

/__ **CBMM - CRAB PICKING PROJECT**

TAPE: OH123-1 & 123-2

DATE: 03/22/99

INTERVIEW OF: J. Clayton Brooks
Re: J.M. Clayton Co.

ALSO PRESENT: Bill Brooks

BY: Kelly Feltault

NOTES:

Speakers occasionally difficult to hear. In these instances, the word (Inaudible) was used to indicate missing words.

Phonetic name spellings: Marilyn Tatro, Rem, Martin Todd, C&K Lore, Calvert Tully, Alma Veach, Sidney Spedden, Lana, Ted Ranky, Rony, Kiten (term used for shell found in crab meal)

C.B.: I was born in Hoopersville, Maryland.
K.F.: Okay. Can I ask what year?
C.B.: It was 1912.
K.F.: All right. And you grew up in that area. Now did you --
C.B.: No, no. My father was in the shipbuilding business.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: And he got his education in it from his father.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: And it was wood boats, it wasn't steel. At that time, it was mostly wood ships. And we were living in Baltimore, and the reason I was born in Hoopersville, my mother came home to have me at home. That's where my grandparents were, Clayton grandparents, J.M. Clayton.
K.F.: Right. Now why did she decide to come here to have you? Was there a reason?
C.B.: Well those days was, I guess, didn't have modern medicine like they do here. Knew how to take care of people, and I was the first child, I guess, and she felt like she'd feel better being home near Mama.
K.F.: Right, with Mom. Okay. So you grow up in Baltimore.
C.B.: No. Went to 13 different grammar schools. That's because my father was in the job of inspecting, took him all up and down on the East Coast, on the West Coast of the country.
K.F.: Oh, okay.
C.B.: And we lived in California, and Oregon, and New Jersey, and New York, just pretty well all up and down the coast. Like I say, I went to 13 different grammar schools, so you can imagine. When I went to Boston, you know Boston was the center of education. Here I was from -- came from Maryland, and they told me I didn't know how to talk. So that's, that gives you an idea how we moved around some. I have trouble with my dentures, so if I --
K.F.: That's all right.
C.B.: -- hope I don't worry you. So I'm going to hold them like this.
K.F.: That's okay.
C.B.: Okay. Okay, now.
K.F.: And when did you decide to come back to this area?
C.B.: Well the wood boat business died out, and my father lost his job with the American Bureau of Shipping. That was the organization that was inspecting these boats.
K.F.: Oh, my husband works for them.
C.B.: Oh, is that right?
K.F.: Yeah, he's an editor for books they publish on safety.
C.B.: Well he had a beautiful pin showed that he worked for American Bureau of Shipping. And he lost his job because of the lack of boats to inspect. So we came back to, in the meantime, J.M. Clayton Company moved up Cambridge, 1920. And he came back, and he took over a shipyard right across the creek from there.
K.F.: Okay. So this operation had the plant plus the shipyard as well at one time?
C.B.: This what?
K.F.: You had this area and the shipyard at one time in the 20's?
C.B.: Well we didn't own the shipyard. He was working for another company over there.
B.B.: His father never worked for --
C.B.: It's my -- Brooks, I'm talking about my grandfather and my father, Brooks.
B.B.: He's talking about --

K.F.: Right, okay.

B.B.: It doesn't have anything to do with the crab house at this point, I don't think.

K.F.: Right, okay.

B.B.: His father was not involved.

C.B.: No, my father wasn't involved at all with J.M. Clayton Company.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: He was -- he built boats, and J.M. Clayton processed oysters and crabs, and they canned Heron down Hooper's Island, and oysters and anything that swam down Hooper's Island. In fact, down there, they didn't have any way -- reason J.M. Clayton moved here from Hooper's Island is because the transportation, we were going in the nation, out in the country with our market, and there wasn't any railway express service down Hoopersville, it was in Cambridge. And that's why they moved here because they had railway express here. Every day the train came in and took seafood from Cambridge. I think all those freight -- I know all those freight docks have all been torn down cross creek here.

K.F.: Yeah. Condos, I think, are there now. So it was really dependent on the railway then?

C.B.: That's the reason we moved from Hooper's Island because down Hooper's Island, they had a night boat that went to Baltimore. And that's how we sold our seafood, J.M. Clayton Company sold seafood into the Baltimore area. But see, we were supplying to the Baltimore area because that's where the steamboat went in.

K.F.: So moving up here to the railway, you had more market --

C.B.: We moved up here, then we had a railway and railway express, and then that meant that we could extend our markets out into the country, it was a train -- well it used to be slow because the train had to go from here to Wilmington and then back down to Baltimore down that way.

K.F.: Oh, okay. Okay. And when did you start working here?

C.B.: 19 -- what was it, Bill? 1933, I think. 1933.

B.B.: I don't remember that. I was listening for the answer. What is the answer?

C.B.: You weren't around.

B.B.: Wasn't around.

K.F.: In 1933.

B.B.: '33.

K.F.: Okay. And what did you do when you started here?

C.B.: Well boil over mostly.

K.F.: Can you tell me exactly what that is?

C.B.: Well I did everything but pick crabs and shuck oysters. I worked in a packing room packing the cans of seafood in containers to be shipped out. In those days, everything went in the -- we call them sugar barrels, went in barrels. And then after that, it went into seafood boxes, wax-coated boxes.

K.F.: Now did you get your barrels from Brooks --

C.B.: No. My brother graduated from college, he came down and he decided he was going to make barrels. So he started right from scratch. He'd go out in the woods and buy logs, and he would took the logs and cut `em off in lengths and make barrel stays out of `em. And then he made the barrels with his barrel stays. That was -- at that time, there wasn't anybody here making barrels. Crisfield, I think, was the closest place you could buy a barrel.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: And they came in different sizes. They went -- they -- most the barrel in the seafood, like 20-gallon barrels, 15-gallon barrels and 10-gallon.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: So it's determine the size barrel we'll ship `em in.

