

Interview Log

Interviewee: Roy Harrison

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BEGIN SIDE ASIDE A

KF: All right if I could just have you go ahead and say your name.

RH: My name is Roy Harrison.

Well, uh, where did you want to pick up, because I know you two have had a conversation already.

MM: I think let's just start um, with basic um, over-view of Mr. Harrison's experience as a manager of that plant and then I'll just in the meantime be thinking about these questions that I have, but you go ahead and start. Is that ok with you?

KF: That's fine. Why don't we talk about what were the responsibilities you had as the manager of the plant.

RH: I had the total management of everything, the buying, the selling, the hiring, the firing, the whole, the whole thing.

KF: And, I know...

RH: I never did any firing, I just did the hiring.

MM & KF: [Laughter]

RH: [Laughter] Yeah.

KF: Well how do you hire a crab picker?

RH: Uh, they just come in and say they want to go to work, and we uh, sign them up and take their social security numbers and names and, and uh ask them where they worked previously. And whether they want to be a claw cracker or crab picker or whatever they want to do. And most of them come in with their uh, with some of the uh relatives you know, they work for me, and they come, so they sort of drift in and out you know. And, they can come to work and if they don't, they don't. If they have something else to do that day, they do that. I mean, they're sort of free-lance, they come in and work when they want to work and they stop when want and so forth. Or, we generally start at seven in the morning. And work until they get tire. They quit themselves, if one stops then it's like sheep following the other, the other ones go and that's the way it worked in those days I mean. They weren't uh, they didn't have any certain hours. They knew the hours the plant would be open and the plant, unless we ran out of crabs, we ran out of crabs then they went home.

KF: Well what if you hadn't run out of crabs and everybody decided it was time to go home?

RH: They go home.

KF: And the crabs get picked the next day?

RH: Yeah, um-hmmm. Whatever there is be, we put them in the ice boxes and wait for the next day. Sometimes I ask them to work a little later, if we have certain orders to fill and can't fill them, then they, most of the time, they'll stay later or hang in, sometimes they won't. Depends on the quality of the crabs, the crabs are real good they stay later, if the crabs are poor and small then they go home. So, I don't have any control over that, that part. If they want to go home, they go home. And they come back the next day, that's, that's the way it is.

MM: Did that change at all in the thirty-nine years that you worked as the manager, was that always the case?

RH: That was always the case. Yeah, um-hmmm.

MM: And how did they know that the plant was open and they could come in to look for work, how did the crab pickers hear when the season was beginning? And when did they start picking?

RH: Well, when we first started we used to blow a whistle. Uh, and uh, you could hear it all over town. But in later years it was by word of mouth. It just uh, if uh, for instance uh, some crabs came in if we say we weren't going to work or wouldn't have the crabs

then um, and they should, we should locate some, then we'd get somebody to get in a car and tell them all and tell them what time to come in.

KF: So most of the pickers didn't have telephones, it was hard to call?

RH: It was easier to go around tell them all, most of them didn't have telephones. Very few of them had them. Way back, they do now, but in the early days they didn't have telephones too much.

KF: And um, we're trying to also understand the traditions that crab pickers had and a lot of the owners and managers have been very observant about traditions that pickers had, what kinds of things did your pickers do like um, did they all have their special chair they had to sit in....?

RH: They all had their own place, and they sat at the same table every day, in the same chair everyday and they were responsible for keeping or cleaning up at night their table and their chairs and uh, and they washed their buckets and pans and whatever utilities they had. And uh, they were responsible for that. And they did a good job. We had steam cabinets where they could put the pans in, we'd turn the steam on, sterilize them. Things like that. And then in the cabinet they would have their own place where they kept their pans or buckets and so forth.

KF: And what about hymn-singing or anything like that.

RH: Oh they, they love to sing, yeah, it was beautiful, mostly toward the end of the day is when they'd start to get tired you know and then they'd start to sing and, gorgeous, I wish I could have recorded some of that, I, it was the most beautiful music I ever heard. All kinds of Gospel things, their kind of music in other words.

KF: Well what was it like working in a place that had such beautiful music happening almost every day?

RH: I enjoyed it, it was nice, they didn't sing every day, but um, they would sing several times a week you know. One would start, and then they would start each one coming in, first thing you know, just about the whole place was singing. And they could really harmonize. And then in later years uh, we found that uh, I put in a microphone upstairs, I could talk to them, and the speakers downstairs, and then I had a, a thing that you could play music over these speakers, and if you played the faster music, their kind of music is faster, they work faster. So we tried to play the faster records, you played the slow records they slowed down. But that uh, really helped. And it helped them, they, it relaxed them you know and give them something to listen to, we played whatever records they requested and all that you know....

KF: Do you remember any of the records or songs?

RH: No I don't, no, I can't remember. A lot of them were Gospel records and, and as I say

some of the, of course Gospel's a lot slower, but I mean there's a faster music, we did that purposely to speed them up a little.

KF: When was this, the fifties, sixties?

RH: Oh, that was in the sixties, yeah. And if I wanted to talk to them about anything I could just sit in the office and tell them, you know, I'd like for them to stay later or we had orders to fill or if they were getting too much shell in the crab meat and all that.

KF: Now did you have assigned numbers to your crab pickers?

RH: Each picker had a number, and that number she kept whole time, all time.

KF: Was that number on the can too that they turned in?

RH: We put that on the can as they weighed their meat up, and uh, and if a customer complained about any too much shell or any foreign thing that's in the crab meat then uh, we could go right back to the picker. That way.

KF: How do you handle that, if somebody comes, calls up and complains?

RH: We hardly ever had any complaints, once in a great while, but we didn't have very many. If it, if we had a complaint, it was in a general area like uh, some of your crab meat has too many bones in it. They didn't say any particular person. Which they could have but uh, most of the time they just say well, you're getting a little too much shell. And then, we'd just go back and I'd talk to the pickers and I say well we're getting too much shell and then as they weighed up their meat, we would dump a can out and finger through it to see how many shell, too much shell in it. We weren't supposed to do that because the Board of Health says you got to pick directly into your can, you can't, but we had to do it in order to keep it under control.

KF: It was a quality control thing. I'm wondering if you can um, describe for us when you walked in the door to the plant um, if you could take us on a little tour of what the plant looked like when you walked?

RH: Well as you come in the front door, that was our retail room. Where we sold the meat retail over the counter or crabs or whatever. And we also used that room as um, we used to wrap a lot of crabs, steamed crabs, there was a big piece of parchment that you put the crab on, then you, if he was short a claw, then you had to find a claw, which was left or right to put on that thing, wrap it up, fold over the back, the ends, and uh, then there's a rubber band went around both ends. And it had a picture of a big steamed crab, when you turned it over, a whole big picture of a steamed crab. And we had oh, seven or eight people, but uh, well, mostly about five, four or five doing it. All day long. And we'd get, oh, sometimes eight or ten barrels of steamed crabs you know, we had the people on the wharf, they would cull out the biggest ones you know, and, pickers didn't like it particularly, taking out all the big crabs. Joan was up here a while ago and I was

reminding her, I said, Melissa's coming, maybe you can fill her in, she used to wrap crabs for me you know, she and Janet, my daughters, and make money, they'd sit there all day and wrap crabs. They weren't happy about it all the time but they did it anyway.

KF: Now did the company always sell those steamed crabs?

