

Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School Interviews

Jack Dooley Oral History

Date of Interview: April 5, 2011

Location: Nantucket, Massachusetts

Length of Interview: 00:27:24

Interviewer: MG – Mason Gilbey

Transcriber: NCC

Female Speaker: Now, this is a project for Voices of the Fisheries project. Go ahead and state your name like it says here, guys.

Mason Gilbey: My name is Mason Gilbey, and I'm a student at the Nantucket Lighthouse Middle School. It is Tuesday, 4:00, 5th of April 2011.

Ben Elwell: Captain Jack Dooley is an experienced scalloper and fisherman, and we're here to hear a little about his experiences in Nantucket. Captain Jack, do you understand that this interview is going to be available to the general public as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Voices of the Fisheries project?

Jack Dooley: I don't care [laughter]. I've got no secrets.

MG: Before we start, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. What is your full name?

JD: John Patrick Dooley.

MG: Where were you born?

JD: Born Nantucket.

MG: Where did you grow up?

JD: I grew up in Nantucket, right on Nantucket Harbor most of the time.

MG: What would you say is your occupation?

JD: I'd say I'm a fisherman, retired. Been fishing all my life – most of my life.

MG: How long have you been scalloping?

JD: Scalloping? Oh, I probably went scalloping when I was about 15 to 16. Then I went off and on for the last 50 years, I'd say.

MG: Where have you scalloped most?

JD: Nantucket Harbor and Nantucket (Muskeget?). It's all bay scalloping now, not sea scalloping. Bay scalloping.

MG: Did you learn as a kid with family?

JD: Yes, I learned by going with the older people, the older fishermen.

MG: Have you always been an independent commercial scalloper?

JD: Not always. I was running a charter boat. I ran yachts back and forth to Florida. I went

across the Atlantic for 16 trips, delivering yachts, once to Tahiti [laughter].

MG: Do you have any stories about when you were traveling to Florida or across the Atlantic?

JD: Not really.

MG: Any scary moments?

JD: Just routine, you take the boat down to Florida in the fall and bring it back in the spring for the summer people.

MG: Were there any scary moments that you had?

JD: Scary moment? No.

MG: How has selling your scallops changed over the years?

JD: How has scalloping changed over the years?

MG: Yes.

JD: Well, I don't know. I would say it hasn't been much changed. It's been good years and bad years. I mean, now, our biggest problem in Nantucket probably is, we're worried about pollution.

MG: How has selling your scallops changed over the years?

JD: Well [laughter], I can remember opening scallops for 40 cents a gallon. But now the price is what? \$17 this year?

FS: Something like that, yes.

JD: We sold them for 2 or \$3, \$4 a pound.

FS: Did you use to sell them down at the boat?

JD: No. We always sold them to one of the markets. There were always two buyers here, Glidden and – now, what the heck was it?

FS: Sayle?

JD: No, it wasn't Sayle. That was Glidden and – what was the other buyer's name? Oh, Sayle's got in Atlanta. John Miller and Walter Glidden were the two buyers for years, when we were kids. Miller had a fish market there, right on South Water Street. Glidden was over on Steamboat Wharf. They were the two buyers. They bought all the scallops, between the two of them. What they couldn't get rid of on Nantucket, they shipped to New Bedford, to Eldridge, or

one of them buyers on the mainland.

MG: What was your best scallop season, and when was it?

JD: Oh, I can't remember. We've had a lot of good years –

Joan Dooley: With me.

[laughter]

JD: – and a lot of bad years.

JD: We had a good year, one year.

JD: I've got no dates. I may have to go look it up.

FS: You used to get bags, right?

JS: Yes. We could get twelve bags of scallops. That was most of the time when I started. It was 12 – well, they'd hold three half-bushel baskets. You could get twelve of them per boat, six a man.

FS: That was your limit?

JD: Yes.

FS: Six a man.

JD: Six bags to a man. They would call them bushel bags, but we could get three half-bushels in them to fill them.

MG: How many scallops do you think have you caught over the years?

[laughter]

JD: I don't know. I don't know. I have no idea.

MG: A lot?

