

Interview Log

Interviewee: Roy Harrison **Tape #:** OH. 122.2

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this is part two of 122

BEGIN SIDE A

RH: They would uh, we had a big thing about, oh, about the size of this room, with a wall built up about that high and, the person that carried out the scrap, he would dump it in a wheelbarrow, take it out and dump it in this bin, and then, at the end of the day, the crab truck would come from Crisfield, it would pick up in Cambridge and all around, and come to our plant and they would take all this scrap and throw on this truck and then they would take lime and lime it all so there wouldn't be any odor and all that from it, and they would pay us for the things, it wasn't much, a little bit per hundred or something I don't, per barrel or whatever they figured it was, but later on the competition from Argentina got so bad they couldn't make this crab meal, or they could make it but they couldn't pay for it, so we'd give it to them then, because what were we going to do with it, it was a favor to us for them to take it away, so um, but I can't think, I can't think of the name of the company, if it was, Hooper's Island is where they took it. I should remember the name of the company but I don't. It was a dehydrator of some sort that *they* dried this thing out and it went through all this thing and they uh, the product was just like a powder almost and uh, it was used to go in chicken feed and stuff like that.

KF: Right, because there was a dehydrator [sp?] plant in Crisfield that uh, I guess I. T.[?] Todd was telling me that they used to give them their crabs.

RH: Yeah there's one down there too. It may have been the same company. But I, as I remember, I think it was Hooper's Island, is where this one, I'm sure it was. Because I remember some of the drivers, they were from Hooper's Island. Y - i j out, as you say, there was one at Crisfield too. And I think there was one over . ~.rd. Now what they did with that I don't know, over there. I think we sent a few a ads over there,

↓ Seaford DE

something, but I don't, maybe they were experimenting with that one, I don't know. Just before you get into Seeford, it's on twenty going in from Reliance. It's still there but I don't think it does anything like that. Yeah as I say, the people, there was one carried the pickings and one that carried the crabs and then after the day was over, then the two of them would wash the plant down. And everything went overboard, you washed into the gutters and washed the gutters out, went out into the river. Which I think they'd frown on today. [Laughter]

MM: So you, one of those men would pick up those knives if they left them in their place.

pickers:
tools
rev

RH: Oh yeah, yeah, if anybody had left their knives, they would most likely be on their place or on their chair. And um the person who carried the crabs, he would know whose it was and he would save it for them, for the next day. But I think most of them had at least two knives. In case they broke one or lost one or something.

MM: Did some of them take them home with them? They took them when they went.

RH: Yeah, they'd take them home with them, yeah, they all had their little satchels and cases that they carried their aprons and their paraphernalia, whatever they had, lunches, and, of course, we didn't have a lunch hour or anything. I mean they just pushed back from the table or went outside and ate their lunch or whatever. Whenever they got hungry. They were not supposed to eat at the table uh while they were picking. But I think they would allow them to push their chair back away from the table and eat sitting in their chair. I think a lot of them did that. But most of **them liked to get up and walk around about** that time anyway, they're sitting there all morning. They want to stretch their legs.

KF: Well now when uh, I'm going to hand you this **photo** and ask you, I know there's big piles of crabs in front of those ladies, now when they're done with their crabs, how did they signal to the crab, uh, guy that they needed more crabs?

RH: Just holler "Crabs!" Yeah, he is just right in there, they'd bring them to them, or he may even see them when they get low and he'd dump another one up there. They were only supposed to have one bushel, but sometimes they would give them two or one and a half or something like that. But, Board of Health says one bushel.

KF: And it looks like everybody got their own bushel put in front of them?

RH: But sometimes the crabs would, there'd be some dead ones, real hot weather you know, they'd die, and uh, they'd, the picker would know, time they'd pulled the shell off whether it was dead before it was cooked and they'd throw it out you know. And then, that's why they'd give them some extras sometimes in order to make up, if there was a lot of dead ones. Now this was taken in the McDaniel plant, up here at McDaniel.

¹Transcriber's question: How could a picker tell, simply from pulling the shell off a crab, that it had died before it was steamed?

KF: Ok, and urn...

RH: See these are stainless steel tops, they're just on these frames that's what they...

KF: Now it looks like everybody got their own pile, they didn't have to share with the person across from them?

RH: Oh no, no, each one had their own. But there'd be somebody sitting across from one another and maybe one crab or so would get mixed up with the others but I never heard anybody complain about it. But early in the morning sometimes a picker would come in and you had to kind of watch it, they'd come in and start to pick, and some of the other ones weren't there, they'd go around and start to pick some of the bigger crabs off the top.

[Laughter] The other one's pile... **[unintelligible phrase]** They didn't really do it too much but they, I know they did it. There was one or two of them would do that, I never said anything about it but....

MM: Did they say anything to one another about it?

RH: I'm sure they did. Oh they'd fuss with one another sometimes. They got along good, but they'd, they'd have, they'd fuss.

MM: What were the fusses about?

RH: Oh I don't know, just everyday things, mostly in fun. I don't think they were too serious. I never saw any of them get in any fight or anything like that. Because they all got along good together.

MM: It's interesting that people we talked to down at Hooper's Island, they put a line of crabs down the middle of the table, and so sometimes, if you and I are picking crabs together, and we're pulling off the same pile, we can get into it with each other because I'll get the big ones, I'll take all the big ones.

RH: That's not a good idea to do that.

MM: And I just wondered, do you, from what you know, the whole time you managed the Harrison and Jarbeau [sp?] plant, each picker **had their own pile?**

RH: Yeah, each one had their own crabs, we never did that.