RH: Well we sold them retail, but most all these went to Food Fair stores. The chain stores, they'd put them in their stores. And we sold a lot of them in New York, Fulton Market. We had quite a big business on that.

KF: And when did you all sell these steamed crabs, was it the fifties or earlier or later?

RH: No, back in the sixties and uh, the seventies, I think we more or less stopped doing that in the seventies. Uh, because most of the crabbers would cull them out themselves, the big ones, and then the trucks would come around and buy those and all we got were the culled crabs, see. And they paid so much for them that we couldn't afford to buy the good crabs and do that, this was back in the days when the crabber just crabbled in the barrel, brought it in, and then we would dump it on the table and cull the big ones out and the rest went to the pickers to pick. But after they caught on and then the cities they pay so much money for the basket crabs and then they got refrigeration on the trucks and they could take them right in and these places could steam their own crabs and season them, you know like they do today. And all that was left that we had, so we gave up on the, I guess it was in the seventies. When we, maybe the middle seventies, when we stopped wrapping crabs and just concentrated on picking.

KF: Now was wrapping crabs how much of your business was that?

RH: Oh yeah it was at one time, yeah, we had uh four or five people wrapping all day long on them and we got the parchment paper and they were printed up right up here at Sherwood, there was a printing office, the Ronson [?] Printing Company, they printed these things that I can't remember what it had, maybe a Harrison jar of **[unintelligible word]** seafood on it with the crab and, I remember the big red crab, I can't remember what we printed on it, but uh, it was a good advertisement. And change stores loved them that way, I mean, you could take a big crab and you can take a smaller crab and not wrap it as tight and it will look almost as big as a big crab, see. You can get away with a lot with it wrapped up that way, see.

MM: Did people go and I'm thinking about the customers for these wrapped crabs, would somebody go and buy one of these wrapped crabs for lunch? Is that how, and they would just buy one?

RH: You mean where we'd sell them?

MM: The customer at Food Fair, would they come in and just buy one of these wrapped crabs?

RH: Well they could buy a dozen, half-dozen, whatever you want, they would have them in their cases, they, of course they had to keep them refrigerated all the time. And they would have it in the refrigerating cases, and then they could buy a dozen, two dozen, I guess one if they wanted it. Yeah. I never really went into it to see how they did that, but I'm pretty sure that's the way they did it. See where you wrap some, they're not all the same size, when you wrap some a little looser, than they all look alike. Of course you could tell by the weight of the crab, you had to have it fairly, now in Philadelphia you could wrap uh, for the Philadelphia market you, they wanted a big crab, they didn't care whether it was fat or not. They wanted the size. Baltimore city, they wouldn't take a poor crab. You had to have fat crabs for them, they knew more about crabs I think, in Baltimore. And it was funny, between the two cities, but, in Philadelphia they would want it, now New York you could send either one up there, they didn't care. They had preferred the big fat ones. But if they were big poor ones, they didn't say anything, long as it looked fairly big.

MM: Were the wrappers the same people as the pickers or are they different kinds of people?

RH: No, no, they were all white people that we had wrapping, um, young people come in, you know, some of the, let's see, my kids did it and maybe some of the people, I forget just who did it. There's some of the help, you know, wasn't busy, or the truck driver or somebody, he would go in and do some, see, just to keep busy. There wasn't any particular, we had some that, mostly did it, but I say anyone around the plant that wasn't busy, if they wanted to go in and wrap crabs, they could do that. We pay them by the hour on that, wrapping crab, um-hmmm.

KF: Well we had started on a tour of the plant, and so I guess we want to...

RH: Fact is I even wrapped some myself sometimes. When I wasn't doing anything except sitting around I'd wrap some. Yeah, well, when you came out of the retail room, now this was down on Navy Point, this was a plant down there I'm talking about, that's the place I was most of the time, right there, um, when you came out of the retail room, you come directly into the packing room. And, there was a big refrigerator there, ice machines to make the ice, and um, then on one side of the room was um the oyster department in the packing room, it was sort of, it wasn't divided exactly, but one side was oysters, the other side crabs. And we had separate windows now when we were doing both at one time, the oysters would be coming in to one side of the packing room, shucked oysters, and the crabs, meat, would be coming in on the other side. Crab meat was to the left and oysters to the right because the oyster shucking room is to the right. Um, and then uh, of course was the picking room. Which was about um, it held, oh, let's see that room held about uh seventy people I guess. Something like that.

KF: And was there always about seventy people picking?

RH: In the early days there was, yeah, and then it, as the years went by, they, some of them died and some of them didn't want to do it anymore and they kept getting lower and

lower and lower and the final year I was in it there was only about seven... sixteen, seventeen at the most and they, and you could only figure about a dozen or something like that when I retired. And now Joe Spurry tells me, he bought the plant, and I think he has one left out of, out of the old pickers that I had. Just one left. Of course now they're not all dead, some of them are retired and have got social security but uh, there's just some living still, I can't remember all their names, but uh, and then, when you went out of the picking room to the, we were going from west to east through the plant, retail was on the west end as you come in the road and then it, toward the water, we're going toward the water, then you go out into what we called "the bins", that was a room where the oysters were stored, you know, we'd have several thousand bushels sometimes in the early days, in these bins, have four or five bins, you'd put one day's oysters in, or don't you want to go into oysters, would you want to stay with the crabs?

KF: Go ahead and explain this, this is great.

RH: Well I was, on the left were the oyster bins, and then, to the right ... we changed this plant around two or three times. To the right was where we had the round cookers, they held fifteen barrels, which is about sixteen, seventeen hundred pounds of crabs in each one, and it was a roll-type thing, it was a live steam thing, what it was was a stainless steel cooker that was round and had steam pipe that went, perforated steam pipe that went through, and when they turned the steam on, all that steam would come out of these perforated pipes and steam the crabs. Well you put a top on it and you fasten it down as tight as you could but still steam escaped from it and that's the way we did it for many years. And that room's to the right as you came out of the picking room, there was two, two steamers there and used to keep them going all the time, they would use up fifteen barrels in no time and, the time you'd get another fifteen barrels picked, because we were picking over a hundred barrels a day, at that time. Um, and then later we, we changed that around, we got into clams later, so we took that crab picking, or crab steaming room and put a refrigerator in there and we also, that's where the clams came in from the boats, the boats would pull up to the side of this building, we'd open a little door, and put a roller track in there and the clam boats would roll it right on into the ice box, with in other words we made a ice box out of that room. And then we built a new room on the, on the east side uh where the bins are, we extended out toward the water, and then we got into, when we built that, we got into the retort cookers, the pressure cookers, that's what the health department almost insisted on at that time because the bacteria count was lower, it seemed like with that. So we had two great big retort cookers that held about the same amount, they held I think it was fifteen barrels, it was two great big trays that you dumped the crabs in, you'd hoist them, we had a hoist that hoists the crabs up, you have a picture of, you know, in, that magazine of a retort cooker. Let's see. **[sound of pages being flipped]** Well, what it was, it's like your home pressure cooker on a stove that you have, it's under pressure you know, this is only great big you know. And uh, they stood about, we had to have platforms where you could get up to drop these big crates in, we had hoists, electric hoists, that dropped them in. And then you screwed, had great big bolts that screwed the tops down on. And um, so we got into using those and we used those up until I retired. And, when I first got into it, we had just the upright boiler, that used soft coal, and you had to make the fire up with the kindling and then it took a while

to get the steam up. And but you kept it up all day, the soft coal was very hot, you couldn't use anything but soft coal. And uh, of course it made a lot of pollution with the stack you know, but then after, in later years then we got into the oil-fired boilers, they were all automatic and everything. But uh, those early ones you had to, it had an injector on there, you had to inject the water to get it to go in this little boiler and all that, it was hard wor...hard to...much better in later years, you just flip the switch and the thing comes on and you got the steam up, it was a big improvement.

