Tales of Cape Cod
Joshua Nickerson Oral History
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Joshua Nickerson: One of them came, and I could tour the floor. Well, there were only two or three of them. They didn't get around very much. The young people would build bonfires in the middle of the street, main street in the town. Bear in mind, there was no automobile traffic. I remember on one occasion – well, one of the big things was the 4th of July morning. They went down the main street of the town to see what had happened. What did they do last night? I remember one occasion when somebody had managed to put a dory on the roof of the portico, or whatever you want to call it, in front of the local post office, which was quite an achievement. Of course, there was always a story – which I'm never at all sure, and it wasn't really hypothetical – about the difficulty that they had getting the cow out of the belfry of the church before people would get up to it. I don't think that the cow had to get up into the belfry. There was always that story and all kinds of Halloween type, well, vandalism, that's what it was, which occurred in the best of spirits of fun and games, however, on the night before the 4th. At midnight, there'd be the sounds of firecrackers and so forth. Most days, we had what they called cannon crackers. Those were firecrackers that made a real boom. There were no laws, as there are now, forbidding people to use fireworks. Everybody went after them in a big way. Everybody was his own operator.

BR: Did you have a parade on the 4th of July?

JN: Usually, yes. Well, yes. We used to have a parade on the 4th of July. This was a big deal. In the parade, they always had a section called the horribles. These were people made up in costume to look "horrible." Then a little later, when we did get [inaudible]. There was one fellow I remember had something that was a van, looked like a police van. So, there was one section of the horribles that dressed themselves up like comic policemen. Then as the parade advanced along the street, they would spot prominent citizens on the sidewalk watching the parade and go out and seize them and throw them in the wagon. Then after they'd carry them short distance, let them go, and repeat the process with some other prominent citizens. This included, of course, some of the visitors who were seized in this manner. I think one of them being (Joe Lincoln?), on one occasion, who lived in Chatham. I lived in Chatham for the first 30-odd years of my life. So, this is why I'm talking about Chatham so much, in reference to this particular time period, or perhaps I should say Chatham. Speaking of pronunciation, there has been a marked change in my lifetime in the way some words are pronounced around here . The peculiar way of enunciating, which I, for want of a better term, would call the Eastham accent, consists, in my opinion, of giving a vowel the sound of a diphthong. In other words, you cuh-ome, not come, you go-oh, so that a single vowel has the sound of a diphthong, like the a-e, e-i, i-e, and so forth. In connection with that, people commonly, including myself, if you've noticed, say Chatham today. But certainly, when I was a youngster, Chat-ham was the way it was pronounced.

BR: What were some of the other names that were pronounced differently?

JN: Well, another example would be the family name M-A-Y-O. When I was a boy, that was