MM: Do you think that all the Talbot County pickers did that?

RH: All that I know did it like we did. All that I know around here. I say that, a little different at Hooper's Island, they had different ways of doing things, in Cambridge, even when we went to Cambridge things, you know, we had to change a few little things there. I can't remember what but, they get used to doing a certain thing in a certain plant, they go to another plant they want to do it the same way. And our, we were a little different

on some things. I can't, as I say, remember exactly what. But we had very little trouble with any pickers, I mean they, they were all nice people. They had their homes and you know, they didn't, these people didn't live in shanties like the ones in Easton and that we would haul in, *they* were different uh, people, they had their homes and their families and everything,, and uh, you take the ones we hauled out of Easton, they got along all right with these people, but they were, migrant workers is what they were, they were used to living in shanties and, but these people wouldn't have lived like that. They had their, their homes were neat and clean. Because I'd go in sometimes, I'd knock on the door and tell them something, I'd go in and it's, really, I mean they kept their homes nice.

MM: What was retirement like for these women? Did they ever retire, or did they work until they died?

RH: They worked I would say till they died. I didn't, or until, well it got, the, let me see.... After they started drawing Social Security, a lot of them retired. Now they're the only ones that ever retired that I know of, the ones earlier, I mean they worked until they couldn't work any longer. Not necessarily died, but at least they couldn't come to work anymore. But after they started getting Social Security then a lot of them wouldn't work as steady, because it seems like if you made a certain amount, it had something to do with unemployment insurance or something I don't know but, uh, a lot of them would, say well I can't come to work today I'm over my limit or whatever it was, I can't recall just what, it was something between Social Security and unemployment, that they couldn't work because they would have to pay some back or something. And at times we did uh, a few of them we'd just pay **off cash, under the counter out** of retail salmi we weren't supposed to do that, but we would do that in order to keep them coming in. Because we needed the help you know to do that, so we would do that sometimes. But we never got in any trouble about it. Because we'd tell them now, don't say anything about this, you can't broadcast this. [Laughter] So I guess every business has to do things like that sometimes.

KF: That's right, that's right, a lot of the food industry's like that, you've got to keep your workers and sometimes you pay them under the table. Now this is you and who else?

RH: I think that's uh, that's Gladys James. She's dead now, yeah I'm pretty sure that's Gladys. Looks like claw meat, she was a claw cracker and that's claw in there, that's who that is, Gladys James. Her mother worked for me years before, now she was one of Culvern **jsp?** Jewitt's pickers, and she came over to me, uh after ColWm Jewitt died, and this particular one, she was really loud, a nice person, but loud, you could hear her all over the place. And she always called me "Mr. Jarboe", well I wasn't a Jarboe but that's, she and she knew I wasn't but she'd say, "Mr. Jarboe!" [Laughter] I let her do it, I didn't care. Yeah, Mr. Jarboe, she'd just say that to get a rise out of the other pickers I think.
MM & KF: [Laughter]

KF: Did any of the pickers have nicknames or anything like that?

RH: Nicknames ... I don't....

KF: Did they give you all any nicknames?

RH: I don't know, they probably did have, I'm just trying to think. I can't recall. But I'm pretty sure they did.

MM: Were there famous crab pickers?

RH: Were there what?

MM: Were the pickers that were the fastest crab pickers

fast picker

RH: Oh yeah we had some that were faster than others, not necessarily as good as some, some of the faster ones you know, weren't uh, they got more shell in them or something, and some didn't. We had one that uh, from Belleview, and she uh, **was** really fast, she was faster than anybody there, but she, the meat was messy looking all the time, she had it all over the tray, she had it all over everything, all over herself, everything else, but she was very fast. And uh, I had to keep getting on her **about** the shell, getting too much shell in it, because when you're fast that way, you're going to sacrifice one speed for quality, so uh, and then we had one or two that uh, they were average, I mean they were fast, some of the fastest, but we had some that were, picked pretty meat, really beautiful meat you know, and uh, I remember one in particular was Number 38, her name was uh, her last name was Smith, um, Edna, no, I can't think of it, anyway, the retail customers would come in, they would ask for "Number 36", and uh, there wasn't enough 36s to go around, so we would take some of the other pickers that were almost equally as good and put "36" on their cans [Laughter] to satisfy the customers. Because you couldn't give them all 36, they'd call ahead sometimes, want so many pounds on Saturday, I'd like to have all 36, or 38, what'd I say 36, 38. And uh, there just wasn't that many, she just didn't pick that much meat to do that so we had to substitute around. We never got any complaints on it.

best pickers

KF: Now what does it mean to "pick pretty"?

Picking Pretty
[gendered the meat as "He"]
Nelsena Custis claws
meat

RH: The meat is smooth, they get the uh, backfin out smooth, they don't break it up, and uh, they top it up pretty, they turn the, when you cut out the backfin it, it's rough on one side, it's uh dull-looking on one side, but when **UI** . , es out of the shell, it's smooth and shiny, and you turn that down, when you top the meat you turn the shiny smooth side down, and then when you flip it over on the can, and it shows up there real smooth and shiny, and that's what I call "pretty", **when** it looks pretty. And also the claws, you take the claw cracker, we had Nelsena [sp?] Custis that you want to interview, she was the best claw cracker, she didn't do anything but claws, uh mostly, she knew how to pick but she liked to do claws. And she would take the, not the pincher part of **the claw but the other part and it's brown** on one side and white on the other, and she would take those and lay them on these tops, just line them up you know real pretty, with the brown side up, and then when you flip that over, you had the white side of that piece of meat, and it looked like little fish or something, really pretty, I mean, and uh, and everybody wanted her meat too when they **wanted claw meat. But it's funny about claw meat uh, it was the cheapest meat and in my opinion** it was the best, whenever I'd bring crab meat home, I'd generally bring claw because it's sweeter and it made, I think it made better crab cakes. But a lot of people would come in and if you had sold all the white and you said "Well all I