KF: You were talking about the oysters and the crabs and in describing the way things were set up and the equipment, was it easier to just shuck oysters and run that operation than it was the crab picking?

RH: I liked the crab picking myself, I like that better, the oysters was, we never could make a lot of money on oysters, that's one reason I didn't like it and then, because it was all a lot of work, the things were heavy and you had to hoist them out of the boats and mud and, and some of the shuckers were stabbers, where they stab the oyster and open it and some were breakers, they had a little thing where the piece of metal here and they'd take a little hammer and break the bill and they called them "Breakers." And when they did that, they messed up the whole bill and all, that stuff would fly you know all over the place and all over everybody. We didn't have too many breakers, they're mostly in Virginia where the oysters are harder. But most of ours were stabbers. And um, I tell you oystering is in the winter time and I don't like winter anyway and I just didn't like the oyster business much. Clam business I loved and the crab but oysters I ... and they would bring the oysters in, lot of the, well some, now this is not all of them, some of them were pretty honest but, they would try to crib the oysters, they'd show them a certain way and you can leave a hollow place down in the tub and then they'd throw their old boots their old uh cans or whatever they can to fill the tub you know and, it was a lousy business I thought, I never liked it, it was wet and cold and everything else. So I liked the crab business and I liked the clam business, they were both more summer time businesses, warm weather. Of course we crabbed, I mean we did the crab year around, I mean we'd go into dredging they'd get them out of Virginia, dredge crabs out of the Bay. And uh, and I really liked the crab business.

KF: It just sounded that there was more equipment needed for the crab business than there was for the oyster business and I was wondering if that made it more complicated?

RH: Well, no, um, we had the, we had the shucking benches, in the early days, we had two, we had a room along the water, which was a great long room, it was a smaller room, than we had the big room. In the early days we would, for the winter time picking, a lot of the pickers went into shucking oysters. They wouldn't pick in the winter because they, you had to wash the crabs, well they couldn't make as much money. Anyway, we would take all of the equipment out of the, all the tables and everything, out of the big room and turn that over to oysters, and we had about forty, fifty shuckers in there. And then we would take the little room and use that for crab picking because we didn't need as much space. And you'd have to haul all these tables out of one room and put them in the other and all that, and um, Bill Jarboe [sp?] did, in the early days when we were handling a lot

of oysters, Bill Jarboe he ran the oyster operation, he and Jim Warner, they, they'd run that. But in later years, I had it all, I complained one time that they were losing all of my crab money in the oyster business in the winter, see I making it in the summer, they'd lose it in the winter. They said, "Well if you can do any better, you can do it yourself." I should have been listening instead of talking because they dumped the whole thing on me then, they wouldn't, that was the end. So I had it all after that, but it was on a much smaller scale. They were shipping four, five thousand gallons a day and buying from eleven or twelve houses and all that, where I didn't, what I shucked I packed. I made it as simple as possible because I didn't like that business anyway.

KF: You said the summer crab pickers would go into oyster shucking in the winter?

RH: Yeah, uh-huh.

KF: Who would pick your dredge crabs then in the winter time?

RH: Well we had some that didn't like to shuck oysters, and they stayed with crabs year around, but some of them that, just like the crabbers, they would work till oyster season came along, if they liked to go tonging, they'd go tonging, then you didn't have the crabs in the fall, same way with the clam boats, my clam boats captains, they would work up to September the first, and then they'd quit and I'd have to lay the boats up, of course the season is mostly, on clams, the summer anyway. There wasn't much demand in the winter, so it didn't make any difference to me, that much. Because the big months they'd already gone, so they liked to, to tong you know, though why I don't know, because that's awful hard work too. But, and the clamming was such a beautiful job, I mean they just stand there and run the boat and pick the clams off in the baskets, it's very clean and wasn't as strenuous as the, tonging oysters you know that's hard work. Anyway, that's what they liked to do so.

KF: Did you have your own fleet of boats?

RH: Yeah, we had our own fleet.

KF: Just for the clams or for the crabbers too?

RH: No, no, just clams. We had four uh, four boats, and we kept them right at the plant, we had the uh, the slips built right there in Fog's [?] Cove where we kept the boats right there. I owned the boats myself and I sold them, I sold the uh clams to the company. We started out they, they, I started out with one boat and then they, I did so good with that then they decided they'd like to get into it so we bought them together and we had the Fuller [?] and then busy in tomatoes and I don't know for some reason they decided they wanted to get rid of them so they sold them all to me and I ran them for about ten years until the hurricane sanded everything and that was the end of it.

KF: Was this Agnes or...?

RH: Uh, yeah, Agnes, yeah the one that had all the water, you know that was **[unintelligible phrase, Coniwingo?]** going down the Bay and I think it was Agnes. It was in seventy-one, yeah, yeah, that was, so I sold all the boats. One of them went to North Carolina and two to Rock Hall and one to Annapolis, I believe that's where they went. And we were moving to McDaniel anyway and I had no place to keep the boats, they'd sold the plant to uh, the Museum at that time. So it all worked out good in a way. Not for the clammers so much but uh, for me it worked out good because I wouldn't have had any place to keep the boats. But I did like the clam business, it was nice clean business. And I like that.

MM: I want to ask you about the summer crab pickers who didn't want to pick the winter crabs. And you said the reason that some of them didn't is because they had to wash the crabs?

RH: Well we wash them year around really.

MM: Ok, can you lead us through the process? Once you get the crabs, walk us through the process, both in the summer time and in the winter time.

RH: Yeah, well the um, as I say our customers liked white crab meat, they didn't like all that fat and yellow and all that in it. Now personally I like it, to eat it, I'd rather have the fat in it. But our customers didn't like it, because it didn't look good, you'd put the glass or plastic top on there and then the yellow fat would squish all up under the glass and, but where they wash the crabs um, it was much cleaner and the pickers seemed to like to wash the crabs, they didn't object because it was, when you're picking crabs and all that fat and dirt gets in your fingers and, and it's much cleaner. What they'd do, they'd pull the top shell off, then they'd trim the crab, the body, they trim the fins off, of course they break the claws off first, and then they pull the top shell off, then they trim the crab, and then they pull out the dead man's fingers and all that in the middle, you know all about that and the apron. Then it's just a little thing about like this see, and they fill the bucket up, then they take it over to a washer, we have, uh, oh I guess there were eight or ten sprays, where, there was a great long stainless steel washer where they dump them in the washer and pick them up and then they have this uh spray that they spray each crab and put it in another bucket see, or put it in the same bucket, they wash the bucket out. And then they would take it back to the table, that's where they pick the crabs. And the claws would be turned over to, the people that do the claws. Now if they prefer to do the claws themselves, which a lot of them did, they would do them themselves. Most of them, uh pickers didn't like to crack claws, and ones that liked to crack claws, didn't like to pick crabs, so it worked out good that way too.

KF: Was there ever any reason why they ...?