always pronounced, "Mao." Today, it's pronounced, "Mayo." I used to like to say, I knew a man who changed his name during his lifetime without any legal process. People would say, "How's that?" I'd say, "Well, it was a man I knew named Charlie Mao when he was born, and he was Charlie Mayo when he died." Well, anyway, the common use of and listening to radio and TV and all the media today is very rapidly, I think, wiping out the distinctions of enunciation and pronunciation. Those distinctions are very subtle, at least they were. But I could almost tell, when I was a young man, whether or not a person came from Eastham, for example. Because the way of speaking in Eastham was just a little bit different than what it was anywhere else, the elongation of the vowels and the peculiar twist, which I can't quite reproduce here for you, of the words. I suspect, though I don't know this, but I suspect that, that manner of speaking was due to the fact that it was similar to what had been used, say, 300 years ago. This idea, on my part, is borne out by the fact of the spelling of that time. Now, back when Bradford wrote his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, there were no hard and fast rules of spelling. For example, he spelled the word pour, pour from a pitcher into a cup, for example, P-O-W-R-E, which I think meant that it was pronounced power, not pour, but power or something like that. We've lost the use of a lot of old words as well as the pronunciation. For example, it's been years since I've heard anybody refer to a tempest. Now, a tempest was something that happened quite frequently in my childhood. It can be defined, I think, as a violent thunder and lightning storm accompanied by rain, probably localized in a small area, not a general sweeping storm like a hurricane. Now, there again, hurricane. That's a word that I don't think I ever even heard as a child. We talked about line storms. We got line storms in the spring, and we got line storms in September. The line storm occurred when the sun crossed the line, the equator. You could pretty much count on having a line storm, sometimes more vigorous than others. One word that I haven't even heard for many years is feetnings. Now, the difference between feetnings and footprints is this. When you walk on the sand, you make footprints. When the birds and the animals walk on the sand, they make feetnings. But I haven't heard the word feetnings in years. I'm sure there are many other words which have been lost. Then they get corrupted. You read in the paper about a nor'eastern, or you hear somebody refer to a nor'eastern. In my youth, there was no such thing as a nor'eastern. It was a northeastern. You had a northwestern and a northeastern. Now, the reason for this was quite obvious when you think about it. Because in those days, compass directions were given by the points of the compass. When a wind was blowing and the helmsman took over from the man before him at the wheel, they had to give the compass directions of the course in a manner which would be unmistakable. So, if it said the O sound of north, he knew it was the east. If he had the R sound of north, he knew it was west. Likewise, it was always sou'west and southeast for the same reason. But it always annoys me a little bit when the paper comes out with the sign, nor'eastern, because there never was a nor'easter. There was a northeastern, but not a nor'eastern. It was a northeastern, if you want to shorten it, and a northwestern. Of course, this is a little off the subject, but I also get very annoyed when I see the headlines in today's paper saying something about 2M or 3M meaning millions. The capital M means thousands. If they meant millions, there should have been MN. This is particularly annoying to me because in the [inaudible] business, the capital M with a straight – a horizontal line drawn through it is a symbol used for thousands. So, the newspapers come out, and you have to read the story to find out whether they mean thousands or millions. Usually, they mean millions. But they don't write the symbol for millions. They write the symbol for thousands in that way.

BR: How about some memories, boyhood memories, from your east window about the tugboats?

JN: Well, I lived on Old Harbor Road as a boy. I had my bedroom window face east. One of the sights you could see out that window – as a matter of fact, what you'd do, you'd get the clue by seeing what was happening out there. Then you'd go outside where you had a broader, expansive view. You get a better look. But one of the sights would happen after a week of easterlies, which we often have. We have a week, even longer. It went from the east or easterly quarters. All these sailing ships which were coming down from Long Island Sound and Vineyard Sound, coming out, would be unable to beat down through the channels and the shoals between Nantucket and the mainland of Cape Cod. So, they would lie at anchor during these easterlies in Vineyard Sound, between Martha's Vineyard and Woods Hole down there. Then as it always did, the wind came around to the southwest or west, and they had a fair wind to come down through the shoals. So, they would all leave at once. They would come roaring down through past Monomoy and out through [inaudible] slough and into the Atlantic Ocean. They'd get there, of course, pretty close together. So, it was not at all uncommon, under those particular circumstances, to see as many as a hundred sailor vessels at one time going by. One of the curious things that was happening in those days was that in Chatham, they had – there was a tower on top of a building on the main street, right next to where the Mayflower Shop is now, across the street from the Tale of the Cod, in which there was a man who sat up there and observed all day, the passing shipping. Then he telegraphed the information as to what ships they were or what signals they'd given to the people in Boston who were either the owners or the underwriters or whatever. Because some of these ships hadn't been reported. This was a method of reporting. You see, we had no radio. The telegraph was the only means of conveying this information. In order to get the information, we had to see it through a spyglass. The last man that I know of who did that work was a Captain Cyrus Kent who did that.

BR: What sort of signals did they give to identify themselves?