have is claw," they'd turn their nose up, you know. "Oh claw, I don't want claw." But they'd go up to Crab Claw and get these little finger things, cocktail things, that's claw, and pay a fortune for those things. And that was great. But if, but they frowned on it when you said "Well all I've got is claw" you know. [Laughter] Because Eddie Higgins, he used to be a partner over to the Crab Claw with Billy Jones at one time, when they first started the Crab Claw, Eddie Higgins was one of the partners, and he would come over to our plant for lunch and he would uh, he especially, he ran one of the clam boats sometimes, and he would take a pound of claw, he liked claw, he wouldn't take anything else, and eat the whole pound, right out of the can. He died young, I wonder if that was the reason.

[Laughter]

KF: And this was um, Selena Custis?

RH: Lena.

KF: Lena Custis.

RH: L-E-N-A. Lena Custis. She was a good crab picker, uh claw cracker, she was really good. And she was as clean as you ever saw, real nice, she was one of the, out there opposite Clark's in a, no not opposite Clark's either, she lives out in uh, one of those projects, uh, out to the edge of town, before you get to Gas Oil, or the uh United Propane on the left.

KF: Ok, yeah. I just thought this was a really good picture of somebody picking. It's a really nice shot, but what can you tell me about it?

RH: I don't even, that's just somebody's hands. It's just some crab meat in their han... oh it's the uh, piece they cut off, they trim off this section. See, they have the bodies and then you trim, you cut that in half, then your backfin is on the bottom, and this piece is what I call the jib-shaped piece, is on top, then you've got to cut this again to get these sections out, this comes out, um, where you have to trim it the second time. You cut it off and take it off and then you trim it again and get these little sections. But the back fin and the larger pieces of meat, the bottom of the crab I always called it, was uh, underneath of this, this is the top after you pull it, if you're familiar with picking, you know about picking crabs, well, you cut the piece off of each side, and this is what I call the jib-shaped piece, you cut this to get out these little sections, and that's the finer crabmeat. But sometimes if a big crab uh, the bottom of the crab is so big you can mix it a little bit in the back fin and sell it as backfin because it's as large as a backfin out of a big crab, used to mix it up a little bit or the pickers would do it sometimes, to get more backfin, It's cheatin' a little but you had o ch t in erg a little bit here and there.

11,

KF: This is uh, one of your claw crackers.

RH: Oh that's the one that I thought was weighing up the meat a while ago, this is her, this is Gladys James. She was a claw cracker, she was the one that used to call me Mr. Jarboe

all the time. Uh, see all the claws? She's a claw cracker, all that's claws right there, on the table. She wasn't very fast claw cracker, but uh, she was steady, she was always there, I mean she worked all the time, she was never uh, she worked all the time unless she was sick or something,

KF: Now did these ladies wear uniforms. This dress looks like a uniform.

RH: Um, at one time we had uniforms for them, they bought them, but I don't think that lasted very long. They had to wear these caps, their hairnets, they had to wear that.

MM: Did you supply those?

RH: Um, I can't even remember. It was, I don't think it stuck very long, I think at one time they had them but I've forgotten. Evidently they didn't wear them too long. They mostly wore whatever they wanted, but they always had to have an apron on, and the hairnet.

KF: Well it looks in that one photo we had of everybody in the room, it looked like they all had hats on.

RH: Yeah.

KF: Regular kind of baseball hats or something.

RH: Yeah.

KF: Well and here's, I'm just...

RH: Oh yeah, she has that hat ...

KF: She has that hat on.

RH: Well I guess that would, the Health Department would be satisfied with a hat as well as, if they didn't have a hat you couldn't pick with just your hair hanging down or anything. So a hat would do all right I guess, that would keep any hair from falling down. Yeah I guess they did. Oh this is, she's washing crabs, that's a washer. See? She's got the spray, she's spraying her crabs. Yeah.

MM: Do you remember who she is?

RH: How she what?

MM: Do you remember who she is?

RH: This one?

MM: Uh-huh, the woman who's spraying the crabs.

RH: Yeah, that's Molly Palmer.

KF: Oh, ok.

RH: The one who's not in [unintelligible phrase ... Two Years' Oil? ...I assume they're referring to a company name on someone's hat who's in the photo with Molly Palmer],

MM: Ok, I'm writing captions for these photographs at the same time. And I hadn't...

RH: But she worked just as long as anybody. I mean she, she come early and stayed late, that woman. I guess, that's all she ever did I guess probably, in her life, pick crabs.

KF: I'm just curious about this one, that looks like a medicine show, is that what that is?

O Sherwood
RH: It's says show. Sam Docks[sp?], Sam Docks' Show, Sherwood nineteen thirty-two. Huh. Circus, I don't know. I don't remember any uh, there may have been a circus here sometime or other, I don't know. It's got me there. I don't know. Here's a picture that's, I didn't bring it up the other day because I didn't think it would amount to anything. We had a gas pump here, now this is the corner of the boat shed, Shanahan's? And see we were right to the east of that. There was a old truck out here, and this was a water tank and this is a gas tank, I was pumping gas in one of the vehicles. But I didn't bring it up the other day because I didn't think that, you'd probably even want that. Now this is a store that my father had, now this is even before, he ran it for forty-eight years. And he bought it from this man, uh, W. F. Rowenson [sp?], and this must have been about nineteen fifteen or fourteen, twelve, fourteen, fifteen or something like that I figure, because my father bought it in urn, in about seventeen or something like that.