RH: It doesn't take long to learn how to crack a claw, all it is is crack a claw, break it and take the meat out see, of course to get fast enough to make a living at it, you've got, it's a certain amount of skill to that too. But to learn to pick crabs it takes several years to learn how to trim the crab and to be able to get it out of the sections without getting a lot of the shell

in it and all that. So um, as I say, they go back to their table, they pick their crabs, and they'd already turned over their, their claws to what we call "claw crackers." And the claw crackers would sit there and crack their claws and, then we always see that they had a top, of course all the cans had a top. Now one time we used the metal cans, then in later years, after we got down to McDaniel plant, they got into plastic, they were cheaper, and um, everybody got into plastic. But they were bulky, you couldn't get as many in a barrel, for shipment, you could get maybe eighty pounds in a barrel or something like that with the plastic because they were, as I say, bulky. Where they, and I never thought they refrigerated as good, the metal I thought cooled the crab quicker than the plastic. But we insisted that they put topping on their, they take the biggest pieces, like backfin you know, they biggest pieces of backfin as they were picking they'd put on this top, and when they brought it up, the put the top on the scale and they put the can on the scale, and they'd take out of the can until the scale registered one pound see, and then whoever was in there taking the meat, in the packing room part, they would take this top and flip it over, you had to do it quick or you get these, this topping would slide off. And then it would show up through this thing as great big lumps you know, we had to make it look pretty you know in order to sell it. And we did that with the claw and the regular, the special, we had four different grades that we picked. Now they got what they call "Lump" and they've got uh, "Big Lump", and all, but it's all backfin, backfin is as big as you can get, but they have, then they came out with, used to call it "Deluxe," "Deluxe Claw," Deluxe uh", deluxe didn't mean a thing but it was on there, it made it sound good you know [Laughter]. So anyway, there were a lot of gimmicks, and stuff you had to do. And the Board of Health, they didn't like the "Deluxe" and they, but they went along with this "Lump" and "Jumbo Lump", then they had "Lump", then they had "Backfin", and all that. But it was all, it was just lump was all, I mean backfin lump, that's all it was. But they, called it all kinds of things to get more money for it I guess. I didn't do that, all I had was "Backfin," I never went into all that "Deluxe" stuff. We did go into "Deluxe" for a while, when we saw it didn't mean anything so.... It was just something, a gimmick.

MM: What were the four different grades that you were marketing?

RH: The "Backfin", the "Special", now the "Special" was supposed to be broken up lump, you break up your lump, it's supposed to go in the "Special", but what it really wound up to be, it was nothing but uh, the better pickers, that picked cleaner and, and didn't mash it up, that was called "Special" but it was topped with backfin. The top layer was backfin, the rest of it was, the finer white meat, which was, we called "Regular." I don't think they have any "Regular" anymore, I think they're all called "Special".

MM: And then "Claw" was the fourth one?

RH: The "Claw" was the fourth one, that was the dark meat, out of the claw.

MM: That process that you just led us through, that was the summer time process, and was it the same in the winter time? Was there, were there any extra steps to make sure to wash the crabs when you were getting those Virginia crabs?

RH: Um, you had to wash them a little more thoroughly I would say. Because uh, if you

know crabs, you take them out of the mud, there's all that mud under the shell, when you pull the top shell off, all the uh, dead man's fingers or lungs or whatever they want to call them is full of mud, so in order to get it, you don't want crab meat with any grit in it, so they had to be extra careful, spraying in the winter time, to make sure that you didn't get any grit in it.

KF: What did you spray them with, was it just water or...?

RH: Just water, um-hmmm, just plain water. It was a right high pressure where you could, you know, wash all the dirt and the fat and whatever out of them.

MM: Were all of these women black? The pickers, were all of the pickers black or did you have white pickers?

RH: In the St. Michael's um, plant we had all black. We may have at, on occasions, maybe one or two white, but I can't even remember who they were. But I do remember I think maybe one or two, they didn't stick though. Now in Cambridge, the Cambridge plant had uh, about two-thirds black and um, one-third white.

MM: What was the difference do you think? Was it just the, their working class in St. Michael's....

RH: Well they were predominantly black in St. Michael's. There wasn't any white pickers that I ever knew of in St. Michael's. Now as you go toward Cambridge and Hooper's Islands, now you get down the islands, they're all white. Because there're no colored people down there, see, so the crabbers wives and so forth pick the crabs. We had a plant at Hongo [?] River for several years, and they were all white pickers. And they were fast too, they could really pick, good pickers. And I say there at the Cambridge plant, that was in nineteen forty, I say they were one-third white and two-thirds black. And the whites set to themselves and the blacks, which was normal because they had their own thing going I guess, they wanted to talk about the things they talked about, they talked all day long. But the, they thoroughly enjoyed picking I think because they'd laugh and talk and, you know, and seemed to have a ball. And I remember in nineteen forty in the Cambridge plant, um, talk about them singing, they came out with a song called uh, "You Are My Sunshine", you remember that song?

KF: Yes.

RH: They sang that all day long, that same song. I got so tired, it would sound good but I mean I would get tired of listening to that same song. "You Are My Sunshine"--I'll never forget that. That was back in nineteen forty, it came out that year, evidently, or the year before or something. But that was...now I can't remember whether the white people sang it or all of them, I guess it was all of them I don't know.

KF: Now did you manage all of these plants? The one in Cambridge and here and...?

RH: Um-hmmm, well the one in Cambridge um, we only had that uh, I got married in nineteen forty, we built the plant in nineteen forty, and I got married and moved to Cambridge in forty and we ran that plant I think it was two years, two seasons, and um, then I had to come back to St. Michael's, Mr. Jarboe died and his son, he was running the St. Michael's plant and I had to come back here, so they sold that plant to um, General Foods, I couldn't think of the name of who they sold it to, General Foods Corporation. They bought that plant and I came back to St. Michael's, so we didn't have that anymore. But we had one at Sherwood down at Lowe's [?] wharf that we ran in the summer time, I don't know whether we ran that in the winter or not, I guess we did. And then uh, we opened the uh, Hooper's Island plant, it was at Hongo River, and uh, I had a manager from St. Michael's, it was [unintelligible name, Adgo Seeder?], there's a Doctor Adgo Seeder in Easton, it's his brother that ran the plant at Hooper's Island, and it was strange the way they did, the pickers would work at several plants, now they would go to work at our plant at uh, twelve o'clock at night and they'd work till seven in the morning, and then the plant would close until twelve the next, the next night. And um, by the time I got there in the morning about eight o'clock, he would be back from Hooper's Island with all the crab meat they'd picked that night. It was strange. Then those pickers would go on to another plant and work in another plant. They must have worked all of the time almost down there. I don't know whether they worked more than two plants or whether it was three, but they worked more than one plant, same pickers.

MM: Wow. That didn't happen in St. Michael's?

RH: No, no, unh-uh, no they'd start at about seven o'clock in the morning and work till they got tired.

MM: Were you all the only picking house in St. Michael's?

RH: Oh no, no there was one next to us, Coburn and Jewitt [spelling?], they uh, they picked. And then uh, there was one across the harbor, you know where the hotel is across the harbor, there was one over there. That was Clayton Larmore [sp?], Larmore, he ran a plant over there. Now that was way back in the early forties. Because he didn't stay in business too long. But I remember when we were running

END SIDE ASIDE A
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RH: Down at Wittman, he picked for us, it was Percy Marshall, uh, he had a little picking house, you know they had about uh, seven or eight pickers, or ten pickers maybe or something like that, and we took all his meat, he was independent, we didn't own that, I mean he, it was his plant, and uh, it was on a small scale, and then he shucked oysters for us in the winter and picked crabs in the summer for us. We bought all his product.