JN: Well, they had flag signals of one kind or another. I'm not at all sure what the signals were. Well, just like the Navy always used flags for signals from ship to ship, well, they used signals on these vessels going by, to indicate which ones they were as they went by this reporting station. Or sometimes the reporter, marine reporter, could identify them by some other means. But he was sitting up there in that tower with his spyglass watching what's going by. Sometimes, I guess, he reported ships without being able to identify them, just to know, I guess, I think, maybe, perhaps, that sort of thing. The big changes, the really big changes, have been in transportation in my lifetime, transportation and communication. They have really revolutionized everything. When I look around today and see everybody – almost nobody had anything even remotely approaching them. It's incomprehensible to the young people to know what it could have been like in those days. It was a big deal with us, for example, to go on a hayride. When we were schoolchildren, one of the naughtier things to do was to organize a hayride where the boys and girls – they had this hayrack drawn by horses. The boys and girls would climb in and go on this hayride, in which there was some cuddling and kissing and so forth going on. But that was a pretty daring event. Sometimes it combined going on the hayride with going to a dance nearby when you get a little older. It was a long haul to go 5 or 6 miles with a horse and riding in those days.

BR: I would like to talk about your mother, the article you wrote about your mother, (Brooke Allen?).

JN: This one?

BR: Very interesting, the things that she used to say.

JN: I don't think my mother was any particularly different from anybody else's mother in those days. But I remember she always reserved the bottom drawer in the chest of drawers under the counter in the kitchen for paper bags and string. Paper bags, of course, weren't nearly as common then as they are now. They were relatively rare. Because, as I mentioned earlier, they brought the things to you. You didn't go to the store and get a paper bag. To me, one of the greatest wastes today is the way they use paper bags. You go to the supermarket, and they give you two or three beautiful paper bags. When you get home, what do you do with them? You've got so damn many. You don't know what to do with them. So, you burn them. You throw them away. But in my mother's time, these were carefully saved, as was the string. She used to make her own soap, save all the grease that was accumulated, various kinds, in the cooking processes and make her own – it was sort of a hard soap, I must admit, but it did work. She made it in a big flat iron pan. Then before it had hardened, while it was still soft, cut it into squares with a knife. Then when it was hardened, you had these oblong pieces of soap. It always smelled pretty good though. Because my father had to go to Boston occasionally on errands and business. When he did, she always had him get some sassafras to bring home to scent her soaps with. [laughter] Again, one interesting, to me, important change in lifestyle here on the Cape is the advent of modern heating and plumbing. When I was a child, we had a backhouse. There was no toilet inside the house, unless you want to count the chamber pots which were kept under the bed. If used, dumped into a big cupboard bucket the next morning. The night soil was taken out and dumped on the ground somewhere. At any rate, the hot water supply came from kettles heated on top of a cast iron range. Then, in some cases, they had a sort of a reservoir in the back of the line into which you poured water and then dipped it out with a dipper. But one of the big advances was the introduction of what is called a hot waterfront. This was a system of putting small pipes in the firebox of a kitchen range. Those pipes were hitched to a 30-gallon tank which stood vertically right back of the stove and circulated the water, which was heated by the fire, around in the tank. Then from the tank, other pipes led off to a faucet in the kitchen sink. This, of course, didn't come about until after the change in the water supply. Because the water supply, in my early childhood, consisted of a hand pump in the kitchen sink. But it wasn't long, in fact, I was still a very young child when my family put in a windmill which pumped water out of the ground and up into a reservoir, in a copper-lined or metal-lined wooden tank up in the attic. When you had that source of supply, well, then you could use this hot water system. But one of the curious things about our particular pump was that the well was within 10 feet of the outhouse. But that wasn't so bad. Because what carries the pollution from sewage is not the solid material, it's the water that you use to flush it out with. So, since we were using no water to flush our outhouse, the pollution from the urine and feces that went into the outhouse didn't go very far in the sandy soil. So, it wasn't too bad to have, in my opinion at least, to have the well within 15 feet of the outhouse.

BR: Do you remember when the German submarine was off of Nauset?