KF: And it was here in Sherwood?

RH: And it's still there, it's right up here.

KF: Oh it is!

RH: Same building.

MM: And that's the place ...

RH: Where the Post Office is and all this is the same building, notice the roof, all this, this has been changed down here a little. But basically it looks the same as this.

KF: And that's where the printing office was?

RH: The printing office was on the further end, there was another addition built on to this. I don't think at the time this picture was taken there was any printing office there at that time. There was a printing office, a drug store, and the general merchandise store. But

I I that's where my father had his store in here and they would pay the people off in the canning house; they'd bring him the payroll and he would pay the people off from the factory down here and the one over here, see there was a tomato factory here, fish plant over here. And he would uh, let these people have credit all week, and then uh, the company would give, bring him the payroll and he would hand out the payroll and then he would uh, get them to pay him. See that's how he ran a credit business, that's how you did it in those days.

MM: Was there one in St. Michaels that took care of your, the crab pickers or did you all...?

RH: Oh no.

MM: You all paid them.

RH: We paid them off, yeah.

KF: Did you guys ever have a draw day?

RH: A what kind of day?

KF: A draw day, where if they need an advance on their weekly salary or uh....

RH: Oh yeah, my father would loan them money and stuff like that. Fact is he even, in his safe he would uh, keep money for them, you know they'd say, they called him "Mr. K", he was K. Harrison, and "Mr. K will you hold this money for me?" Because they were afraid they'd get in a crap game and lose it if he.... they'd say, "Now don't let me have this for any reason. Now keep that." And he would save it, put it in little envelopes you know. [Laughter] Or maybe they were afraid one would steal from the other, I don't know. See all these people that I'm talking about were migrant workers, they lived in the shanties down at Lowe's Wharf and around, I mean they're the ones that um, he paid off.

MM: You know you were talking about, and this isn't about crab picking, but we were talking about this store, that the uh dredge boats would come and grub up at the store, what kinds of things would they buy, what did they buy, do you remember, what they bought?

RH: Well the big item was um, codfish, they'd get this, he had this dried codfish that uh, real salty, and mackerel, they'd buy mackerel, and butter, and uh, a pancake mix, that kind of stuff, uh, corn bread, and chewing tobacco and um, I can't re ... and I guess some canned goods because they couldn't handle any fresh vegetables. They didn't even have, I guess they maybe handled some but, I think it was mostly canned goods and stuff, they'd get enough for a whole week, but I remember codfish was uh, their main food out there, they'd make codfish cakes, and uh all the dredge boats did that. If you didn't like codfish, you probably wouldn't like dredging.

KF: Now was cod something you would catch here in the Bay at that time?

pay
crab
pickers

Dredge
Boats

RH: Oh no, no, it was shipped in, he would get it out of Baltimore, I don't know where it originally came from, up north I guess.

KF: Wonder why they didn't eat a local fish that you could catch?

RH: Well this was in winter time and um, they had to have something that they, they could fix up in a hurry. I guess they made these codfish cakes up and uh, they would keep better maybe. They didn't have any refrigeration on those boats that I know of

MM: And the salt cod, is it sold in big barrels? How did you sell...

RH: It was sold in barrels, it'd come in big slabs of, they were about that long, about that wide, and about that thick, and uh, when I was a kid, we used to eat it, it was real good. My mother'd make codfish cakes.

MM: You can't get it anymore.

RH: No, you can't get it like that, un-uh. And they were really good, you put onion in them and all that stuff. But that was the uh, main thing on crab, on the dredge boats, the main food, I mean they, they didn't have meats or stuff like, I guess maybe they sausage or something like that because you didn't have to refrigerate that much. Because my father made the sausage up and, he would hang it in the back room, and it would hang there for a month or two at a time, no refrigeration [chuckle], or anything. I just, I didn't, but it kept all right I guess, I don't know, that's the way they did in those days. He had a special room where he hung this uh, sausage on links hanging down.

KF: What about things like scrapple, was that a big thing for them to take out?

RH: I guess they, they ate scrapple, I only remember the sausage. He sold scrapple, I don't know whether the dredge boats, they probably bought scrapple I imagine.

MM: I have one more cod question for you. Somebody who would ride the ferry from Baltimore over to Claibourne, would buy a snack at the snackbar called a "coddie and a cracker", have you ever heard of that?

RH: Coddie?

MM: Coddie. C-o-d-d-i-e.

RH: And a cracker.

MM: A "coddie and a cracker."

RH: Peggy!

Peggy: Yeah!

RH: Have you ever heard of a "coddie and a cracker"?

Peggy: Of a what?

RH: A "coddie."

Peggy: A coddie?

RH: Melissa said that a cracker and a coddie they would buy on the ferry boats coming over.

MM: At the snack bar.

Peggy: I don't remember those.

RH: You remember a coddie?

Peggy: Un-uh.

RH: No I don't either. I don't...

Peggy: It was a cracker?

MM: You know how sometimes they'll give you a crabcake with a crackers now?

Peggy: Yeah, uh-huh.

MM: Apparently, on the ferry boat, they sold for snacks something called a "coddie and cracker", and we were trying to find out what it is.

RH: Maybe it was a codfish or something, if they called it "coddie", it could be a codfish cake with a cracker.

Peggy: I ought to remember because I used to travel back and forth every weekend.

MM: Ok, well you would remember.

