned down – rebuilt it – was a lobster and clam place, coop. Torn down in 1990s. Row boat station on the end – Ted Hill started it and Lightner bought it. Sold it to Husseltaft (sp?) – sold it to Margie’s (sp?). Rented row boats. Customers came from Sheepshead bay. Started it after WWII. All kinds of people came. Dropped people off in the bay. Later had small motor boats. Other rental places – Great River – remmers – Bay Shore, Sayville: William brown. Bill Brown built his own boats. Made some money. People went week fishing.

114 Bill Brown had 40 boats. Cheap - \$4/day for a row boat. Lowell – dad had pound traps. He worked for him during the summer. Caught week and blow fish. Cotton nets. Nets chafed on the poles. Skinned blow fish - \$2 for 80 pounds. Made \$12/week – thought it was a lot of money. 18-20 cents a pound for bluefish. 35 boxes of fish out of one trap – usually uniform size. Grandfather died when he was 33 years old. Dad had to go to work when he finished 8th grade.

151 Bluepoints- knew men who worked there. Paul Mercer, Mike Van Essendelft, the Stiles (Andy). Knew someone who worked in the float room – in the white building – upstairs was offices, underneath was where they opened oysters – bubbled the oysters – another room for shucking. No refrigeration – used block ice – Gus Stall had the ice business – gone today. Near road near today’s friendly’s. Delivered ice to Bluepoints – had big coolers where they kept oysters. Kingston’s – Long Island Fish Company – pound trap – ocean – similar to Sunrise Fish company in Islip.

195 Bob Doxsee and Joe McMillen saw Bob’s film together. Shoved steamers onto a conveyer belt. Pushed a cart down and ran it down. Shuckers – Gabriel Quake, Van Esseendelfts, Stiles – opened the oysters. Culled oysters for the half shell trade – if two oysters grew together – had to separate them – this was culling. Large oysters called box

oysters. Went to different part of the building. Where hatchery is today – Jimmy Conkel fixed things – had a tool shop – on top was a water barrel – painted with Bluepoints name – barrel was painted white. Pitched roof – took oysters that they didn't sell and put the oysters in floats – pumped water in there and keep them alive. "old man stile" would shovel the oysters until they were ready to sell. Got rid of conveyers. Started bringing surf clams when oysters dried up. Flinny, Dykstra, Sonny Zimmerman, dad worked there in winter. "40 fathom clams" were canned. Put salt tablet in the can. Steam kettles for steaming the clams. Some customers – white rose – had their own labels that were put on the cans. Had 3 or more boats – Ollie Bishop, Leon cinder (sp?) ran them. Trucked the clams. Used escalating dredges to catch soft clams. Used basket dredges for ocean skimmers.

300 some guy watched flowers company in Oyster bay – used a harrow – pulled it and loosened the bottom and then followed with dredges. Then went to basket dredges and then to escalating dredges – has a belt on it and a head on the bottom – square in shape . Outlawed dragging in bay in for fluke in the summer – clambers protested. Islip town outlawed dragging in 1940s. In west area – Amityville - used stick dredges – outlawed it. Lowell says Armar built them – in West Islip – makes clam tong rakes. Used to have local folks – Alexander – in Patchogue who made tools – made first all steel heads for clam tongs. Flat teeth to catch oysters – spiked teeth for clams. Louis Monkowitz from Sayville – across from movies – had a blacksmith shop. Milt Oakley on Brentwood road in Bay Shore – was the best. Made each one individually. Son took over but went out of business. Another guy in Huntington also made the heads. Made thousands of handles for clam tongs – Georgie Kline.

411 Bluepoints as a company – when they went into clamming – took everything and didn't put anything back. Would dredge chowder clams from nyack, ny which was polluted and plant them in great south bay – had a hard time getting a set of clams. Sometimes it worked. Kept their grants with the town – other states and towns eliminated the grants. Terry's bed – clammer had rights to it. Bluepoints was known for overworking the "Dutchmen" – 12 hour days. Dad said Jake Ockers – had a grocery store – gerbers, greene's – Jake Ockers would pay them – kind of like a company store. Cut salt hay in the 1970s – may have destroyed the scallop habitat. Scallops near Davis Park – lots in early years. Also hurt by southwest sewer district. Bluepoints did not help the town.

496 Rumor – if you didn't go to work in the oyster shanties by September 1, no one would hire you for the winter. Fred Ockers was a better person to work for. Many of the dutch were very poor – the Bebbe's were very poor – ate salt park, pickled herring, had a vegetable garden in back – chickens and hogs. Other families did too. There were always clams in the bay so you could make a living. Today – clams come from Florida, key west – farm raised. Tasteless.