JN: Yes. That was in August, I think, of 1918. August of 1918. You see, I was 17 years old. It was a Sunday. There was a girl that I was kind of sweet on that I took her sailing down Stage Harbor and over across Stage Harbor to the beach. We were over there swimming on the beach between Morris Island and the mainland. We heard this thunder. It sounded like thunder to the north. But we couldn't figure out why because there was a fog bank hanging offshore. That was the only sign of weather. When we got back from the morning trip, beach and swimming, we found out what had happened. Of course, nothing would do, but we had to arrange to go over to Orleans to find out what was going on. There was a tow of barges going by, tugboat and several barges going by Orleans. Suddenly, out of the fog, a German submarine surfaced and started shelling them. They sank, I think, one of them, or they put a shell through the pilot house of another. The people, the crews, took to the boats and rowed ashore. At that particular moment, there happened to be a – one of the then new flying boats out of the Chatham Naval Air Station, off over the fog bank, running some kind of test, but unarmed. They heard the noise and came in to see what it was all about. As soon as they realized what it was, they wished they had some bombs. Or if they did have bombs, they didn't work. I don't know which way it was. At any rate, the only weapon, which is – or the only missile that was thrown at the submarine was a monkey wrench, which one of the mechanics on the plane threw as they went over. At that time, there was a very big Naval Air Station, big for that period, right where Eastward Point development is now, beyond the Eastward Ho golf course in Chatham. There were several thousand men there. They ran the patrols out of there all the time. One of the reasons that they chose that spot, I think, is that they figured that the current between Strong Island and the mainland would keep that open so they could navigate their pontoon planes there in the winter. I don't know how they figured they were going to avoid the ice cakes if they had them, but that was apparently the theory. They had some pretty heavy, serious casualties. I remember one occasion; they came in with one of their planes. I think it was a *Curtiss*. Was it a *Curtiss* plane? They had linen on the wings. The structure of the plane was made with Sitka spruce. I think they were biplanes with pushers – pusher type. They came in and mistook a wet flat in the haze for water and tried to land on it. It turned over and burst into flames. The two men in the plane were badly burned. They took them by special train or by train from Chatham to Boston for treatment. Because there was no – I think one of them died on the way. You see, in those days there was no hospital on the Cape. The nearest hospital was in Middleborough. That wasn't much of a hospital at that time. We had no medical services of that nature. The Cape Cod Hospital wasn't started until about 1920. So, there again, you come up against a tremendous change in my life. Like every other child in the community, I was born at home. Where else? Well, you could be born at the midwife's house. But it was either at home or at the midwife's, one or the other. There was no other place. Today, you look at the statistics in the town reports, and you find that practically every baby that's born on Cape Cod is born in a hospital. Whether that's good or bad, I don't know. But it's certainly different.

BR: It is. Do you have a story you can tell me about your parents?

JN: Well, what sort of stories would you have in mind?

BR: Anything interesting about their lives. Anything that they passed down to you.

JN: Well, of course, the women, the wife and mother – you see, there were five of us children – had a pretty damn busy life. They not only had to do all the cooking. There was no fast food or quick – frozen food stuff. It had to be done from scratch. But they had to take care of the house and they had the laundry and all the chores to do around the house, they and the children. In those days, almost every family that had, let's say, a modicum of financial affluence had a hired girl in the house. Now, some of these were, as in our case, sometimes it was a local girl. Well, we had two that I remember, two or three who were wards of the City of Boston. We had them at different times. The hired girl, so-called, was never referred to as a maid or a servant. She was, in effect, an almost member of the family. She ate with the family. Yet on occasions, she didn't participate in some of the more significant family rites, for example. She didn't have to go to church on Sundays and the rest of the family did, for instance. On the farms, which I wouldn't be so familiar with, the equivalent was a so-called hired man. It's a status which has long since disappeared. I think we've lost something in that. Because with our unemployment today and coupled with the impossibility of hiring anybody to do even simple tasks around the house except at an exorbitant price, there's something wrong, in my way of thinking. They had a better solution. The same thing applies to taking care of indigent members of the family. We had a maiden aunt who was very poor, mother's sister. She used to live with us for months at a time. No money changed hands, but she did the mending and a lot of things like that. It doesn't matter, of course. Today, what would happen? She'd be on welfare, and the taxpayers would be supporting her. Far greater importance than is indicated by the cost of the money. I think we've lost part of our family cohesiveness and family responsibility for taking care of each other, which existed at that time. Of course, it's a completely different world in many respects. For example, when I was growing up, we used to sit around in the evening with a kerosene lamp on the table in the middle of the living room. It was a bright lamp. I think it was an Aladdin or maybe a Rayo, big deal, because it had a (mandolin?). You got better light that way than you did with the kerosene lamps which just had a plain wick. We'd all sit around the table. So, we all got the light over our left shoulder. Mother might be knitting or sewing or whatever it might be. My father was usually reading the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Because in my childhood, he had never had the advantages of, shall we say, higher education. He spent his winter evenings reading the entire 32 volumes of *Encyclopedia Britannica* from cover to cover [laughter]. So, he got pretty well informed even though he didn't have much schooling.