Peggy: Yeah. My friend Adda and I, we used to get sandwiches there.

RH: Did they serve codfish cakes on there, do you know?

Peggy: I don't know because I don't like fish.

[Laughter]

Peggy: I'm not a fish eater. I like crabs and shrimp and oysters but I don't like fish.

MM: Me too.

RH: Well it could've very well been a codfish, they call it a "coddie" I'll bet it was a codfish.

Peggy: Could be.

MM: Well if we ever find out, I'll let you know.

Peggy: Yeah I wouldn't mind knowing myself. Never heard of it,

RH: Coddie.

Peggy: I've got to ask Adda if she ever heard of it.

MM: Well let me know if you find out.

Peggy: Yeah.

KF: Do you have any other Harrison and Jarboe questions?

MM: I'm trying to think of, you know what, all this information...

KF: Yeah, me too.

MM: I want before, I do want to ask about these three pictures that you gave to the Museum. Because I want to write on, you know, a caption for each of them.

RH: Now this is the St. Michaels' plant, now this first picture with, that's Stanley Harrison and Lester Harrison. They're the ones that started uh, in business, out on the uh point there. But this picture was taken in the old building before the ones, now I didn't, I think I worked one year in, I don't know, I'm not sure that I ever worked, yeah I did work in here a little bit in that building. And then the Board of Health they condemned it. And they tore that down and built a new building after that, and that's the one, the one they built is the one they sold to the Museum. Now this is the packing room in that last building. That was on the right as you come in the retail into the packing rooms, oyster tubs that uh they had. And this is, this is the front of the building before we built on, we built a retail room out here, and then we got on the town sewerage and they only way they could reach it right, we had to put the bathrooms over here, on this end, the retail room was built out from here. And that's where you entered the building, from the, but the pickers, they entered from the side, they didn't go through the retail part.

MM: Um, is that, so that's the new building?

RH: This was the new building.

MM: The new building, ok.

RH: Yeah, um-hmmm.

MM: Thank you.

KF: It's starting to rain.

RH: Is it?

KF: Yeah.

Phobe

Barrels
RH: Ah-oh. Well these barrels are the type we shipped the crabmeat in, they called them sugar barrels. They hold, held a hundred and twenty-five pounds. Now that picture was taken before we had any electric refrigeration up there. We didn't have it in that plant, and that thing they're leaning against was a great long box, a refrigerator, just where you put ice in, you ice the crabmeat down in these sections, until you were ready to ship it out. Because as I remember they didn't have any electric refrigeration. At that time. The new building, we did, we had electric refrigeration when they built that.

MM: So you buy ice and fill this box with it?

*ice i
refrigerator*
RH: Yeah, uh-huh, we'd buy it from the uh, Gillis [sp?] had the ice plant there. We, of course even after you had refrigeration, you still had to buy the ice until we got our own ice machines. Then we didn't have to buy ice anymore. I used to get three hundred pound blocks of ice, and then you, we had a, a thing you had to cut it in strips and then you put it in a thing that cracked it, ice machine we called it, we'd dump it in there and it'd beat it all to pieces, fine. And that's how we packed our crabmeat, with that. But then, when they got the ice machine, you got, you didn't have to have the cracker anymore, it just came out in little pellets, which is a big improvement.

MM: If you were going to tell somebody about crab pickers, you know crab pickers probably better than most people because you worked with them most of your life, what was the most important thing that you would tell somebody about crab pickers?

RH: Um, well they were a happy bunch-I'll put it that way. They didn't make a lot of money but they were, they were happy. Because they laughed and joked and, and they enjoyed picking. And they didn't get mad with one another, I mean, very seldom anybody you know ever got mad, seriously mad, although they'd call them this and that and everything but it uh, well, went in one ear and out the other, I don't think they took offense to anything. And uh, as I say, the ones we had in St. Michaels were really nice, everyone, far as I know. Some better than others of course but uh, basically they were really nice people.

MM: And what role should we tell, what should we say about their role in the industry, what part did they play?

RH: Well they played the most important role in the industry. Without them there wouldn't be an industry. They came out with a crab, uh, with picking machines in later years but none of them were any good, I mean, they weren't practical. Outside of a claw machine they uh, they had a lot of different kinds of machines that came out, they had some that uh floated the meat out, with salt brine, um, they crushed it up first, and then they went through the salt solution and they uh the shells went to the bottom and the meat floated to the top, then it went on a conveyor and then there was a dryer that dried it, but it looked like it'd been chewed up and spit out. [Laughter] So, and then they had a one that slung the meat out, you put it in a thing and it'd sling real hard going around and, but it tore the back fin all to pieces, you didn't have that backfin, because it'd kind of be slinging it out and, they had two or three different machines but none of them ever worked practically.

MM: Did you *all* ever try any machines?

RH: No **we never** tried one. We would send, sometimes we'd get too many claws, we'd send them over to Cambridge, he had a, a claw machine, and he would do a few claws for *us but that* was only once **or twice that we did that. Because it didn't look good, it, when** it came out of the salt solution, then it was dried again, it was looked like mush almost. It didn't look good. So, we never bothered with it. That was a North Carolina machine that did that. And, Clayton at Cambridge, he got the one that was supposed to sling it out, and uh, he showed me uh, it, called me over there one day and, wanted to show me this machine, but he wouldn't show me the machine, he showed me the crab shells after they had uh, gone **through** the process and the meat was gone. It was just as clean and pretty, and uh, another day I was talking to Todd over there and he says "Well here's what it looks like," and it, it'd left a lot of meat in the shell and all that. He was trying to impress me I guess that the machine he had, or the one he was trying to promote, was a fellow named Tighlcy [sp?] at Hooper's Island they, they'd invented this machine and they were trying to market it. And get people interested in it but uh, this, the shell's he showed me were evidently cleaned up after... [chuckles] ... afterwards, just to impress me I guess, I don't know. But I wasn't that impressed with it. Because you could only do uh, you had to slide, you put them on a tray, you had to clean the crabs, you had to slide them in through the machine, I think a dozen at a time, well you couldn't get any production, even if it worked. I mean it wouldn't have been practical. So, I haven't heard anymore about it and that's been twenty years ago, so ...I think all the crab picking that's done is done by hand still.