545 Pound trap fishermen – father and two uncles had the bay – brandt brothers had 2 traps. Dad had one trap off of Seaview, two on the north side of the channel – near fire island by ocean beach, near Atlantique and another one by Saltaire. Once tried west

channel but didn't do well. Five traps altogether. Other pound trap fishermen had eel traps but didn't do well. Lowell bought them out. Didn't make a lot of money – changed to nylon traps – had 11 traps. Dad used 38 foot boats – built them. Used until early 1990s. ran freight boat from sailors haven to fire island. Asked fire department to burn it at the end. LI Fish company had 3 pound traps in the ocean. Whitecap fished, Doxsee fished, sunrise. Lowell kept eels in cars in the creek until December. Sold to customer in Maine. Superior also bought eels. Today – only Delaware valley fish buys eels. Sold fish to whitecap – Lester Sergo in Patchogue and mastic seafood. Sometimes went to Lindenhurst and Freeport- sold eels to Fiore brothers.

700 Next door neighbors worked on the bay.

Side B

001 Next door neighbors – heading towards the water – Lowell's house belonged to Anthony Vesport – pound trap fishermen who worked in the ocean. Gabriel Quake – clammer – culled oysters in winter and opened skimmers – next door. Next door to him was Mr. Powie – father was a baymen and worked in oyster shanties. A few doors down – Josh Newhouse worked for Vanderberg – culling clams and putting clams in barrels for Mr. Tucker – brought clams to Lundy's in Sheepshead Bay – had a flatbed truck. "ol' man Tucker" – had a barn – on Atlantic – white house – has a house in the back now. Verbeakes lived – hauled fish – haul seines and went skimming. George wine (?) – oysters and watchmen for Vanderberg and Rudolph. Where Charlie Hart is today. Rudolph was an oysterman.

032 Beebe's house is at the LI Maritime Museum. Not all were Dutch. Vermine's (?) – Baker – dark grey house on Atlantic – yellow trim – worked on oyster boats – was a captain and taught Sunday school. Lockers – looked up to by local residents – worked in oyster shanties, went clamming. Cris Locker – worked at point of woods – taught kids to sail.

055 Kaler lived on Brook Street – rented his house in the summer. Went clamming in the winter. Old Man Dorough – kept books for stores. No hotels in West Sayville. Sayville had hotels – "old cedar shore" – foot of Handsome Avenue – burned down. Hotel part and pavilion on water. Summer. Alley Freeman – judge – had Shoreham at end of Foster Avenue – park now. Boarding houses on Foster Avenue. People came from the city. Maybe one left on S. Ocean Avenue. Village of Blue Point had hotels.

082 Small bars – Max's log cabin in Oakdale. Grocers in Oakdale just past where Wendy's is. Gulf gas station is there now. Near Hoy Mings was Lou's Red Anchor. Camp – west oak recreational camp – bunch of campers from Hecksher State Park – put up platforms and tent – state bought property from Taylor estate – when Robert Moses took control he kicked campers out – fellow named Walters – bought property in between Lasalle and golf course. Went there during the depression – paid rent. Owned property in other places. Lived on Dale Drive – similar style houses – in Oakdale. Near Hoy

Ming's Chinese restaurant. Spanish style stucco. Some worked for Bourne's – singer sewing machine. Gave house on golf course as a wedding present.

139 Few baymen left. Part timers mostly – part time fireman and policeman. Near Kingston's – grey building – lobster shed. Kingston's clam bar was Fred Ockers' place – old float is still there – kept lobsters.

158 Lowell made a good living until 14-15 years ago. Expenses are too high. Most clams come from other places – southern clams are cheaper. Bluepoints is important – Kingston's clam bar – Vanderberg's was in the middle. Buildings are the same. Rudolphs – Charlie Hart's has been rebuilt. LI Maritime Museum. Hard to show them a pound trap – end of Handsome Avenue – Lowell had a trap there – and at end of West Avenue. Boat builders – none left. Rowboat rental – destroyed by county. Cedar Shore was at end of Handsome Avenue. Shoreham was on Foster Avenue. Big houses on Foster Avenue. Alvin – large boarding house – is still there – on side street near foster. Lafayette was torn down.

207 Chris Locker and Kaler were only people he remembers renting their houses during summer. Fire Island beach communities more popular. The Pines - “high rent district.” Many people came out during the summer – stayed at Cedar Shore and Shoreham. 50-60 families. Freeman rented rooms by the season. Had a dock and fence to keep jelly fish out. “wet pants” club – 50 years older – one founder was Harvey Garrett smith.

243 Photo of cat boats on the bay. Collins family – baymen – lived in Sayville. Bevelanders – West Sayville – baymen. Talk to Donald Bevelander – in nursing home. Support for Fire Department – and churches – center. Christian Reform Church – New Life today, Dutch Reform Church – not sure which came first. Only one catholic in his class. Baymen used to have oyster shucking contest – 60-70 years ago. Lowell remembers skimmer shucking races among baymen. Not a real contest. Covered supper dish dinners, church fairs – strawberry festival- no longer. Christian reform church has a fair once a year – had to buy sugar. Women made food – traditional dutch specialties.

330 Recipes – grandmother made 40 gallons of clam chowder. Always used salt pork. At fire department meetings – served clam chowder – discussed whose recipe to use. Now they use Campbell's canned chowder. Added clams to it. Skimmer clams are sweeter – that's the change from hard clams. Manhattan style chowder. Lowell uses chowder clams from port Jefferson or Mt. Sinai. Tried planting them in Sayville.

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