MM: So he was, would he be ca...would he have a bush [?] house?

RH: It, I yeah, you would class it as a bush house.

MM: And it's the oyster part that makes him a bush house?

RH: The oyster, yeah, they never refer to a crab house as a bush house, I don't think. But it more or less was, I mean when you have few pickers and sold to somebody else, you didn't sell your own product retail, and oysters, there was a lot of bush houses at one time. My gosh, it seemed like this harbor, way up in the harbor there was all, when my grandfather had a bush house up there, he had two or three shuckers. He'd catch his oysters and they'd come in and he would shuck them and some of his family would get in there and shuck and, they were just little shanties is all they were, and then he would sell to the bigger house you know, you get more money for it that way than you would just unloading your oysters to the other house. And it increased production too, but we bought from bush houses, I say we had I think it was about eleven at one time, now most of them were over at Kent Island, several at Kent Island, and Raleigh Crayton [sp?] at Hooper's Island, he picked crabs for us and also ran some oysters, I think he did oysters down there too.

MM: Going further down past Wittman, were there, there were big packing houses down at....?

RH: Well the one at, uh, of course we owned the one at Lou's [?] wharf, we owned that, and we ran oysters and crabs later we did that, but uh it was a fish house for a while, they cut fish and then they, there was a tomato house down here where we canned the fish and canned the uh, fish roe, we had uh herring roe, that was the main fish, the herring, herring roe, then we did some shad, and shad roe, but not much shad roe. And um, let's see, oh a lot of it was put in vats, we canned a lot of it, maybe a half or something like that or maybe a third we canned and the rest of them just went in great big vats with pickle, and we'd pickle the herring, and uh, then they would be put in, we'd sell those to Vita Foods up around Chestertown, and we'd sell them, we'd put them in great big barrels you know with the pickle and seal the tops and ship them to the cities. I don't know what they did with them, they ate them all I'm sure but, I don't know just what happened after we shipped them out, but I do some went to Vita Foods where they put them in these little glass jars, you can still buy them today I think, little cut up pieces of herring. Uh, that's where, I would say half or two-thirds of the herring went. And then the war came along and we canned um, whittings for overseas. And we shipped a lot that way, and I think later we canned some for dog food or something, this was after the war was over. But that was about the end of the fish business. Because there wasn't any herring on the Bay, I think I told you in nineteen thirty-six I went to uh, northeast, we had a plant up there that we rented from uh, fellow named Harvey, we rented that several years and um, I was the office manager, I was right out of high school, and I got nine dollars a week, man I was really making money. Everybody was jealous of me, I had such a good job, because all of the other wages were about fifteen cents and hour, that was standing, going wage at that time in canning houses and all, fifteen cents. So, that was back in thirty-six, thirty-seven.

KF: And that plant canned herring?

RH: Canned herring, yeah, we canned herring up the Bay. Well we were running this too, somebody, one of the company was running this one too. But that was the one that belonged to a man and we rented that several years. We lived right up there during the season. And rented a bungalow in northeast and lived right there. But all I did up there, I was just, tend the office, took time on the people working, stuff like that, I didn't have any, I didn't run the plant or anything like that. I was only, seventeen or something at that time. Right out of high school.

KF: Do you remember what the name of the plant was in Hongo?

RH: Well, I don't know, I'll tell you who owned, Hubert Applegarth, uh owned the plant and we rented the plant from him or, or leased it or whatever for a couple of years. Um, but we, it was all the Miles River brand, our brand on crab meat was the Miles River brand. And that's what they picked in, our Miles River brand cans. That's the only brand we ever had. In the crab meat.

MM: Did you notice any difference between the way that the women picked crabs in the Hongo River plant when you got up here? When you started working in the St. Michael's plant, were there any differences?

RH: I had trouble at the Hongo plant um, when we first started, they were used, the meat was fine, the white meat, but the claw crackers, see we always pulled the meat off the clincher bone, you know what I'm talking about, where it bites, we pulled it off. Of course the other had not bone in it anyway, the other piece of the claw you know, it was free of bone, you just take that piece out. They were used to just breaking that thing off, the clincher, with the bone still in there and put it in the crab, well you've got a whole thing full of clincher bones in there and that wasn't good. And we had to change that, they told me, I think we had to pay them a little more money or something, the claw crackers, to get them to take that bone out. Because they were real proud of, they'd take that great big clincher bone, put it on top, put the **[unintelligible word or phrase]** on top here, on top the meat, and it'd look good till you start to eat it and, good gosh, all that clincher bone, that was the only difference in the picking. And they did get a little more shell in it down there, we did have some problems with the shell, that we had to, do the best we could, and then we would take that meat and send it to some customers that, uh, that we weren't as proud of as some of the others you know. Sell it a little cheaper maybe or something like that. But we did the best we could and as I say we only ran two years, and uh we give up on it.

KF: So until forty-two, the one in Hongo closed down in forty-two or...?

RH: Um, no, that was uh, no the Hongo plant was um, in the sixties. Yeah it was in the sixties. Now the ones back in the forties was St. Michael's and Sherwood, and I say we bought from Percy Marshall and um, Raleigh Creighton at uh, at Hooper's Island, I think they were the, I think it was four plants that were picking for us at that time. But all of the meat from all of the plants went to St. Michael's and it was all packed and re-packed from St. Michael's plant. I mean they didn't do any selling or anything like that. I sold it

all right from St. Michael's. We were, we sold crab meat by the barrels then, I mean you call the customers, you don't say how many pounds of this or how many pounds of that like we did in later years, you just say, "How many barrels you want?" And guy would say, "I'll take two barrels of claws, two barrels of regular, and a barrel of backfin." And a barrel consists of about a hundred and twenty-five pounds.

KF: And were the barrels actually wooden barrels?

RH: Yeah. Used to call them sugar barrels, they were big barrels. It'd hold about...

KF: Did you have to purchase those barrels?

RH: Oh yeah. We bought them from barrel companies, there was one at Cambridge, and, let's see I was trying to think where we got them. Crab barrels we got out of Nassawondix[sp?], Virginia, they were special barrels that were all um, riveted all the, so they'd last a long time. Uh, and we had to get them out of Nassawondix, that was the only place that made crab barrels. I was trying to think where we got our other barrels. I believe we bought them from Marshall's Express, I think he would haul them, they were used barrels see, Marshall's Express was running to Philadelphia and Baltimore and he'd take the freight up and then he'd, we'd send it in barrels and then a lot of times we'd get the same barrels back and have to buy the barrels over again. We bought them once and then we shipped them out, then Marshall would buy the barrels and sell them to us. I think that's the way a lot of that was. And then we'd buy the barrels and fill them again and use them over again.

KF: I hadn't heard about this special crab barrel. I know a couple of people said they got their barrels from Brooks Barrel Company in Cambridge.

RH: Yeah, I bought some from Brooks too, in later years. Yeah Brooks, but I'm talking about before Brooks. Um, I think we got them from Marshall's Express, and then there was somebody else, but I can't remember where we got them. As I say in later years Brooks was the only one that I know of, I'd go over and get a load or he'd bring over a load. He was a nice guy, I liked him.

MM: I wanted to go back and ask you a little bit more about the pickers. Were most of the women who picked at the plant part of a family group that had...?