K.F.: And what size barrel would the crabs go in?

C.B.: Well in those days, it wasn't much demand for crabs like we know. Like you couldn't go anywhere hardly and buy crabs by the dozen to take home and steam. That was something new.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And that came on after we moved here, company moved here. And just -- it was after, in the late 30's anyway that they started, people started buying crabs and taking `em home and steaming `em, or buying the steamed crabs and take `em home and picked `em with a keg of beer or something like that.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: But at first, all crabs were marketed in cans, tin cans.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And then we, to prolong the life of -- crab meat doesn't, crab meat doesn't freeze as well, doesn't freeze very well. And so we developed, I helped another man develop a pasteurizing.

Got the idea from pasteurized milk.

K.F.: Yeah.

C.B.: And we went to a steel sealed can to pasteurize in. And I think now --

K.F.: Okay. Now how long do you think you -- sorry, go ahead.

C.B.: I think now they're pasteurizing cups now, aren't they? Plastic cups.

B.B.: Mostly cans --

C.B.: We didn't --

B.B.: -- cups now.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: They told us, the plastic people told us at that time they didn't have any plastic that wouldn't breathe, in other words, let air through. That's hard to understand.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: Air go through the plastic cup. But they said they didn't have anything that would pasteurize well.

K.F.: Okay. Well how long did it take you to develop this process?

C.B.: Well the -- Maryland had a seafood marketing department, and they were stationed, had their headquarters in Crisfield. And through Maryland -- a fellow by the name Marilyn Tatro, Tatro.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: We and he developed this process of pasteurizing crab meat. And it had to be done in a sealed can, had to stay in a sealed can until they was used. In other words, take it home and keep it a week after you opened it. But after a week, it would spoil. But it would last oh, I guess -- well we kept it five years after we packed it. But we didn't recommend it because it got crystals, got crystals in it. Felt like it had sand when you ate it.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: It wasn't ice crystals. I don't know what was crystals. Do you know, Bill?

B.B.: Well it just -- I think it takes some properties of the can when it gets cooked. I don't know. There's a lining in there, and that's kind of the way we explain it, but those dissipate, I think, you know, the crab meat's left to breathe --

C.B.: It's a chemical reaction.

B.B.: -- ingredients. All those -- it's not from the crab meat in there, but the chemical reaction. And but it does, you know, if you're opening a can of pasteurized, and a can of fresh, and you're tasting it, you can taste the difference.

C.B.: Yeah.

B.B.: You know, a lot of times if it's already prepared into a cake or --

C.B.: The color!!! change too, darker because you cooked it. Pasteurize beyond the original cooking process.

K.F.: Okay -- pasteurized meat.

B.B.: Well most people around here don't, I mean they just don't want it, but they eat it when they go out to restaurants this time of year and have crab dishes.

K.F.: Right, okay, okay. And what was it like working here in the 30's and 40's?

C.B.: It was a lot harder than now, I guess. Well we had this room over here, I don't know if you've been, but we had that room full of hand pickers.

K.F.: Okay. How many?

C.B.: Eighty, 90.

K.F.: Okay. And did they pick all year, or were they picking just in season?

C.B.: No. Just mostly -- well we would pick sometimes we'd go to the south and buy crabs and occasionally to give our help occasional work during the winter when we weren't harvesting any crabs in Maryland. And that way, we kept the help coming back to J.M. Clayton Company rather than going to Phillips into the soup business or something like that, or going to another company and getting permanent work there. That's how we happen to help, try to help hold our crab pickers, have `em keep coming back. And they liked a little time off too because they were getting unemployment. Well most of them are mothers, and they like to be home with their children, you know, get `em off to school and a little time.

K.F.: Okay. Now were they bringing their kids in in the summertime?

C.B.: Used to be the mother would come here in the summer and bring all her kids, crack her claws, and she picked the body.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: But that, of course, the labor laws prohibit that after awhile.

K.F.: And when did that start?

C.B.: Gee, I don't know. Can't remember, I would say in the late 30's.

K.F.: Okay. So what was it like having mothers and all their kids here working?

C.B.: Well it was a pain with the kids running around. Of course, the mothers tried to teach the kids how to crack the claws, but they couldn't always do it. And it was like a nursery around here.

K.F.: Did the kids stay within the picking room, or were they allowed to --

C.B.: When they picked, they pick right alongside their mother, or in a table so the mother could watch `em. And that's how our future crab pickers would develop. The mother would teach `em, and keep -- she had `em right there with her, and of course they learn how to pick crabs from their mother.

K.F.: Right. Now how many of those kids would then start working here when they --

C.B.: Well I think our employment held pretty steady to about 90, 80, 90, a hundred.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: As the older ones got unable to work, I mean, the younger kinda picked it up. And then the kids learning how to do something, which was picking crabs, they could go somewhere else and make -- we had printing people came here and said they loved these crab pickers because they knew how -- they were very dexterous with their fingers, they learned how to use their fingers. And that's why they were such good employees, and jobs, and putting things together.

K.F.: Oh.

B.B.: Like (Inaudible).

K.F.: Okay. I hadn't heard that.

B.B.: -- when those industries came to town -- labor (Inaudible).

K.F.: Oh. Well how did you all deal with that then, with now you've got all these --

C.B.: Well I guess women kept on having babies and bringing `em in here. And we'd break `em in, and they'd go on somewhere else and work. That's just part of it --

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Because this was a smelly business. You go home and nobody wanted `em get on the bus or in a taxicab because their clothes was permeated with this odor of crab.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: And they would go somewhere else, like Western Printing or some of the other plants out here on Woods Road, and they didn't smell so bad. They'd get a taxi come get `em.