BR: What would you children be doing while mother was knitting, and father was reading?

JN: We'd be reading, or we'd be doing our homework, whatever it might be. Of course, there were a lot of chores that were done at night, like the bread making, for example. That was done in the evening after supper. That is getting the dough ready. So, we'd put it in pans to be put on the back of the stove where it was warmed for it to raise during the night and ready to bake the next day. Listen, I can go home tonight, for example. I can say – my wife can say to me, "What would you like for dinner?" I can name any one of them, half a dozen things. I can get out of the freezer, get the damn thing out of the freezer, and decide and in half an hour, dinner's ready. Now, in my mother's time, to get that same end product, would have required an all-day's job with somebody supervising. Now, it didn't have to work that time, but you had to be there to make sure, for example, that the beans didn't dry out too much in the oven or whatever it might be.

BR: What would you children be reading, for instance? Did you read any particular books?

JN: Well, we read pretty serious books. I remember struggling, and I mean struggling, through Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But my favorites, of course, were G.A. Henty. This Henty was an adventure story writer about Drake and all the military heroes of the Caribbean, *With Clive in India* and all that sort of thing. And also, Horatio Alger was a favorite, *Rags to Riches* and all that sort of thing and taken quite seriously. I guess Horatio Alger would be laughed at today. But in those days, he was regarded quite seriously by us children. Of course, for periodicals, my favorite was the (*East Companion?)*. I used to look forward to that from week to week, eagerly. I remember there was always a question of a comfortable chair and – to sit around this table and have the light come from the lamp just right in the middle of the table. One time, for a birthday or Christmas, I forget which, my father had been complaining about not having a chair that fits. The chairs don't fit. So, mother put some money in an envelope, and with it a little note saying, "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Birthday, Oscar, for a chair that fits. (Eglantine?)." Dad opened the thing and said, "My god, of all the presents I ever heard of, you give me a present for a chair that fits Eglantine, fits you." [laughter] This was his way of joking about it. He used to go to Boston on trips. In those days, and even in my time, when I got older, in my twenties, in buying lumber, we would go to Boston and go around to the lumber wholesalers, offices of the lumber mills in Boston, and buy. We would buy – for example, we'd buy in February or March the foreseeable entire supply for the next two or three, four or five months. Of course, in those days, too, what you received in the early part of the year, you weren't expected to pay for until November. Today, what you receive on the first day of the month, you're expected to pay for before the tenth day of the month. So, the role of the banks has changed considerably. At any rate, dad used to go to Boston quite frequently. He would come back. He'd usually bring a little present, something he picked up in the sound stations, for the children, consisting of some hard candies in a jar or sticks of candy in a jar. We used to look forward to that with a great deal of eagerness. I remember my younger brother was very generous with things. I was less so. So, I'd pass mine around and give everybody a chance to have one stick. Then I'd go and hide it. Whereas my younger brother would pass his around and get rid of the whole of it. Then when that was gone, go and find mine, and pass that around, too.

BR: [laughter] Getting back to this sitting around the table, was this the dining room?

JN: No. This was the living room. We had a parlor, too. But we never used that except for formal occasions. We had a dining room and a kitchen.

BR: What were the holidays like, Christmas for instance, when you were a boy?