RH: Yeah, yeah, they were family. They'd bring their children in. In the early years, I mean there wasn't any wage and hour thing to worry about and, they'd bring the kids in to crack the claws, they'd pick the crab and the kids would crack the claws, uh, and the, we didn't have any age limit or anything, they could be ten years old and so forth. But after the wage and hour got, came in, then had to be sixteen, you had to have permit even to work at sixteen, and uh, we sort of got away from that, hiring them, because a lot of them couldn't make the minimum wage cracking claws so, so we go away from something like that.

MM: What was it like when that wage and hour went in? Did you um, did you have to go out and recruit more pickers because you couldn't?

RH: No, we, we had the same pickers, you couldn't get any more pickers, we always had tried to get all the pickers we could get you know. Always had a place, we never turned anybody down because we'd put another table somewhere if, if, but that didn't happen too much because, as I say, it was on the decline after the sixties, it started declining, you had plenty of space anyway. But um, then the way and hour came in and you had to keep their time, when they came in, when they left, that was a job. Uh, we didn't use time cars, we did on the hourly help, but the others we'd just have, put down on their, their tab sheet, where they picked that day, what hours they came in, when they left. And that was a job, trying to keep up with that, and then a lot of them couldn't make it, if they couldn't make, see we paid by the pound, and they had to have enough to make up this whatever the minimum wage was at that time, and if they couldn't make it up, then we had to make up the difference, and that got a little expensive too. But then they came along and let us have uh, we'd average it up and they'd get an exemption for the, whatever pickers they couldn't make it, would average it up over the week and we'd apply for an exemption for so much an hour. I think it, I don't know whether there was any age limit to that or not. I can't remember. But anyway then they would send an exemption through for this picker could work for, say if the wage was uh two dollars an hour, maybe if they couldn't make over a dollar and a quarter an hour then, um, they would let us pay her a dollar and a quarter an hour without having to make up anything. Otherwise we'd've had to let them go, a lot of them, because a lot of them couldn't even make a half of minimum wage and we just couldn't have done that so, but then you had to contend with them coming around and checking all this stuff all the time and, that was really a headache too.

MM: When did all this start? Do you remember when it started? How long, you started in nineteen thirty-nine?

RH: Who, me?

MM: You, yeah.

RH: I started in thirty-five, right out of, I graduated from high school in thirty-five and I went to work that summer and worked for them for a year and then I decided I needed more education so I went to Goldy [sp?] Business College for two years, I still came back in the summer and worked in the plant in the summer and I spent two years and I got out of there in thirty-eight, and then I, rest of my life until I retired, the same thing.

MM: Did these regulations come in after the war or did they...?

RH: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Yeah it was way after the war. I think so. Probably, the way, they had a wage and hour thing but we didn't, the seafood didn't come under that for a long time, uh, it was in other businesses, it got in the canning business first I think, before we got into it, but, finally they put seafood into it, they had to, to do the same thing with seafood but, I don't know when they started the wage and hour but I'd say it was in sixties,

or early se... let's see, no. Let me see now I can tell you, um, when we went to McDaniel in seventy-one, we had exemption, I would say it went in in about sixty-five or something like that, that seafood got into the minimum wage thing.

MM: Ok, you know how you said you experienced a, there was a time there where your pickers were not able to make the minimum wage before the exemptions went in. Do you, was that true in all the plants and is that maybe one of the reasons that you all were the last to be forced to...?

RH: I think so, yeah I think everyone realized that uh, you know these people, they never made a lot of money, and I kept trying to get the uh, all the plants, I would talk to them and try to get them to raise the price of the picking, in order so that we could meet these minimum wage, but it was hard to do. Down the islands they didn't want to do it, the ones around here, the plants would have done it but we couldn't raise it unless they raise, because we wouldn't be competitive. And I felt sorry for the pickers because they didn't, they worked hard and they didn't make a lot of money. They should have been making a lot more. But uh, Clayton at Cambridge, he was the one, he was the ringleader around Cambridge and Hooper's Island, and to get him to change was all but impossible. So we, we did go up later, we went up maybe a few cents a pound above the rest, and I think eventually they had to do it but they, because they were losing pickers, by not doing it, fact is we sent a bus to Cambridge, that's one thing we did, we needed pickers anyway and we sent the bus over there to pick up some of the pickers and offer them more money.

Well that got to Clayton Company and Todd Company and all upset and I think we edged it up a few pennies you know that way. But uh, they were bullheaded, they didn't want to change. But they were hurting themselves because they were losing pickers to the industries I mean that were hiring people, fast foods were coming in and everything else and, and uh, these people wanted cleaner work, they'd get cleaner work for more money they're not going to be picking crabs.

MM: What was it like for you when the kids were all in the plant? As the manager...

RH: The kids?

MM: Um-hmmm.

RH: Well, that's I um, taking claws and throwing them at one another and stuff like that but, generally their mothers would speak to them and keep them under control. I didn't have to say too much to them, I might complain to their mother. I'd say your kids or doing this or that, try to get them to quiet down. But they, they'd get a little rambunctious you know, they'd get tired in the evening, crack claws all day, but I never really, as I remember I never really had any big problem with that.

MM: Did they run around, did they spend the whole day picking claws or did they sometimes race around....?

RH: Well if they wanted to get up and go out and play or do something they did it, I

mean, as I say, it was all piece-work, they only got paid for what they did anyway and if they didn't do it, they didn't get paid, only for what they did so, I had no restrictions, just like the pickers, I mean, they come and go as they pleased. If they wanted to come in at seven o'clock they came, if they wanted to come in at nine o'clock they did, I mean some of them couldn't come in early. Some, now we hauled the ones, the ones we hauled, now we, we ran a bus out of Easton, and uh, Bellevue [?], of course they had to be on time because they wouldn't have any way to get there. They, and then we had uh, we ran a bus down here, um, no we ran station wagons mostly.

MM: To Tilghman?

RH: No, to Sherwood, yeah, down through the woods here, we had pickers down there, then we'd go on up and we'd pick them up, some right above Sherwood, there were colored houses along there, and Hensontown, and then we'd go down to Pot Pie and pick up two or three down there. We'd get a big station wagon load, or a small bus or something. Of course toward the end it was more station wagons, because you didn't have as many but, in the Easton area we ran a bus out of there. Because we had a tomato factory up there, and a lot of the people lived on the camp up there, and they, they picked crabs and uh, and shucked clams, and we'd bring clam shuckers and pickers all down at one time if we were operating both, and uh, and at Bellevue we got a lot of people out of Bellevue at times.

MM: When you say lived on the camp up there...?

RH: Yeah, the shanties.

MM: And where was that?

RH: Easton. You know where the Easton, you know where, you go out Dover Road, that big place on the right where there's warehouses, there's nothing left there but the warehouses, the plant's gone. Yeah, it's right uh, it's past Wal-Mart, and it's on the right, I think, I don't know whether it's boats they have there, they had boats in there one time, in those warehouses, but that's where the Easton plant was. And they had the shanties back there, and uh, and these people, a lot of them would live there the year around. They'd uh, they'd work in tomatoes, of course they had to work, the company insisted they work in tomatoes when they were running, and then when they, tomato season was over, then they would come down and shuck oysters or pick crabs or shuck clams or whatever. And uh, they'd live right on the camp year around. They were nothing but shanties.

MM: How many people lived there, do you know?

RH: I don't know. Uh, I guess they had at one time twenty-five shanties maybe there, maybe three or four to the shanty, I don't know. I'm just guessing at that now.