K.F.: Okay. Well with the crab pickers, could you tell that certain families picked a certain way? Did each family have a certain way they'd pick crabs, or --

C.B.: Well we kind of left it up to the mothers on teaching their children. Some women picked crabs, go through it *in* a different way than other women. And we never tried to interfere with that. So your children would learn probably a little different how to pick crabs than my children would.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: But the thing that we stressed is try to keep as much shell out of it, out of the crab meat as possible. And that has a lot -- the way you cut the crab has a lot to do with that.

K.F.: So what was the best way that you saw?

C.B.: Well I ought to get a crab to show you. You ever pick crabs?

K.F.: I have, but not as easily as --

C.B.: I can't explain it to you then. Because it's -- I have to go into bone structure of the crab inside the crab. And there's a place *in* there we call the cap after you pull the back off. And if you didn't cut that cap off just right, your crab meat would contain more shell.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: Like the first cut you make into the actual -- where the -- you cleaned it up, and you got that, you know, body there, and you've made your -- it's the very first cut you make to try to get the crab meat. And if you don't make that first cut right, then you run into trouble. The only way you can get it out.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: There's a way you can cut it so it makes all those cavities exposed more than --

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Do you know about the swimmer fins on a crab?

K.F.: Yes.

C.B.: That is the section of crabs where the backfin comes from.
K.F.: Right. Okay. Now if you've looked at a certain pile of crab meat, could you tell what family had picked it? Was it that noticeable?
C.B.: Well you could tell the worst because they ground it up so badly.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: The ones that weren't good pickers kind of picked it up and squeezed it out, would smash the crab meat.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: Do you understand?
K.F.: Yes.
C.B.: And the ones that were good pickers, they knew how to cut that shell and lift it out of those sections with a knife, with the point of the knife.
K.F.: Okay. Now who is the most talented crab picker you've seen?
C.B.: Huh?
K.F.: Who was the most talented crab picker you've seen come through here?
C.B.: Well I guess -- what was her name? The white girl that worked here.
B.B.: Rem?
K.F.: Rem?
B.B.: Yeah.
C.B.: Yeah. We have several --
B.B.: You should interview Rem.
C.B.: They learned how to pick down Hoopersville when they were kids.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: And it seems like the ones that learned had good teachers, were naturally better crab pickers.
B.B.: And Martin Todd was a good one.
C.B.: Yeah, uh-huh (affirmative).
B.B.: There's a long list of good ones, but of course the ones that are still here you remember before the ones that may have gone away way back when. I remember Margie, she was excellent.
C.B.: Right. And the reason they got -- had to quit, what's this thing, the disease that gets your hands if you do like this a lot?
B.B.: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.
K.F.: Carpal Tunnel like in your wrist?
C.B.: Yeah, Uh-huh (affirmative). And this is what caused a lot of `em to retire.
K.F.: Yeah.
B.B.: We haven't really seen it too much, I don't think, but --
C.B.: We're not picking as much as we did years ago either.
K.F.: Now I know that in Crisfield, they had a union for the crab pickers. Did anything like that ever come to --
C.B.: They came here, but we persuaded our help not to join it.
K.F.: All right. May I ask what that was like at that time?
C.B.: Well I can't tell you how we persuaded `em. I mean they can let you know. It was against the law at the time.
K.F.: Okay.
C.B.: That's why.

K.F.: Was it a difficult time, though, when the union was trying to get formed in Cambridge?

C.B.: They concentrated -- they didn't concentrate on us for some reason or other. I guess they thought they'd break some of the easier ones. 'Cause we let 'em know we weren't going to join. Just came out and told 'em we're not going to join. Don't care what you do, we'll go out of business. And if we go out of business, then these 80 people are going to lose their jobs. And they kind of laid off for awhile. And they concentrate on Crisfield. And there was more crab houses in Crisfield that they can concentrate on than here. Cambridge, was only two in Cambridge. Hearst was three at one time, but only two big ones: Todd, Todd Seafood and J.M. Clayton Company.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I think that was Dick Hearst up in the corner here.

B.B.: Don't remember that.

C.B.: Had a beer joint there.

K.F.: With his picking house, or next to it?

C.B.: Picking house right behind him, yeah.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Behind the beer joint.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And by the way, over there, there was a metal fabricating company, C&K Lore. And C&K Lore helped to develop all this crab meat machinery they have over here.

K.F.: Oh, okay. I was going to ask you where you got your equipment.

C.B.: We just had to make it. There wasn't any place like you could on a Chevrolet automobile, or a Dodge truck. You just had to do it on your own. And that's how C&K Lore, he was a good friend of ours, and he had good ideas. He had worked at Phillip's Packing Company before he went on his own. And he was developing machinery for the canned tomatoes and beans.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: And with his knowledge of food, it helped he and us to develop his crab meat machine over here.

K.F.: Okay. Now did you guys have to help him design --

C.B.: We worked together on it. I mean if we had employed an engineer which wasn't a seafood engineer equipment people, we never could afford it because they'd have to teach the man who was doing it what to do.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: There wasn't enough picking plants on the East Coast in Blue Crab to have a market for a long -- a great number of crab picking plants.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: Took 'em a long time.

K.F.: Yeah.

B.B.: How many -- you probably worked five years?

C.B.: What?

B.B.: Get something to work, crab-picking machine.

C.B.: Do what?

B.B.: To get the basic crab-picking machine to work, five years?

C.B.: Oh, yeah. It was at least five years' development.

B.B.: And that was with exerted effort too.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: I mean it wasn't, you know, just picking it up, you know, every other weekend. I mean they spent a lot of time.

C.B.: Then there was another packer in Dorchester County that lives down to Codville who went in with us. His name was Calvert Tully.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: With Meredith and Meredith. And his boys are still running a plant down there, Meredith and Meredith.

K.F.: Yeah. Okay. I was hoping to talk with them next week.

C.B.: Well Calvert's not active down here.

K.F.: No, he --

C.B.: I think J.C. is his son, oldest son.