JD: I made some living at it, but I wasn't dependent on it for a living. Most of the time, I went commercial fishing on the draggers. Scalloping was in the fall of the year, go for a couple of months. But after I bring the boat to Florida, or the yacht to Florida, I'd come back and go scalloping for a couple of months then go back to Florida.

FS: So, you were more of a fisherman that filled in with scalloping.

JD: Yes.

FS: I was thinking about scalloping because I Googled your name on the internet, and Nantucket Seafood Specialty Scallop Company has your name trademarked.

JD: Oh, yes. He came in as a buyer when Peter had the restaurant – my son had the restaurant – the West Ender out there. Peter bought scallops. This guy got in with Peter and made a specialty of it, selling them to high-end restaurants in New York and those places.

FS: But it's not you. Peter sold it to some other guy.

JD: I sold it to him. Although he was buying them from Peter.

MG: What was it like fishing in all these different places like Florida, Tahiti?

JD: Oh, it was a lot of fun.

MG: Do you have any best memories?

JD: I don't know. It was always fun. Fishing is fun. Catching is fun too if you can catch them [laughter].

MG: Have you ever done any other kinds of fishing? You've mentioned a few. But have you done any others?

FS: What kinds of fishing have you done?

JD: Oh, I've done commercial fishing for cod, haddock, flounder, fluke, (long winters?), on Georges Bank, down in the gully here, south of the island. Fished there, Georges Bank, Nantucket shoals.

MG: What boats did you run?

JD: I served on the *Gladys and Mary*. That was the first dragger I went on. Then I went on to *Mary Tapper*. Fished on all of them out of Nantucket, the (*Kyle Henry?*), *Mary Tapper*, and the *Robert Joseph*. Fished on all of those boats.

MG: What was your typical day like on the water?

JD: Typical day was – well, if it was rough, it wasn't too pleasant. But most of the time, we had good weather.

MG: Have you ever read any close calls in the water?

JD: No, I haven't had any.

MG: What was the most fish or the biggest fish you've caught?

JD: The biggest fish we caught sportfishing was a swordfish, 724 pounds.

FS: Wow. Where was that?

JD: [laughter] That's his bill right there.

FS: Oh, excellent.

MG: Oh, wow.

JD: That's a bill. Now, there's a small swordfish over there.

FS: Was that all from Nantucket?

JD: Yes.

FS: This one, this big one. When was this big one?

JD: Oh, I don't know. 1980, something like that. What was the date on it?

FS: [19]73.

JD: 1973. I caught that one, south of Nantucket, about 50 miles out there.

FS: That's great. You're associated with the Anglers Club. Did you help found the Anglers Club?

JS: Oh, yes. I was one of the founders when we started it back in 1969, I guess it was. We got together with a gang of fellows, (Maxie Rited?), let's see, (Pete Kyle?), Dan Kelleher.

FS: Kenny Holdgate.

JD: Kenny Holdgate was one, yes. It was a nine of us on the first board of directors. I was the first vice president. Pete Kyle was president. I served on the board of directors four years, when we first started.

MG: Can you tell us how boats have changed over the years?

JD: Oh, the yachts are getting bigger and better. Oh, yes, the yachts have – the draggers there too. Fishing is almost over. That's why they've overfished it.

FS: You think they've overfished it?

JD: Oh, yes. Yes. The Russians came in here. We had the 12-mile limit, and they took

everything. They didn't throw anything away. They ground it up. What they couldn't use for food, they used for animal food or mink food or something like that, fish meal, out of it. Twelve miles out, there was a whole fleet of Russian big draggers, motherships, and smaller boats that would catch their load and then go alongside the mothership and unload. Then they would package them and do the whole thing, process them right on the big boats.

FS: When was that? When did they start coming in, the Russians?

JD: Well, I'd say in the fifties, sixties – sixties anyway, sixties and nearly seventies.

FS: Do they still allow that?

JD: No. Now they've got the 200-mile limit.

MG: What equipment did you use to fish?

JD: Well, on the draggers, it was nets; (auto?) trawling, they call it. Then the split fishing was rod and reel. When we went harpooning, we had a harpoon and stuck the fish.

MG: Did you throw the harpoon? Or did you have guns?

JD: No, we threw it.

MG: Wow. That's cool. That's really cool.

FS: That's how you got the swordfish, was harpooning?