JN: Well, Christmas was celebrated in the schools with a Christmas tree. Everybody got a present of some sort, which you drew names. You were supposed to get a present for that person. Well, the presents were [inaudible], something like ten cents or something of that kind. So, there was no real burden around it. They had the Christmas holiday. They used to give – they have exercises, they call them, singing and recitations and all that sort of thing. The parents were expected to come. The mothers usually did, some of them. The fathers usually didn't, not many of them. Then they had a Christmas tree in the vestry of the church with Santa Claus and

all that sort of thing. We usually had a Christmas tree at home. One of us would dress up as Santa Claus to impress the younger children if there were any around. That's more or less it. It was an interesting holiday. Strangely enough, I don't remember that Easter was considered a very important holiday. That was a religious holiday which had very little impact, in my family at least, on our secular activities. That may have been due in part to the fact that in those days, the nearest Catholic church was in Harwich. We had the Congregationalists, the Methodists, the Universalists, but no Catholic church in the town of Chatham at that time. In fact, there was no Catholic church in Orleans. I think the nearest one in one direction was Wellfleet and in the other direction was Harwich, which is quite a change from today.

BR: Do you remember any other thing, any other stories about your childhood, your family?

JN: Well, I sort of ran out for the moment, I guess [laughter].

BR: Did you have certain chores to do each day, every day?

JN: I'm not sure about the each day. Yes, I did in a sense. We always kept some hens, laying hens. I was responsible for their care and welfare. I must admit that I didn't do very well by them. But I had to pick up the eggs. When we decided to kill a hen so we could have chicken stew, it was my job to cut the head off and pluck the heads and gut them and get them ready. How I hated that job. My reward for that was that I got the hen manure. My father, when he bought it from me, gave me a dollar a barrel for the hen manure. So, I came out pretty well, financially. But in every family, the boys had certain things they were expected to do. Well, for example, one of the things I used to hate to do was beat rugs. [laughter] My mother would have to take the rugs outdoors and lay them on the ground and take a wrought iron rug beater and beat the bejesus out of those rugs. How I hated that. Of course, I had to bring in the laundry off the line on Mondays if I got home from school, the laundry basket. Other boys that I knew had such jobs routinely as filling the wood box. I had, too, which I did of course, but we didn't burn so much wood. We burned more coal, and I had to keep the coal [inaudible]. That was one of my jobs. There were numerous chores. Everybody had to do something. If you had a date with a boy after school to go, and you had to go and do something, you could say, "Well, I'll meet you after I do my chores."

BR: How often did you have to beat the rugs?

JN: Well, frankly, not too often, [laughter] but there was what – there were two rituals. There was the spring house game, which was really a big job. Everything was torn down and taken outdoors and cleaned and put back again. Wallpapers, you've got to change the wallpaper. That was done in the spring house cleaning. You've got to refinish the floor. That was done in the spring house cleaning. Then there was a lesser fall house cleaning. But the spring house cleaning was absolutely sure to have to beat the rugs. Of course, I objected to it, strenuously, after mother got the vacuum cleaner. Because how could you, in any reasonable concept, beat the rugs after having vacuumed them? It didn't make any difference. I still had to beat the rugs. Father used to call it house clearing instead of house cleaning, clearing house. That's another ritual that's no longer done. That was common. Everybody did it. There was nothing peculiar about it. One of the things that I really don't know anything about, of course, but often wonder

about is what the children do for games today. When I was a child, we had certain games that we played routinely. Hide and seek or hide and go seek was one. The way you started that game was to count out to see who was going to be it. The person who was it was the one that had to find the other people. The thing that – the ritual used to go through would be forbidden today as being not in the public interest, I guess, because we used to say, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a nigger by the toe. If he hollers, let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe." I'm sure that would be forbidden today. Another game we played was duck on a rock.

BR: What was that?