K.F.: Uh-huh (affirmative). His son and his grandson.

C.B.: Yeah. He had another son that left and went with a lumber company.

K.F.: Now what about during World War II? How did the laborer work here? I'm assuming a lot of the men were called to duty.

C.B.: Well I think the watermen, I'm not sure about it, but I think the watermen exempt from the draft because they were producing food. Anybody in the food business got an exemption.

That's how I got an exemption until -- and I was single, I wasn't married. If I was single, man, they'd come after me first draft. But I was working in the food, and they give me a deferment.

K.F.: Okay, okay. I had heard that the watermen had that deferment.

C.B.: The watermen had it. But see, of course the watermen couldn't -- at that time, watermen didn't have a market for their crab meat unless we were in business. So the watermen wasn't any good to the food chain unless we were in the business to process their crabs. And so that's how I got deferred. But after the war progressed, the deferments, they started going into the seafood, into the food business. They needed more people than they were getting without -- and then they said well I'm going to take all the single. So they got me right away.

K.F.: Okay. And the rest of the men in the plant, were they called --

C.B.: Well it was mostly women. We had mostly women. And, of course, the watermen were their own business.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And they were producing food, producing food, and we were producing food. And, of course, the women then weren't constricted.

K.F.: Right. And how did the business change when you got back? What happened in the 50's?

C.B.: Well it was almost like coming back like I had never worked here before. I mean I went in the Navy. I was in the Navy three years. That's where I met my wife, Bill's mother, and Jack's mother, Joe's mother. And I came back. Oh, I was -- we had a plant down in Toddville, J.M. Clayton Company had a plant in Toddville. And I was -- I left here to go down and open that plant when they bought it.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: The plant was Willy Johnson owned it, Olin and Willy Johnson. Olin's first name.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And I was running that plant, and that's another way that I was being deferred because I was employing all those women down there to pick crab, and furnish the market for the water, the crabbers.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And we also shucked oysters down there, and shucked oysters here.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: So we're really important in the food chain of the company --of the country. And like I say, then they started picking up the single men, they needed us for the draft. And my number went up, was getting closer and closer. I kept checking the selection -- what they call that board? They call it -- I forget.

B.B.: Selective Service.

C.B.: But soon as I found out that I was pretty close to being -- I enlisted in the Navy. Because I'd rather, I figure I'd rather be on a ship and go down, get it over real quick than lay in the trenches in the mud. That's just what I had in mind.

K.F.: Okay. And what happened to that plant in Toddville then when you --

C.B.: Sold it. When did we sell it, Bill? Do you know?

B.B.: It was before --

C.B.: We sold it after I came back from the service.

B.B.: '50?

C.B.: Damn if I know. I can't remember.

K.F.: Now it continued to operate then, I mean, right through the war.

C.B.: It's not a crab plant anymore, I don't think. I don't know what they --

B.B.: But they --

C.B.: Huh?

B.B.: J.M. Clayton Company never had any --

C.B.: Oh, no. We don't have it anymore. No. We sold it to a fellow name of -- oh, what's the old big boy?

B.B.: I know who you're talking about. I can't think of his name right now.

K.F.: So is the plant still there?

C.B.: Plant is still there.

B.B.: It's not operating.

C.B.: And it's not being run as a crab plant anymore, because this fellow that we sold it to --

B.B.: He died.

C.B.: -- he died, Yeah. I can't think of what his name is.

B.B.: I'll come up with it a little later.

C.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Where is it in Toddville?

B.B.: Goose Creek.

C.B.: Goose Creek.

K.F.: Okay. And what was the most *difficult* thing about running this plant?

C.B.: The Health Department. I mean to keep everything clean, we were the first ones, I guess, in the area that got a boiler big enough to operate a steam cleaner. I don't know if you know what they are. It's a high-pressure hose, and you mix water and steam. And for some reason or other, the pressure increases as you're mixing it. And that does a real good job in cleaning your equipment, your tables, your floors, your walls. It cuts paint right off the wall.

K.F.: Oh, okay. And you were the first ones to get this?

C.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Well how did that change your daily routine?

C.B.: Well we had a much cleaner place. You could smell the difference when you went in the picking room, you could tell -- used to be when you cleaned by hand, you had a scrub brush and a water hose. And you naturally didn't do as good a job as this high pressure steamer did. And you could tell by the odor when you went in there that they had used it to pick crabs. But after they got the steamer, it eliminated all that. It eliminated a lot of our problem with the Health Department.

K.F.: Okay. And what about the clothing and stuff that the pickers would wear?

C.B.: Well they were responsible for their own clothes. Aprons, what did they do about aprons?

B.B.: Well we provided the aprons.

K.F.: They had disposable aprons.

B.B.: Right now --

C.B.: Yeah, they had these white disposable aprons that they wore one day and then threw them away. So we didn't have that problem of cleaning the aprons.

K.F.: Okay. I know some people have the rubber ones you hose down.

B.B.: Yeah, some of `em.

C.B.: Well that's, you have a job to clean `em.

B.B.: That's right.

C.B.: You got to scrub `em, and they still don't get it all.

B.B.: That's why --

C.B.: Around the button holes and --

B.B.: Right.

C.B.: It's hard to clean.

K.F.: Okay. Now does the Health Department actually inspect that kind of stuff? I mean --

B.B.: Sure.

C.B.: Well we had the steam hose, we were the first one to have the steam hose, and we didn't have as much trouble with the Health Department after we got that because we had a boiler big enough so it could operate the steam cleaner.

B.B.: But they do look at their clothing. I mean, you know, they can't have sleeves hanging down in the crab meat, they can't have rings on their fingers.

C.B.: Right. Fingernails.

B.B.: Hair nets on their --

C.B.: You can't pick `em with --

B.B.: Can't have fingernail polish.

C.B.: -- rubber gloves on because you cut the gloves to pieces with a knife.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: Are you doin' okay, Dad? Do you want a little break?