JD: Yes. Well, sometimes they won't bite. Now, if they don't bite, we say, well, if he stays up, we don't scare him. We'll go harpooning and stick him. Of course, we'd get them. He wouldn't get away.

MG: How have the rules and regulations changed since you started fishing or scalloping?

JD: Well, there are more and more rules now than there were. It was you could take anything. There was no limit or size. It was, if you wanted it, you caught it; you could bring it home and eat it. Now, they've got all kinds of limits on how big a fish can be, how small they can't take them, how you have to release them. Most of the tournaments now are tag and release. Unless you're going to use the fish or eat it.

FS: How do you feel about that tag and release program?

JD: I think it's great. It's a common thing. [inaudible]

MG: Are you still fishing or scalloping?

JD: No. I'm retired. Recreationally, that's all I do. I go with my son or whoever will take me.

[laughter]

MG: What's the most difficult part about being a fisherman or a scalloper?

JD: Well, if you were on the dragger, years ago, they went out for 6 or 8 days a week, sometimes 11 days. You're away from home. So, it was much home life. You'd be in for 2 or 3 days and then back off fishing. You'd go again.

MG: Were you ever on one of those eleven-day journeys?

JD: Oh, yes.

MG: Have you ever gone up north to fish?

JD: North?

JD: Maine.

MG: Have you ever been, like, to Newfoundland to fish?

JD: Oh, yes. I fished out of Newfoundland with my cousin. But I just went out with him for the ride. He was fishing out of Dunville in Placentia Bay in Newfoundland on the Avalon Peninsula. My father fished on the Grand Banks, dory fishing.

MG: Where's the Grand Banks?

JD: Up in Newfoundland, Eastern Newfoundland. My father dory-fished there. They went off in the schooners and anchored and then set the dories out. They'd go handline the codfish, fill the dory up, and come back and unload them, then rip them open and then salt them, stick them down in the hole. They'd be out there for months. They would only come in for cut bait.

FS: Well, it sounds like you've done so many different kinds of fishing here from Nantucket. You said you also did charter boat?

JD: I operate a charter chat about, yes. It was sort of a pleasure charter boat. The charter boat, when the owners didn't want it, we were allowed to charter it.

FS: Oh, I see.

JD: That would keep us busy and keep us fishing [laughter]. Pay the expenses.

MG: What was it like to be out there on the drag boats for weeks at a time? How was it going to sleep and having a typical day on the boat?

JD: Well, usually, they had a watch. When I first started, there were nine men on the dragger.

There would be four in each watch. The cook didn't have to come on deck, unless we had a boatload of fish. He could come up. You'd have six on, six off, six on, six off. You'd be up on deck for six where you were fishing and working. Then you go down for six hours. Then they cut the cruise down in size as the fish got scarce. So, they went seven. Then you'd be eight and four. You'd be eight up and four down. So, that was right around the clock until whatever watch you had when you started out. You might have the eight and four. You'd have the eight hours. It could be 12:00 to 8:00 and 8:00 to 4:00. Do it four down, eight up. You guys have all been fishing? Blue fishing? Bass fishing? Fishing is fun to keep you out of mischief too.

MG: I still haven't caught a bass.

JD: Oh, you'll catch one.

FS: I've taken Cassie, pond fishing. We have a 5-year-old, and Scott's taken her out. She (caught?) Scott. I took her out. She caught a pickerel.

JD: Pickerel, yes.

FS: That was fun. She was the only kid who would put the worm on her hook.

[laughter]

JD: That was all you needed. When we were kids, we got a stick of wood and a cork stopper. We'd go dig for worms, then go out and throw the stopper out with a worm on it and catch pickerel and perch, yellow perch and white perch and sunfish and pickerel. My grandson, (Brendan?), caught a 3.5-pound pickerel when he was 3 years old. We were patrolling out here in the pond. Next thing, bingo, he had one on.

JD: Got a picture here to prove it.

JD: Yes, show them the picture, Jean. Jean had the Anglers Club record for 14 years on 5-pound pickerel.

FS: Oh, did you?

JD: Isn't that fun?

FS: Five-pound pickerel.

JD: Yes. I used to do a lot of fun fishing.

FS: It's with (Ellen?)