JN: Duck on a rock. This game consisted of finding a fair size rock. Then each of us would get a small rock, small, about the size of the hole in your hand. We would choose it the same way we did for hide and go seek. The loser put his rock, his stone on top of the big rock. We had to draw a line a few yards away, maybe 3 or 4 yards away from the rock in the turf, on the sand. We had to stand behind that line and throw our rock to knock his rock off the big stone. If we succeeded in knocking his rock off, which we usually did, if he could put his rock back on top of the big rock and catch one of us before we had caught our own rock and returned back behind the line, then we were it. The first he caught was it. It was a little dangerous sometimes when the rock's flying around, but it was a standard game. Another standard game that we used to play was prisoner's base. This could be played on the ground. It was even more fun when played on the ice. You scored off a line across an area. Then at right angles to that and behind it on either side, you put a base, which was the prison. So, there'd be one on each side of the line. The trick was to go – you divided up both sides, one half on one side of the dividing line and the other half on the other side of the dividing line. The game was to go across on the opposite side from your own and get back without getting caught. If you got caught, then you were incarcerated in the base. Then, of course, the game really began. Because this first stage was simply an opening skirmish. The person on your side would try to run the [inaudible] through the people on the other side and get to you and touch you in the base if you were the prisoner. If they could touch you, then you were released from the prison and could go back and do the game. But if the person who was releasing you got touched, then he had to go into the prison. So, the game consisted of two or three people from one side trying to release the prisoner simultaneously so that they would be diversionary action instead of doing it one at a time. As a result, it was really a mixed-up message in some aspects. It was a lot of fun. Then we had a lot of other games. Marbles, for example, we played marbles then very differently the way the city boys did it. The city boys had eggers, and they made a circle on the pavement. So, the way we did it was to dig out a place where the ground was fairly solid with clay or clay-like and take the heel of our shoe and make a little hole and then fashion it around. So, there was a little cup-like hole in the ground. Then at a certain distance from that, we'd draw a line beyond which you couldn't step. The marbles consisted of small marbles, maybe half an inch to five-eighths of an inch in diameter. It used to be something like ten for a penny or something like that. The trick was to – each person put in a certain number of marbles, like say, two or three. Then you took turns. One person would throw the marbles and try to get them in this hole. Well, there were various methods of doing this. You had to announce in advance of each throw which way you were doing it. For example, there was plunk the pot. Plunk the pot meant that you got only those that stayed in the cup in the ground, the cup-like hole in the ground. Then the next person picked up the rest and went on. But plunk the pot and pushes meant that you had the privilege of pushing.

If you succeeded in pushing a marble, you had to try all the marbles besides those that were in the cup – the ones that were on the outside. But if you failed, you lost completely. Then there was rollers. The rollers meant that you could roll the marbles to the cup without having to let them drop directly into it. It was quite a game.

BR: I didn't realize it was that complicated.

JN: It was very complicated. Of course, when we were very little, we used to play hopscotch. You marked off an area and then had to hop on one foot from square to square and get around. This was done in one of two ways. You would either do it in an oblong way, or you could do it in a concentric circle, like the shell of a winkle. There were many childhood memories, but we didn't have much to formalize, actually. One of the most popular things with the boys when we were growing up was to scrub up. That consisted of taking a baseball bat, which you tossed from one person to the other, to be chosen as leaders. Well, [inaudible]. Anyway, they were supposed to catch it in their hand. Then the other person put their hand directly on top of the first one, going up towards the small end of the bat and so on, until the last one at the very top. We kept going over and over until we got to this position. As I remember, I'm not quite sure about this, but as I remember, the person who was at the top had the choice of who was going to be on his side. Then you choose sides. You never had enough, of course, for a full baseball team. But you had enough for a pitcher and a catcher and, hopefully, a first baseman. Sometimes you had enough for a second baseman and a third baseman, too. We used to play makeshift fields, by the way. There was no organized athletics in the schools except baseball, in my recollection. I think the girls didn't have a basketball team, the boys did. There was no place to practice athletics except outdoors.

BR: One thing we didn't talk about was the shipwrecks, do you remember?