C.B.: Huh?

B.B.: Are you doin' okay?

C.B.: Oh, yeah. I'm fine.

B.B.: All right. I didn't know whether your teeth were bothering you or not. I didn't realize --

C.B.: Well they're falling down. I'm getting some new ones --

B.B.: I didn't realize --

C.B.: -- and I'm waiting for it. That's all. I'm all right.

B.B.: Okay.

C.B.: I got my thumb up here to hold it.

K.F.: My Dad had the same problem.

C.B.: I'm sure. Happens to all of us.

K.F.: Yup. So what about things like -- I know some pickers have a certain way they like to arrange their chair with cushions and pillows and --

C.B.: No cushions.

K.F.: No cushions?

C.B.: Huh-uh (negative). They're hard to clean, You can't clean a cushion.

B.B.: You have to get vinyl.

C.B.: That crab picker -- you know, you take a cushion and set it, adjust it. Well you get it from your hand, you get it on the cushion. So I don't know. We don't allow -- have many cushions.

B.B.: Well we do have a cushion. It's a vinyl-coated thing. It's approved.

C.B.: Oh, is it? Oh, yeah.

B.B.: But again, it's got to be cleaned off every day. But it's a cushion they can put in the seat. But, you know, none of these pillows in the back or anything like that. Just the Health Department won't allow it.

K.F.: I've had some people describe, you know, certain cushions are reserved for certain pickers with certain chairs.

C.B.: Yeah.

B.B.: Yeah. They all like their own chairs. I mean --

C.B.: We had, all had the same chair. And it's a galvanized chair that can be cleaned real well. You can see this chair here couldn't, couldn't be cleaned that, in a crab-picking room.

K.F.: Right. And what are some of the other traditions of a crab picker? I know some of the plants, they used to sing hymns and that kind of stuff. Did they do that here?

C.B.: They used to do it. But I don't know. Do they do that any more, Bill?

B.B.: I never remember it happening.

C.B.: You don't? Oh, my land. They had wonderful voices. Hear them all over the place.

They sing these old hymns, and it just seemed to go with it. You know, when you're picking --

BB.: --rhythm.

C.B.: -- you got motion like this all the time.

K.F.: Oh, okay, okay.

C.B.: I mean it's not just your hands. They get going like this when you pick a crab, and claws in the bucket. So like they're just not sitting rigidly in one place.

B.B.: Got a claw cracker now. There's only one really we have left. He's just extraordinary. And, you know, his rhythm gets off, he's just got to leave. He can't be productive that day. He's totally frustrated.

K.F.: Really?

B.B.: So he has to take off And it's, you know, generally something that upsets him, you know, it'll break his rhythm. And we don't like those days, but they happen every now and then. We'll see him leave at an early hour and not come back and we'll know what's happened.

K.F.: That's interesting. I did interview one gentleman who picks crabs, but he had shucked oysters before. And when he started picking crabs, they all told him well you pick a crab like you're shucking an oyster because he had so much motion. And the crab pickers said well you're not supposed to move that much. Would it be possible to talk to this claw cracker?

B.B.: Yeah, I can call him.

C.B.: And they were generally children who caught the -- cracked the claws.

B.B.: And I'm sure that's how --

C.B.: That's how their mother started `em.

B.B.: Donald's mother worked here, was an excellent crab picker. You know, again, it's a family that's been with us for a long time.

C.B.: It wasn't just girls that came with their mother. Boys did too.

K.F.: So the boys came too.

C.B.: Oh, yeah.

K.F.: Now how many of them would actually stay in the crab house?

C.B.: How many what?

K.F.: How many of the boys would actually stay and work in the crab house, either --

C.B.: Well the kids, as long as their mother didn't have a nursery to send them to. So as long as they were at an age where they need supervision, their mother would bring them down here because there wasn't any nurseries. Now I think there are some nurseries that the crab pickers have, take their kids to before school.

B.B.: But a lot, the kids, the men would, you know, probably end up shucking oysters. I mean way back then --

C.B.: That's right.

B.B.: -- we were doing that, and that was more of a male occupation. So they would come down with their mothers and crack claws, but later on, they would find employment in a crab house or oyster house shucking or doing, you know, other general jobs that really required men's strength.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I think my grandfather was the first one that ever picked a crab commercially on the East Coast, J.M. Clayton.

K.F.: The plant opened in 1890, is that right?

C.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: And they were picking crabs then?

C.B.: No. He had shucked oysters to start off with. And then they wanted to keep the watermen in the water. So they started picking crabs. And, of course, it was new industry to everybody down there. And they had to learn how to teach the women how to pick, teach the crabbers how to go after the crabs. And at first, they didn't have pots, crab pots. It was all trotline. You understand what trotline is?

K.F.: Yes.

C.B.: Okay. So then you create this industry, but then how did you find a place to market the meat?

C.B.: Well this is how the railroad came in. We had people in New York City who hooked onto crab meat. They love crab meat. And there wasn't any crab plants up there. So how do we get it, get it quick? By train. `Cause we didn't have a boat running from here down the Bay and then up New York. And the trucks weren't that -- weren't that -- wasn't that many trucks on the road. This goes way back, of course, you imagine.

K.F.: Right, okay. Now how long was it before other crab plants opened in the area?

C.B.: Well Todd opened, Todd Seafood opened after we were here. When they started, I can't remember.

B.B.: They were in the 40's, weren't they?

C.B.: I would say it was the 40's, yeah. It was before the war, wasn't it, World War II?

B.B.: I imagine it was. I don't know. It was before me.