KF: This made me think of a question um, if you looked at, when you were still working, if you looked at a container of crab meat, could you tell who picked it?

RH: No. Well, like Lena Custis put her claw, I could tell that she picked that and number thirty-eight I was talking about, I could generally tell her meat by the way she cut the backfin, I could tell by the backfin how the regular, well I could tell by the special because that's top *is backfin*, but her backfin was always so perfect, it ran like balls. But outside of that I don't think I could tell.

KF: Now, um, number thirty-eight, did she have any family members that were working in

the picking room with her?

RH: No, let's see. No, she wasn't married as far as I know. Um, but um, I was trying to think, I think she lived alone. She lived right on uh, the highway right out there. I don't *know* whether she's still living or not. I think she is but I'm not sure.

MM: On the highway *in* [unintelligible phrase, "those little"?] houses across from Perry Cabin?

RH: She lives... Yeah, yeah up the street a little further. Now the one I showed you that Jeanette, she lived almost opposite Perry Cabin gate, but this uh, Smith woman, the number thirty-eight, she lived about halfway between there and the filling sta...or Big Al's. Along in there. I doubt she lives there today, I don't know. If she's living, I'm not sure. Mabel, that was her name, Mabel Smith. If I think about these things, they, if I, if I stop thinking about them I can think of them better, but if I try too hard I can't think of anything.

Peggy: [Unintelligible] down to, down to Tighlman, Roy.

RH: Yeah, Mabel Smith.

KF: She worked at Tighlman?

Peggy: Mabel Smith worked for us, she was a cook.

KF: Oh.

RH: It was a different Mabel Smith I think.

Peggy: She lived in St. Michaels.

RH: And she worked where?

Peggy: For Gladys down on the point.

RH: I don't think the Mabel Smith I *know* ever did anything but pick crabs.

Peggy: She was married to George ...

RH: No this woman wasn't married to anybody.

Peggy: Oh.

RH: She lived alone. I don't know whether she'd ever been married or not. Not that I know of, and she picked for me, gosh, long time, she was picking there when um, I went there. For many years. I don't think she picked for Coleman-Judd, I don't... she may have, I'm not sure about that, she may have picked for Coleman-Judd some. I'm not sure.

KF: I was just curious if um, I know most pickers learn from a family member, you know how to pick crabs.

RH: Yeah, that's how they all learn from their, from their mothers or uncles or aunt\$ or cousins or something.

KF: I was wondering if urn, families tended to have the same picking style?

RH: I think the way they picked the crab basically one way, I mean they all had the whole crab, the whole bottom of the crab, some people, like me, I don't pick that way. I break the crab in half and cut each side and pick it out individ ually, but they, none of those ever did it that way. Of course I'm not a crab picker. But that's the way they were taught to do I guess and that's the way they did. And I'm sure it was a better way than I do it. For myself to pick out.

KF: Did you have any more questions?

MM: Just one more. This is the same kind of question about the crab pickers, about the crab packing houses and the whole industry, like the Harrison family, like the Jarboe family, what was, if you were going to tell a visitor coming over here what was the most important thing for them to know about the history of these seafood packing companies, what do you want them to know, what's important for them to know? What was the most significant thing in your life, that those, about those packing companies?

RH: Um, I guess they were, they were all business men and that they started these things and um, I don't know whether they were related in any... some of them, well Tighlman Packing Company um, they were related, there were several brothers that **started** that business. And then their children, they went into it. Like um, George Heller [sp?] Harrison, you know George Heller, and uh, his brother, um, I can't think of his name. But George Heller went off and A...

END SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

RH: I don't think he's in it anymore. I think he sold out, but he, for many years he operated in Virginia. Or North Carolina, I don't know which it was, one or the other. But um, I don't know as there's anything particular different about a packing house owner or ... Of course the Harrison-Jarboes they, there was two or three generations, two generations, of those that uh, their sons they took it up and that's all they ever did. Tomatoes and uh, seafood. But they were just ordinary people, I mean.

MM: Sounds like all of them were families though or a lot of them....

RH: Yeah, mostly family, yeah. Well back in those days everything, like this little town right here, everybody was related to everybody else and if they weren't related they called you uncle or aunt or cousin or something anyway. Anyone that wasn't related, you'd be

Uncle This or Uncle That or Cousin So-and-so and, they were related in some way if you went back far enough probably, I don't know. But the Harrisons married Jarboes and so forth and uh, Jarboes married Harrisons, and I know it was just a, the whole town was related. Two or three people would have a well and the rest of them would pipe, tap into their wells and, if, I'd like to see the pipes under this town because they [chuckle], they were, the Jarboe house ran their, Bill Jarboe's father, I know he had four or five houses, this was one of them, even when I bought it it was connected to that house around there, I got water from way around there. And uh, I say, there wasn't over three or four wells in town that supplied twenty, thirty houses. But everybody got along good and as I say everybody was related to one another, nobody worried about a few inches of property or somebody built one thing on. So, they were good days. Nothing was regulated like it is today, everything's regulated and, people move in here now, they worry about, a inch or so on this property, have it surveyed and **make sure** nobody's ... but everybody used everybody else's property and *they* walked across it and everything **else**. But they're nice people living here now, I mean there's nothing wrong with that, they're just city people, they're different. Mostly, moved out of the city in here. But they're all nice people. But back in those days as I say, everybody was related to everybody else and, they married, some of them even married first cousins. And uh, I guess they didn't get out to meet too many people, back in those days, I don't know. I started driving, I was twelve years old. I drove...