MM: Tell us a little bit about where the pickers that worked on Navy Point, how many of them did you go pick up and how many walked to work?

RH: In the earlier years, they all walked, unless they, they were crippled up or something they might, I can't remember, but most all of them walked in town. If they were out of town, like Claiborne, we had some at Claiborne, and we'd pick up on the way from this route down there, we'd pick up and go to Pot Pie and then through Claiborne, the old, the all lived on that old uh Claiborne Road, the ones that we had, and it was only, maybe three or four, and uh, we'd carry them all up the same time.

MM: But early on most of the women were walking?

RH: Yeah. All the St. Michael's people walked, as I remember.

MM: Did you know anything about their families? Did you ever, were they, were their husbands all watermen? Do you know what their families were like?

RH: Yeah, I, I uh, knew them pretty well. Um, they'd be a family, and sometimes the men would come down and help their wives, one or two, two or three of them, like that, and they got to be pretty good pickers. When they weren't doing anything else. Some of them, uh, lived, uh, worked on the water, were tingers and their wives worked there, and then a lot of the children, they followed in the footsteps of the mother. The girls especially. And uh, they were, back in those days they were related to one another mostly, you know, a lot of them they had aunts and uncles, cousins, and whatever. They all probably grew up right in St. Michael's and, that was there home, that's where they raised their families and worked on the, the water was about all there was, I mean between the packing houses and the water, I mean that was it. Except for the milling company, they had a milling company, a lot of them, some of them worked out there but, there wasn't any, oh there was a shirt factory out there where a lot of the white women worked, that's, as I say the white women didn't work in the packing houses. Only in the packing room. Now we had a lot of women that worked in the packing room, let's see, wrapping crabs and stuff like that.

KF: Who drove the bus or the station wagon?

RH: The what?

KF: The bus or the station wagon, that picked up the pickers, who drove that?

RH: Well in, well the uh, we had uh, let's see we had one truck driver that hauled crabs and stuff and if he was through for the day, he would take a bus or a station wagon and carry maybe the Easton route and sometimes I did it myself. If I wasn't busy, I would drive a bus or station wagon and, go in one direction, we went in several directions with them, and we had uh, toward the end there I think we had three or four station wagons that we were running. But we had so much water down there that the station wagons didn't last very long. They'd go through that salt water and in two years that was the end, we'd buy them used, we didn't buy new ones, the old station wagons, we'd get the seven passenger wagons. And then one time I went to Baltimore and I got a airport wagon, it

had um, it's like a limousine, had all these doors on it, they called it, it was used it a airport or something, to transport people. And I used that, took you a while to get around the corner with it but.... [Laughter] It was a big Chevrolet, and they'd extended this thing out and we used that to haul, almost like a bus, it would hold about uh, I think it was around sixteen, seventeen people that we could squeeze in that. And we used that, but I'd say in later years as the pickers got more scarce and station wagons, nine passenger wagons, we could, even in Easton, we would run maybe a couple of wagons up there instead of a bus or something like that you know. And then we'd run to Bellevue and one to Easton and one to Sherwood or Claiborne. And uh, it worked out good that way. And as I say, I would drive one sometimes and my secretary in the office if she wasn't busy, she would get behind the wheel in one of the wagons and haul some people and then we had a truck driver, he wouldn't be busy that time of day, he would go in another direction with another one and, we'd get them all home. Luckily safe and sound, we never had any accidents that I can ever remember.

MM: I remember seeing picture on Navy Point of housing, did um, were Coburn and Jewitt um workers, did they live on Navy Point or did any of the workers at Harrison and Jarboe live on Navy Point?

RH: No, nobody lived down there. Well there was a old house there, there's a picture of it up on the wall in there. [Sounds of movement]

MM: In the center?

RH: Yeah, now some people lived there, in that shanty, in the early years. I remember them living in there. Now she painted this picture of it but she changed the water from around here, but that is the, what it looked like, just like that. And when the tide got too high, she had, they had to go upstairs. [Laughter] Which was often.

MM: Well you know now that happens to us at Dodson House. My office is on the first floor?

RH: Does it come up that high?

MM: Um-hmmm, yeah, I have to wear hip boots to get to work.

RH: Oh my land. Well that's the way it was down, down on the, where the crab house was years ago, I mean the tide was up all the time almost, we were running through salt water all the time. And that was really hard on equipment.

MM: Do you remember, were the people that lived in that house...?

RH: Now that belonged to uh, Jewitt's son, that belonged to Elwood Jewitt, that building. His father had the big packing plant next, uh right on the water, in front of that, but as I remember Elwood owned that, and he would rent that thing out, he had maybe four or five rooms in there. And he would rent it out to people working in his father's place.

Colburn and Jewitt, old man Colburn, they were both black, and um, they were nice, nice people, and uh, but they didn't do a very big business. They did a lot of business before I got into it. They were really big oyster packers, I was told. But I think they'd lost all their money by the forties. They did a small business there.

MM: They're credited in, with being the first to grade crab meat on the Bay.

RH: Is that right?

MM: Um-hmmm, do you know anything about that?

RH: No, that was before my time. That was the time when they used to have to tie the tops on the cans and all that stuff, I don't remember anything like that, they were all snap-on when I got into it. Fact is they even had the glass tops shortly after I got into it, used to be solid top, but then they came out with a plastic tops. Plastic centers in the oyster, or that was just in the crabs, not in the, oyster cans were just uh solid tops. But uh I didn't know that, I'm glad to know that. And they were the ones that uh...?

MM: Um-hmmm, I'll send you the article about that. There was a historian who worked at the Museum about fifteen years ago who interviewed all the descendants and did a paper about the marketing, their marketing technique and the fact that, one of the reasons they were so successful early on was, was grading crab meat. Um, I'll send it to you. I'm sure Kelly and I'll be talking to people from the Colburn family.

RH: I know in the later years, Elwood [Elwidge?] Jewitt, he ran the plant in later years, and he had all this chunk lump and all that stuff you know, so maybe they did do the gra... [Laughter] Because he, he did that and uh....

MM: I'll send you the article. It was published in the Weather Gauge, our magazine at the Museum.

RH: I've been told that they were big oyster packers at one time, they shipped um, that's how they lost their money shipping uh oysters west and they weren't paid for it and all that. That's what I was told, I don't know. I can't remember them uh, Colburn and Jewett when I got into it they were pretty well down, they didn't have much money and they didn't have very many workers either.

MM: You know you were talking about the women who worked in the packing room, at their plant? Tell us about some of the other kinds of workers that worked at the plant besides the pickers.

RH: Well most of them were men. The ones that carried the crabs, of course the fireman, in the early days, he was um, a black man that had to stoke the fire for soft coal and all, and he steamed all the crabs for me for years until we got into the, where you flip a switch and we didn't need, anybody could steam crabs that way if they knew how to turn the retort on and time the crabs and all, as far as the, we didn't have to have a fireman as such

because all you did was flip a switch, and that's all there was, but, in the early days there had to be somebody who knew about boilers and you had to blow the flue, the tubes out every once in a while, because that soft coal would uh, would get, accumulate in the tubes and then you couldn't get the draft right. And it was, but this old colored man, he did it for years for us and he was a fireman and he also steamed the crabs in the live steam boxes. But when you got up in the pressure then uh, you had to be more careful because you could blow the whole place off the...[Laughter]...of the point. You had to be careful that your pressure didn't get too high.