K.F.: And who else worked here with you when you were here? Were there other family members that were working here besides --

C.B.: I had -- there was my aunt, my mother's sister was Alma Veach. And Alma's husband was named Carl. And as my grandfather kind of became inactive, Carl Veach took over and ran this company.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And he and my Aunt Alma met, he was a streetcar conductor in Baltimore.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: And he had never lived here before. And after he and my Aunt Alma married, he came here and worked for J.M. Clayton Company. And he brought a brother and a sister from West Virginia, I think, or Virginia. Winchester, Virginia. And -- Elliott's Island. And she went, Carl's sister moved down there with Mary in Elliott. And then, as I say, you got a question. Carl had a nephew named --

B.B.: Paul.

C.B.: Paul, Paul Veach. And he came in here, and he and Iran the plant for until Bill and Zach came in.

B.B.: Also Alison and Sidney.

C.B.: And Alison Clayton is my uncle. Alison was J.M. Clayton Company son.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: And then Sidney Spedden, I couldn't tell him how he got involved, but he --

C.B.: Well Sidney came in as a bookkeeper. And that's how Sidney got involved with us, Sidney Spedden. He wasn't in the family, just came as a bookkeeper from the Town of Cambridge.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And he was real good. Very conscientious. And naturally, they sold him a piece of the business. And then Sidney died, and we bought it out rather than -- it wasn't big enough to take any of Sidney's children -- he had a son and a daughter. And oh, his son was a brain. He wrote a mathematical book, a textbook for colleges. I mean a lot brainier than you need down here.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: So then Paul finally became incapacitated, and he decided to retire. And that's when Bill came in.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Isn't that right, Bill?

B.B.: Right. And Jack was over here before me.

C.B.: Yeah, Jack before Bill. Bill was a CPA, started to be a CPA.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah, you had told us about that. Okay. So this really stayed within the family, your uncles --

C.B.: It went from the Clayton family to the Brooks family. And that's where it is now.

K.F.: And what's it like to work with this family, and then the families of pickers?

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: Seems like a real long family line. Your family and then the families of pickers who've been here.

C.B.: Well it's like their kids learn how to pick, and there wasn't that many crab houses for them to go to if they wanted to stay in the crab picking business, they worked here. And like I say, the

mothers, before they had labor laws, the mother would bring these kids down here and crack the claws, and learn how to pick the crabs. And it really upset our business bad when they got this labor law because we were depending on the kids cracking the claws. And these labor people came in and said you're running a sweatshop, which wasn't so. It was all air conditioned in there, and the kids could get up and walk around, or go out and play, or anything they wanted. But they made us stop giving these kids employment.

K.F.: And how did that *affect* the pickers? I mean if they can't bring their kids with them to work --

C.B.: Well they had -- somebody had to develop a nursery out in the second war there for any white or black crab picker we had to take care of their children if they were going to work. Because we couldn't -- they couldn't bring `em down here.

B.B.: But to get back to your thing about families, we still have some people here whose families go back almost as far as --

C.B.: Oh, go back to Hooper's Island.

B.B.: Right, go back to when the company started.

C.B.: Came up from Hooper's Island.

B.B.: The whole family moved up from Hooper's Island when they moved up. And probably started close, you know, their ancestors -- as far back as our ancestors when they started.

C.B.: That's colored -- I don't know whether you were here when Lana come in or not. She's from down Hooper's Island or family is. She still works here.

K.F.: So really you've seen a lot of these pickers kind of grow up and continue working here.

C.B.: Like I say, we don't want to put it down, but we are on the low scale of the pay scale of the industry.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And somebody has to employ these people who are not educated or smart enough to go somewhere else and get \$15 an hour instead of getting \$10 an hour here.

B.B.: Well things have changed. And years ago, we were competitive in the pay market.

K.F.: Right.

BR: But things have changed. Industries have come in and a lot of production's moved out of the U.S. and the cheaper foreign labor markets. And so, you know, as I was explaining to you the other day, and that's a very complex problem, what we have right now. But, you know, basically I think you'll find most food manufacturing plants aren't the highest paying around. And, you know, as Dad said once, we're good training ground.

C.B.: That's what it was.

B.B.: Essentially get these people that basically are -- have been unemployable, you know. I hate for this to be on tape or anything, but it's all -- not demeaning in any way, but we're teaching them to learn to get up, to come to work every day, to be here on time, to be responsible. And once they realize they can get into that routine and, you know, make it on a seasonable basis here, and have that, you know, feel like they've got the gumption to go out into, you know, can go out and do it on their own and find something year-round and better themselves. Well, you know, we've done a service for those people.

K.F.: Right, right. Well how does that compare now with the Mexican workers?

C.B.: Well I guess we're talking about two different things. You know, I guess more the people I were addressing before were hourly people. Since we've gotten these machines, we're employing a lot more people by the hour who are solely shucking crabs -- shucking oysters and

picking crabs. Most of our help was piecework which is motivating in and of itself. You can do a lot better than the minimum wage or whatever, you know, we are paying for the hourly rate. So there's potential there for people to do a lot better than the, you know, minimum wage. So the problem with the crab pickers has been it's a skilled job. And it takes patience, and it takes hard work and endurance in order to build up and to get to a certain point where you can, you know, do better than the minimum wage. And the people, I guess, that have that sort of drive to, you know, do that sort of thing are being offered better positions at -- where they're putting, you know, electronics together with their hands, they require the dexterity. Western Publishing, you know --

C.B.: That's why they came here. I have a good friend -- that came Western Printing, he said because of the dexterity of the people with their hands and putting things together or in picking crabs fit right into their assembly line, assembling these books that they published and assembled.

B.B.: Also real good pickers last year --

C.B.: That's why --

B.B.: So you know, I think the bottom line is, you know, competing industries and, you know, the -- program. Combination of that (Inaudible). There are certain things we don't want to be quoted on, but I want you to have a clear understanding about exactly, you know, why we're doing the things we have to do.

K.F.: Right. Well it also is going to help us sort of interpret the nature of the industry.

B.B.: Sure, exactly.

K.F.: We're not going to -- but it helps us to explain to visitors (Inaudible) --

B.B.: Right.