JD: Oh, Ellen always did. Yes. Isn't that funny? He was just a little guy. We were taking care of him. His parents were away. Now, he's all grown up, and he's been to college. He is in environmental – what is he into now?

JD: He's into tagging the fish.

JD: Yes. He's studying fish.

JD: Studying. He's going down to Puerto Rico for four months to study the fishing in the rainforest, in the river, and tagging them and checking their movements.

JD: He'll be living in the rainforest all summer.

FS: Wow.

JD: So, it's quite an opportunity for him.

FS: Yes. Sounds like catching that pickerel was really effective.

JD: Isn't that funny?

FS: It is. It's a great picture.

MG: What's the most interesting place you've been fishing?

JD: I guess it would be on the Great Barrier Reef. I'll show you. We went down there with my boss and his three sons. We went down there one year. I'd forgotten what year it was. We fished out on the Great Barrier Reef for black mullet, and we all caught one. One of the boys caught one, I think, 700 pounds. I guess what they tried to do down there in the fall is they tried to get 1000-pounder. That's what they were looking for. The fish come through there and spawn in the fall, and everybody goes out and fishes them. They fly from all over the world, anglers, sportfishing, trying to break a record. That's when you get the black mullet.

MG: What's the most interesting fish you've caught?

JD: Interesting fish? I don't know.

[laughter]

MG: What's the most rare? Exotic, yes.

JD: Well, I think swordfishing was the most fun. Because you were looking all the time. It was like hunting. It was exciting. You could go all day and not see anything, not see one. But when you did see one, it was exciting. If you caught it, it was even better [laughter].

FS: It breaks the water in it. Scott took me fishing on our honeymoon. It was fun.

JD: Yes. I fished down – sail fishing – down Cozumel, Mexico.

FS: So, how do you think life on Nantucket has changed, especially around the docks and fishing?

JD: It was all commercial fishing. You could drive right down the dock right to the boat when we first started. You didn't have to pay to park. There were no restrictions. You could drive right down to the dock, pull up to the boat, get out, leave your car there all day, and go fishing.

FS: Right now, I guess the only big boat is Bill Blount's *Ruthie B*, down there. There's the dragger. There's also one dragger. It doesn't work, does it?

JD: It doesn't go often.

FS: The price of gas.

JD: There are too many restrictions. You've got to have permits now for scup fishing, for conch fishing, for flounder fishing, and fluke fishing. Scotty fishes. You can ask Scotty a lot of these questions you're asking me.

FS: Oh, yes. I've already gotten an earful.

[laughter]

JD: Have you had him on tape now?

FS: Not yet.

JD: Scotty has done a lot of it. He went back and forth to Florida too.

MG: What is the *Trader 5*?

JD: The *Trader 5*, I'll show you pictures of it. That was a sportfishing boat.

MG: Is that one of the boats you captained?

JD: Yes, back and forth to Florida, to Mexico, down the Bahamas.

JD: It was the biggest boat in the marina.

FS: It was the biggest boat in the marina?

JD: Yes.

JD: For a long time.

JD: It was a good sportfishing – it has got 57-foot berth. We had a 16-foot pulpit on it. Made it 72 feet. [inaudible] on 71 diesels.

MG: What was it like starting the Nantucket Specialty Seafood Company?

FS: I think he said that you didn't start that.

JD: That was Peter and Ken Brasfield. They started that. He was buying a lot of the scallops off of the few local guys. I sold to him for a while. Then I guess he continued on these – I think he still does it on a smaller scale, just for something to do for him. He had the names of a few high-end restaurants in New York, a few places like that. He'd ship them and Federal Express too.

FS: It sounds like you had an exciting life on the sea.

JD: [laughter] You guys go hunting at all?

MG: No. I've never been hunting.

BE: In New Jersey, I went hunting for deer.

JD: Did you?

BE: Yes. I didn't get anything. My brother did.

FS: Well, unless you can think of anything else to ask, we'll wrap it up then. Thank you for talking to us today.

JD: Well, I enjoyed your company.

FS: Thank you.

JD: I like to see young fellows that like fishing. Go fishing. Fishing keeps you out of mischief. When you're fishing, you're having fun.

[end of transcript]