MM: Did an accident like that ever happen?

RH: No, we uh. Let me see. We did have one boiler, we had one of the automatic boilers that ran out of water or something or, or I think the early ones that we had you had to feed the water to or something, guy fell asleep and didn't feed the water in it and they blew up, they jumped off this thing about that far, off the foundation. Didn't hurt anybody or anything. But there was a retort cooker, you're talking about the pressure cooker, some of the pressure cookers that came out, they put them, laid them on their side, um, on the wharves, and one guy was killed down at Hooper's Island. The um, see you screw these things up, they have big lugs, there's about five or six, you close the top, pull this lug down and screw it up and that holds the top on and somehow I guess the threads weren't too good on this thing and they got a lot of pressure on it and that thing flew open and struck him and killed him. Now that was down at Hooper's Island. That's the only time I remember any uh tragedy like that. But sometimes the pressure gets up on those things, you have, I happened to walk out once or twice and seen the pressure get too high and you, it scares you, you run up and you cut that thing right back quick because it's in the danger point. I mean you'd have to go, maybe fifteen or twenty pounds over before you could really uh, it would be too dangerous. Because they only carried about uh, fifteen, sixteen pound pressure. But that was a lot of pressure if it uh should give way.

MM: How about the people who worked in the packing room besides some of the white women. Were there also men who worked in the packing room?

RH: Well yeah, uh-huh. In oyster season uh when we handled a lot of oysters there were mostly all men. Now in later years and maybe we didn't too much we'd have women that uh, tended to the windows. They'd weigh the uh, the crab meat and then they'd measure the oysters as they came in. You had to measure those in gallon, gallon buckets. You'd have a skimmer, they'd dump it on the skimmer, person'd come in they had these gallon, well it held about a gallon and a half of the water and all, and then they would dump that on the skimmer through this window in the skimmer. In the packing room, then you have a spray, you spray, wash some of the excess dirt out, and then you take a stainless steel paddle that was about that big and that wide and you scrape the oysters with that into a measuring cup, then you pull it up and measure it and strike it off see, even, that would give you the even gallon, and then, you'd dump that in a can, and then you take the rest of it you scraped off, put it back in the pot and give it back to the shucker, then they take it back and But the Board of Health in later years, they got uh, they didn't like that, giving that, called a bluff, they'd didn't like to give the bluff back because that would stay

there until the next time that they weighed up see and it, the same oyster, a few of those oysters might have gone two or three times before it would go into refrigeration so we had to uh, take the bluff and all and give them so much for each one that way, take it all in. Which was a good idea.

KF: I'm wondering if you could tell me something about these uh photos.

RH: Uh her name was Jeanette. But I can't remember her last name, I was trying to think of that up there the other day, when we were up at St. Michael's. Um, she was a claw cracker, she didn't do anything but crack claws. She lived out there opposite Perry Cabin, one of the houses out there with her grandmother. I think she has died, I'm not sure, I think I've heard that she had died. But I'm not sure, real sure, but I haven't seen her so, I think I would have seen her if she hadn't.... But they were all real nice people. They were really a different class from a lot of the negroes today, I mean these are all nice people, never had any trouble with them. Very seldom ever had any trouble at all. Really nice. Of course it was a different day from today you know. Different time.

KF: But they were really hard working...

RH: Hard working people, yeah, yeah. Now that was the oldest...

KF: She looked like she probably worked for you for a while.

RH: She, yeah, this woman was ninety-two when she finally retired. Her name was Molly Palmer. Now these were the early cans, these were the cans I liked better than the plastic, these are the metal cans. Yeah there's one of Molly Palmer.

KF: Was she the employee that had worked the longest for you or...?

RH: I don't know how long, I think she worked for Colburn and Jewett for a long time and after they closed up I think that's when she came with us. Finally, I mean, Elwood Jewett gave up, I think he died or something, anyway they ceased operation and then all the pickers came over to our plant, what was left, I think there was maybe ten or twelve or something. And she was one of them that came over. But she picked for Colburn and Jewett I'm sure, practically all of her life I imagine.

KF: Now was there any difference between the way they picked at Colburn and Jewett or, or that you noticed when they all came over?

RH: We just picked it better is all.... [Laughter]

KF: [Laughter]

RH: No uh, I don't think he washed the crabs so much, I think he more or less picked the fat and all that. I think we were the only house that washed the crabs around in the summer months. They all had to do it in the winter because you couldn't pick it with all

that dirt in it. But I would buy a lot of meat from them, from Elwood Jewett, and it was good, it was ok.

MM: Was that her apron, or did you all supply the apron?

RH: No that's an apron, you know that, white on there, yeah that's an apron.

MM: Did you all supply those or does that belong to her. Is that her own apron?

RH: Oh yeah, we sold them to them. They paid about a dollar for an apron or something like that, I've forgotten.

KF: And what about their knives? Did they have their own knives?

RH: Yeah, we sold the knives too. Knives cost I think about a dollar and a quarter and a apron maybe, either seventy-five cents or a dollar, something like that. We sold them to them at whatever they cost us, I forgotten what it was. We go all the knives from Crisfield, they um, Burdell [**Purdell?**] I think was the manufacturer down in Crisfield, we'd get several dozen at a time. But a knife would last a long time, they'd sharpen them, finally they'd get too But they'd get these knives to the point where they'd only use that particular knife, they only felt comfortable with that knife. It was hollowed down and everything just to fit their hands and, I don't know, because you'd hear them complain: "Where's my knife, I want my knife, I can't pick with anybody else's knife. My knife is... I want my knife." And you'd see these knives, they all had to be one piece now, many years ago they used to use what they call a old paring knife, had a wooden handle, but you couldn't use those because they absorb juices and stuff and bacteria so they went to the one piece knife. Some of them were stainless steel. Now you get a stainless steel knife and then they, some of them came out with a cheaper knife that had a stainless steel blade but it was sort of welded into a different kind of handle and the health department passed it but they didn't like it particularly, they liked that one piece stainless steel they made in Crisfield. Which was really, and it was heavy enough to crack claws with, now the other knives, they were kind of hollow handles and when you, of course some of them cracked them with the knife, with the uh blade, and some would take them and kind of hit them with the handle. But most of them used the blade. And the handle, they were heavy enough to do that. If you get too light a knife, then it's hard to crack the claw, not enough weight there to do it.

MM: You know you were saying that they had their own knives and they'd come in and they couldn't find, "Where's my knife?" Did they leave their knife at their workplace?

RH: Sometimes they would, and we would hold them if we, we had a person, they would clean up, their part right where they were, and then we would have the man that uh, carried the crabs to them during the day, he would clean up the whole building, and he would clean up their places over again, and also the floors. They never cleaned the floors or anything, they would clean their garbage can that they put the shells in and, and their tray, they had a tray where they kept their cans on, they would uh, clean that, and plus um,

that's all they had. At one time you had these little pans, that when, before they had to pick right into, directly into the cans and they'd bring the pans of meat up and dump it on the scales and then we'd dump it on the table and go through it and all that, which was outlawed later. But then they just had their garbage can to clean, they had the tray to clean and any cans that were left over, that they carried back, they'd wash those and put those away. But then the man that tended to the room, the, we called him the "Crab Carrier", there was generally two of them, one would carry the crabs and the other one would carry the uh, scrap, they would dump the scrap and take it out and dump it in a bin for the people uh in Crisfield to pick up.

END TAPE