K.F.: -- complex (Inaudible).

B.B.: Yes.

C.B.: But you want to remember this. I mean we're talking like a kind of run-down people. We only employ handicap people, so to speak. If a picker or a person during the picking room apply themselves, they can do just as well here as they can out Western. It's available for them. But we don't require it. All we require is they make, at our given stage of picking crab, they pick it by the pound, pay `em by the pound, and if they can't come up to the minimum wage, then we have to make it up to the minimum wage. And that way, they learn, sit here and learn, and we're subsidizing. And if they want to move on, they go somewhere else and get more money. They learned here.

K.F.: But once they get up to say a minimum wage level here when they're picking, will they go find another job?

C.B.: If they so desire, yeah.

B.B.: We don't have that many entry level people anymore. And we're finding, quite frankly, the entry level people that come here, they come here with good intentions. They come here with the kind of -- qualifying themselves for this program or that program --

C.B.: And that's one reason why we're getting Mexicans in here.

K.F.: Now one thing I've been wanting to ask people is with the labor laws, and now you couldn't really bring your kids in, so they're not really learning these skills. Do you think that was one reason there was a labor shortage?

C.B.: I think the reason there's a labor shortage because the government is paying enough welfare, unemployment, that a lot of them can live real well on it.

B.B.: I have to agree. Yeah, I'd have to agree that we're seeing second and third generation --

C.B.: If they want to live at that level. But a lot of us don't want to live at that level. You know, instead of having a run down old car, we want a brand new one,

B.B.: Or a car, or a house of your own.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: So but there's, yeah -- but we were pulling from that whole group before all these programs came along. And there's people want to work (Inaudible).

K.F.: Now the other thing I'm interested in is, you know, we always talk about -- crab pickers and mothers, and the thing I've noticed in talking to a lot of owners and their sons is their position is learning from their fathers -- and you said you started out all sorts of jobs, you did too.

C.B.: Well a small business, a small company, and if a fuse need changed, somebody had to do it. We didn't call electrician. Or if we want to fix the light, we fix the light ourself. We didn't call electrician in to do it.

K.F.: So are these things that you learned here, I mean is this something that --

C.B.: You learn to be a jack of all trades is what you learn.

B.B.: And of course (Inaudible). You know, sort of felt like they can probably use a whole lot of what they got out of it for. (Inaudible).

C.B.: That goes back why we developed all this machinery back here. We had to develop it ourself.

B.B.: Wasn't anybody to call.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: There's no machine company making these things because there wasn't that much demand for them.

B.B.: Couldn't afford to pay somebody to develop them like that.

K.F.: And what is it like working in a family business?

C.B.: You have to let somebody be the boss. And you've got to have that understanding before you ever start working. It's worked out real well here. Jack, he generally is a front man. If he goes out to a meeting, he generally is the one that goes, and they decide the policies or meet with other packers. And then there's Bill who's taking care of the books, taking care of sales, and Jack also gets into talking to other -- to the people who buy crabs about what we're going to pay for the market.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And then Joe who maintains all this equipment over here we have. So the three boys have, it makes it very good because if let's say a fuse blows out, they don't ask Bill to come do it. Of course, he can come do it, but they ask Joe or maybe Jack to change the fuse. Now if they want -- customer calls up and want to know if I can get 1,000 pound of crab meat tomorrow, Joe or Jack can't tell `em, they have to go to Bill. So they recognize each one has a department to be responsible for. And they let it be like that. And I think that's where some families, organizations won't do. They won't give their siblings responsibility in a certain area. So it's worked out real well here, and it worked out way before Bill came in, and before Joe came in.

Each was in sales, buying the crabs, talking about buying the crabs. I went to the meetings that Jack's going to. You have these little departments, as you can imagine running a business, and each one stuck to being the boss of that department. So somebody call up, and I'm sure now somebody call up and Jack answer the phone, they say Jack, we'd like to have 10,000 pound of crab meat, he won't say okay, he'd say just a minute, I'll talk to Bill or get Bill to talk to

and make the decision of it. And they're the ones, if you make a mistake, they're the ones who are responsible.

K.F.: Okay.

B.B.: It's not that bad. We have an understanding, we know who --we know what the business is all about, and we all have the same objective in mind.

C.B.: But they all have it in mind to make some money, and provide their families with a good family life, buy them a good home. And Bill was a great sailor -- he and Joe did a lot of sailing, competitive sailing.

K.F.: Oh, okay.

C.B.: Penguins I think you start out in. And they taught their children how to sail. Joe's got a boy named Andy, the oldest one, he's a crackerjack sailor too.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: That was the recreation that the boys here -- Bill was sailing, and Joe was sailing, and Jack didn't get into sailing much, did he?

13.13- He crewed a little bit.

C.B.: He crewed, yeah.

B.B.: Later on, he did. Not as a youngster. Motor boat.

C.B.: And then my mother got -- she had a double-decker trailer, we'd haul these Penguins around, and my mother would -- they were too old, too young to drive, so my mother would take `em around, pull this trailer around all over the country. Went up to Canada one time and competed in sailing. They were good.

K.F.: Okay. One thing I was going to ask you about, I guess I was reading some newspaper articles about a strike that happened in South Dorchester in the 50's. And I was wondering how that *affected* your business here. Did you all see more business because of that?

C.B.: No. We had a little organization. Dorchester Seafood Proper. And we were very close knit people. We knew each other by the first names. A lot of our families grew up together, and we stuck together. And if lower Dorchester had a problem, we'd do what we could to help `em.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And I'm not going to say just how, but we did what we could lawfully to help `em get through their problem.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I think that's why the union never bothered us much because they knew we had -- we worked together real closely, and I don't think we ever took advantage of any of our help.