MM: You got out to meet people.

RH: Yeah, yeah, I married a girl from Cambridge, Aay over there!

[Laughter]

RH: Man, I was really getting around! They did though, I mean back in the horse and carriage days, I mean um, they had a church here and a church an Wittman and so forth and, they didn't, they got a partner from within a few miles of.. ones that I remember, they all, most of them married around here were married to the ones right in town. As I say they didn't get around that much. And they lived happily ever after I guess. [Laughter] Yep. I don't know. As I say it's a different day today from what it was when I was growing up. But now my grandchildren are flying all over the place, one goes, Joan's daughter, she's going to England, to um, to Ireland all the time, and uh, they fly all over the place. Joan and Russell[?], they just came back from Aruba or somewhere in those islands off of Argentina, they don't think anything about it. I've never been on an airplane. Not a big one. I've been on little ones, but not any big ones. I don't want to get on any. They're safe enough, I'm sure, as safe as a automobile or safer, but there's nowhere I want to go. I've travelled around the United States, I've been across the country four or five times, I like to see this country. But uh, and I've been to Mexico and Canada, but, as far as anywhere you've got to fly.... Guy with, came down, he was with my niece's husband, he uh, flies, he flew for Delta, flew over ships, flew overseas, he flew from Dallas to Frankfort, he, those big jets, and uh, he was uh, getting ready to leave Frankfort, Germany, and he had a heart attack right in the cockpit, co-pilot saw that he wasn't doing whatever he was supposed to be doing to get underway you know, and he was having a heart attack. And uh, he was in a hospital in Frankfort for a while but they wouldn't let

him fly anymore. He's been trying to get his license back but they won't, the FAA won't approve him, he was over here last night, he, they retired him, and uh, but um, but he can get on any Delta flights, if the plane isn't loaded and fly anywhere he wants free of charge, I mean that's a fringe benefit he got from being there. And he told me the other night, he said anywhere you want to go, he says, his friends, he can get them on too. Because he, a couple of friends he had in Washington, flew to Hawaii not long ago, free of charge, I mean he got them on. He says anywhere you want to go, says I'll line it up where you can go. I said that won't be necessary, I'm going to keep my feet on the ground. I appreciate your offer, but I, there's nowhere I want to go. [Laughter] Those things go down, they go down. But, as I say, it's been proved, he said all these planes that fly in and out of these airports every day, you stay around an airport and see how many flights a day, and all across the country and such a few accidents, I mean it's safest way to go actually. But I said but yeah when one goes down, you go, you go with it whether it's your time or not, it might be somebody else's but you're going with them anyway, so....

MM: Is the travelling around that you did, were you the one that went to the cities to market the seafood, did you do that part of it too and go visit **some of the big customers?**

RH: Oh yeah, yeah, I had uh, oh I entertained them, they, most of the big customers, like Food Fair and Burle [sp?] Seafood in Baltimore, Mace [sp?] Brothers, all those, they uh, they would make one or two trips down, spend the night and go to the Yacht Club, I'd take them to the Yacht Club.

MM: So they would come here.

RH: Yeah. They liked it down here, get out of the city you know. Especially one from Allentown, they were coming down all the time. And uh, the partners, it was a younger generation took over Peterson's Seafood, and they came down a lot, they loved it, they'd bring their girlfriends, leave their wives up there and, go out on the boat for the weekend, I had a boat and, finally I sold it to Peterson's Seafood toward the end there, it was a big Cris-Craf [sp?] that I had. I wanted to go sailing so, I sold it to them, and they kept it down here for a long time. And um, but yeah, I had the uh Food Fair people, they would come around and, uh, they'd come about twice a year and I'd have to entertain them some way, and then the ones out of Baltimore, Mace Produce and all those, and I had all that to do. Entertaining them along with everything else, had to keep them happy you know. Because they bought a lot of stuff. Of course the company paid all of it, everything, naturally. So...

MM: You didn't have to travel much for business.

RH: No, no I didn't, well unless I was, sometimes they'd invite me to Baltimore, something like that, I'd go to a party or stay overnight at Burle Seafood people and stuff like that, Harry[?] and I, we were friends as well as customers you know. Got pretty friendly, because I liked them all, they were nice. And uh, lot of them, most of them were Jewish but uh, in the Seafood, but they were real nice people ~ Specially Food Fair, all! their big buyers were Jewish, and Mace Produce, they were Jewish. Burls Seafood wasn't but uh. But I had a lot of good friends.

MM: A lot of the mercantile business in Baltimore is Jewish so...

RH: Yeah, a lot of these, now here's some customers I wrote down, the crab customers and the, um, oyster customers I couldn't think of too many, I got some of the bigger ones, because Bill Jarboe ran that operation also. But I did know them, but I can't remember them, like I did the crabs and clams, we sold most of our clams to Hank's Seafood in Easton and Rock Hall Fish and Oyster Company, just in bulk you know, we didn't uh, ship out under our own label or anything like that. Or not much, we did sell a few, you know, **[unintelligible phrase... "between the aisles"? "phoebe aisles"? "feed the owls"?]** but clams never caught on around here. I mean there was nobody that ate them much, even after all, several, ten years or so after they got uh, catching a lot of them, nobody ate them much. I thought it would catch on and take off but it never did. But you get from New York up, New England now that is clam country, man those clams, soft-shell clams.