JN: Well, there was a shipwreck, at least one or two, almost every winter, as I remember, growing up. These were mostly schooners going by on the lee shore and couldn't haul off. Life-saving service, as it was called then, before it was called the Coast Guards, was manned by local men who were boatmen. The stations were manned on a seasonal basis. The keeper or the captain or the head man and usually his wife and children stayed on the station during the summer, I guess, from May to September or something like that. Then the folk who would come out in the winter. They had no powerboats. They had only pulling boats. They used to patrol the beach in bad weather, foul weather, in the daytime, and always at night. It was a pretty grim job. The men did their own cooking and everything else. But they were exceptionally fine men, capable men, because they were all local boatmen. They were not on the new boats that knew the waters. When they patrolled the beach, the sand would cut like knives sometimes. It was a very rugged job, especially when you consider that this was being done almost all together in the winter rather than in the summer. Before that, before they had the lifesavers – in Chatham, for example, Chatham, there were four life-saving stations, one in Monomoy Point, one in Monomoy, one in Chatham and West Morris Island, and another in Old Harbor. The Orleans station was only a few miles north of the Old Harbor station. Those were all fully staffed. They used to have a saying in their life-saving service, "You have to go, but you don't have to come back." That was pretty true. Before they had that service, they had volunteer crews. There were men in Chatham particularly who made up these crews. They had their own boats [inaudible].

This was entirely a private enterprise. Their main purpose was to claim salvage. But their first priority was to save lives. They had a rule that no two members of the same family could go in one boat when they went off. So, there were many stories which I heard as a child about a vessel getting ashore somewhere on a bar off Chatham. Both two boat crews would go out, race to get there, one coming over the stern and one over the bow. The guy that would come over the stern got to the captain of the ship first. So, he got the salvage. So, there were stories about how they held the vessel on because the tide was rising. She's going to float off anyway. They'd have to wait until the next tide. Then they could claim the salvage and all kinds of odds at that time. But there was never any question when it came to life-saving. There was one story which I don't know the detail of. It was a bitter, bitter winter, much the same, I guess, sort of winter as we had in the winter of 1976, [19]77. The bay off Harding's Beach between Monomoy and Harwich port was solid ice. There was a vessel in trouble. It was a southwest wind blowing just beyond the ice pack. It was a northwestern blowing at half a gear. The Coast Guard, all their lifesavers, wouldn't go, couldn't make it. Some of the fishermen and boatmen from Chatham got up on top of what they called the hill there where the old windmill used to be, overlooking Stage Harbor. I think it's called (Crocker House?) now. They could see through their binoculars what was happening. The ship was dragging down onto this thing. If the men didn't get taken off that day, she never could go through the night. All will be lost. Well,, they got pretty angry because the life-saving crew wouldn't go. There was a big stink about it. Because, you see, they'd have to go off against the northwestern wind to get them. They certainly couldn't get them. So, they loaded a big dory onto a wagon. They hauled it over to South Chatham or South Hollis. They manned it with a volunteer crew. They went off to this vessel and took off their crew of four or five people. Because the wind was from the northwest, they had to keep going. They couldn't come back. They landed on Monomoy. There, the Monomoy station life-savers were there to greet them and give them assistance. They offered them – to take them up to the life-saving station and give them food and coffee and bedding down for the night. The Chatham members are so damn mad that they wouldn't do that and marched off half-frozen to go back to the mainland without eating [laughter]. All right. But that's one of those stories. You never know how true it is.

BR: You don't know the name of that ship?

JN: No. But I remember hearing the older people talking about it when I was a child. Then, of course, there are the stories which were quite the opposite. Captain Joe Kelly, who lived up the street from us, Joseph Kelly was captain of the Monomoy Point Station. He had quite a reputation. One of the stories about him was that he went off from Monomoy Point in the northwest blizzard to a vessel in distress off the end of Monomoy. He always carried a revolver strapped around his waist when he went on his rescue missions. They finally got to this vessel and took the crew off. But there was no way on earth they could get back against that wind. So, they had to go all the way to Nantucket. If they missed Nantucket, God knows where that – they would never have made it. In order to do this, the crew from the vessel he'd taken off had been giving a little trouble. They were frightened. He made them lie down in the bottom of the boat. And the men rowing put their feet on him. Captain Kelly pulled out his revolver and brandished it around. He said, "Now, the first man that tries to stand up, I'm going to shoot him." [laughter] I'm not sure if I got the story accurate, but that's my general recollection.

BR: They did find Nantucket, though.

JN: Yes, they made it. But if they missed, it's long ways from Monomoy to Nantucket, with the northwest – northerly gale, in a rowboat. Try it sometimes in November, December, and January. Well, I guess, that's about it.

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