You can have these. You can just take these. [Sounds of things being moved about]

MM: I'll make you a copy of them.

RH: I don't, I don't have to have a copy. No, because I remember these, I made a lots more but I just uh, I can't recall. I know the cities that the oysters went to, but I can't remember the name of the um, of the people. I know Sioux City, Iowa, we sent a lot, and East Saint Louis, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; all those places, but I can't remember the name of the people.

MM: That Shaeffer [sp?] stand is still up at the wharf in D.C.

RH: Is it? Uh-huh. Well there was a C. W. Schaeffer and a C. R. Schaeffer. We used to sell to the Schaeffers a lot of crab backs, the uh, for devilled crabs, you know. I We'd clean the backs and uh, and uh clean them and all and finally the Board of Health outlawed it. You couldn't do it anymore. So they had to use glass or plastic something after that.

MM: This is great, I can't believe you can remember all of this. Also this with those account books, um, I think will get...

RH: Yeah, you may see some in there, of course I think they were mostly tomato books, weren't they? Yeah. Well I don't know whatever happened to the seafood books. I don't have any. When I left, Harvey Jarboe was still, he was still running the place at McDaniel, he probably retired after I retired and I don't know whatever happened to the books.

MM: Do you think there's a chance that Spurry's [?] has them somewhere?

RH: Maybe. I don't know whether Joe Spurry might know something about them.

MM: He's on, he's my next to call.

RH: Oh yeah. Yeah, he's nice, he'll help you all he can. He's got a lot of um, things, like

Acct
books

um labels and things like that I think. I framed mine, I've got them up on the wall. I framed them after I was up there the other day, yeah. Burton [?] gave them to me and I put them in a frame.

MM: They're beautiful.

RH: Yeah. And Joan said she has uh some that I don't have, she said I could have them and frame them if I wanted. They were the uh, herring roe label and the herring label. I think I have a shad label. And something else there.

MM: Well thank you, so much.

RH: Oh, you're quite welcome. I've enjoyed reminiscing about all this. Brings back memories you know, think of things you hadn't thought of in years. Even when I was writing down these things, things would come back, you think about them.

MM: You know what we may do is we're going to spend the summer talking to the pickers and we may call you in the fall, because we're going to learn so much that we didn't know to ask you.

RH: Yeah. Sure, I'm available any time you want. Come down or I can come up there and meet with you. I'm glad....

MM: Also I have, as we're uh, as I told you the other day, I'm doing the history of Navy Point, and I want, I may call you about your, I'm going to bring the maps of Navy Point and talk to you about it sometime. That building that's still there on the left that's now our small boat shed, that was the warehouse for the plant...

RH: No, that wasn't ours.

MM: It wasn't yours.

RH: No, that was Shanahan's.

MM: Got it.

RH: That belonged to Shanahan Artesian Wells, he kept all his equipment in there. Now our property started just to the east of that, maybe uh, oh ten or fifteen feet east of that, from there clear out to the water, I mean was ours, and over to the Jewett property where, where you know it comes up and then turns off, where the lighthouse is, that corner, is, Jewett is where the lighthouse is. And we were on the long piece that goes out, the main piece.

MM: Ok. Right there we just learned something, because the Museum thinks that that building was you, was the Harrison and Jarboe cannery warehouse.

RH: No. No that was Shanahan Artesian Wells. We had a place we kept barrels in right

next to that, that was our property, and then the, where the old big stack was, the stack was ours and the um, the remains of the old canning house that was there that fell down. And then we had another building next to the, that was kind of connected on to the stack. That was our, I can draw you a little diagram sometime and lay it out, not exactly, foot by foot, but I, I, pretty close, the way it was laid out, yeah.

MM: I'm also, um, we've got, the three photographs that you gave the Museum, I'm going to leave some paperwork for you to read and you can sign it and uh, or if, yeah, why don't you just keep this and read it and then mail it back to the Museum?

RH: Ok.

MM: And that's for the three little pictures, And I can't remember, Mrs. Cannon [?, **not sure I'm hearing this right**], we are making duplicates of the photographs for her, do you want copies of those photographs?

RH: For who?

MM: Those new ones that you ga...I'm making her, she wants us to...

RH: For Sophy Gun **J?, really having trouble understanding this name**].

MM: Uh-huh. Do you want me to make copies of the photographs for you, that's one thing I didn't write down last time.

RH: Photos...?

MM: Those little ones.

RH: Oh, copies of them?

MM: Uh-huh. Of these three.

RH: Oh, yeah, yeah you can do that. Yeah, that'll be fine.

MM: We'll do it. And I, I'll call you when they're ready.

RH: Or wait a minute, I have the originals, don't I?

MM: No, you gave the Museum the originals.

RH: Oh you have the originals?

MM: Um-hmmm.

RH: Oh, ok.

MM: Did you, um, what I think I'll do...

RH: It doesn't matter whether it's the originals or copies or whatever, I don't care.

MM: All right.

KF: While we're talking about paperwork, the tapes are going to go in to the library at the Museum, and to do that we have a form for all the people that we interviewed to fill out, um, and here you can check how you prefer the materials to be used. Are they available to the public or do you want people to kind of let you know when they're using them, um, or would you rather people not use them. And we let everybody decide how they want to do that themselves.

END TAPE