K.F.: I was just curious because I thought maybe the watermen would come up here with their crabs rather than --

C.B.: Well I think the -- I don't know if we're talking about the same thing, but they imported Mexicans down there too because the people -- the Americans down there realized that they had to have year-round work, so they came to Cambridge and work in the shirt factories, or sewing factories, rest rooms, and they had to get Mexicans to work too, because to do this crab picking and oyster shucking.

K.F.: Okay. I was just asking about the -- I think it was `54, 1954 strike that happened in South Dorchester -- that the watermen would come here with their crabs.

B.B.: I didn't know anything about that. It was a watermen's strike?

K.F.: Yes --

C.B.: I don't remember what you're saying either, but I do know that they had some trouble when they got Mexicans that some of the watermen got out to the Mexican girls, and it caused problems in the family.

B.B.: Well this was like back in 50's, Dad, right when I was born. It's way before Mexicans. She's talking about a strike down in South Dorchester.

C.B.: Oh, oh. I don't remember that.

K.F.: Somebody had given me a stack of newspaper articles. I had read them and thought well I wonder if Cambridge saw more business at that time. Nobody was working down that way.

C.B.: That doesn't register a thought in my mind. I can't remember that. Though I do know that we had a seafood packer, Dorchester Seafood Packer, and we worked very well together. If they were short of crabs and we had too many, we would sell them crabs, and they'd do the same for us.

K.F.: When did that organization start?

C.B.: Well I was one to first start it, Calvert Tully and I.

K.F.: Okay. And was it to get better representation of the industry?

C.B.: Well it was -- we'd have a meeting of minds. And we talked these things out. If somebody was having a problem, we'd try to help them solve it. And when we all left there, we always -- the meeting, all us were all friends and go have a beer together and a highball afterwards. If they had a problem in South Dorchester, they would talk to us. If we had a problem, they would come talk to us. And this way, they weren't robbing each other for workers, and weren't trying to steal crabbers from each other or oystermen from each other. They gave us an opportunity to keep on going day after day instead of having a strike of 10 days or two months or something like that. And with the short season, crabs, one week, even one day means an awful lot in the final production for the year.

K.F.: Okay. And now do you have the same crabbers who usually sell to you?

C.B.: Uh-huh (*Affirmative*). It generally works out that way. Because they -- I guess it's because when they get producing crabs, at first a company can only handle so many crabs. And when he starts off the season, he has let's say 50 crabbers. And he takes -- those crabbers depend on him in taking their crabs because you can't carry crabs for a week and wait for somebody to come get 'em or they won't be much good. So this is one reason why we got this machine -- because if we have so many crabs when these crabbers -- and our crab pickers couldn't handle them, then we start the machine. And these machines, there wasn't any -- it was all laborers you pick up off the street. All they did was stand there and pick shells out of crab meat, or take crab from here and put it there. That's about all they have to do. They didn't have to go through all the motions of picking a crab like breaking the legs off and cutting the knuckles off, pulling the back off. They had all those different motions go through.

K.F.: Okay. And who were some of the crabbers that bring you the crabs? Who could you count on would always bring you --

C.B.: Well all of 'em that work for you depended on you to take their complete catch. And in the fall when the shucks become real plentiful, that's when a lot of us had problems in handling their whole catch. And with the short season, one day -- if you let a crabber off one day, he's hurt for the whole season. And this is why we went to the trouble of developing this machinery where we get an unskilled laborer to run these. And it still gives -- and another thing, the reason why we could keep good crab pickers, because they knew when before crabs came on, we run the poor crabs through the machine and give them the full crabs. As you know, you pick a crab, if it's a

poor crab, you're not going to get much meat. And you go through the same operation to get meat out of a full crab, a fat crab. So we would give the good crabs to the hand pickers, and the crabs that were a little hard to make time on we put -- put `em on the machine over there.

K.F.: Okay. Now how did you all grade your crab meat when you first started?

C.B.: Well the market had a lot to do with that. I mean some people who can afford to pay 20 or 25 or \$30 a pound for crab meat, then they will get the lump, backfin lump. Your -- now this meat over here, there's no backfin comes off these machines. So a lot of that meat goes to these companies who make crab cakes. Andy, I think, used to make `em. I don't know if he does now or not. Then there's several others. Oh, Campbell's Soup and we sell a lot of crab meat to Campbell's Soup. Oyster shuckers -- shucked oysters to Campbell's Soup. And most of your backfin goes to gourmet restaurants. You know what I mean by backfin crab meat?

K.F.: Yes.

C.B.: And that comes from the backfin of a crab, meat from a crab.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: Okay.

K.F.: So was Campbell's Soup a big customer for you?

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: Was Campbell's Soup a big customer for you?

C.B.: In oysters especially. When we were shucking oysters, we'd haul, oh, two or 3,000 gallons of crab -- or oyster to Campbell's Soup up in Camden, New Jersey. They make canned Campbell's Soup, oyster soup. And we used to wonder what they did with all of the oysters because you open a can of Campbell, you see about three oysters in it. And there we were carrying `em gallons and gallons of solid-meat oyster, no juice. So they went a long ways from a can we gave `em to what they put in the final pack.

K.F.: Well is there anything else about the business you can think of?

C.B.: I was just sitting here thinking probably something we didn't -- newsworthy or people would like to read about that you and I haven't gone through, but I can't think of anything.

K.F.: How about this day-to-day working here, if somebody wanted to know what it was like to come here to work every day?

C.B.: Well like I said, we had to find a way, after we stopped shucking oysters here, we had to find a way of working every day. And we -- unemployment helped us lay the crab pickers off when we didn't have any crabs. And sometimes what we'd do is take a truck and go to Carolina where their crab season is longer, and that's where we got crabs to pick. We'd haul `em up here and pick `em, steam `em and pick `em. And we didn't -- I don't think we ever made a lot of money, but we kept our work force together.

K.F.: And that was really important to you?

C.B.: Oh, my land, yes. You can say -- crab picking is an art. You have to be an artist to pick a crab. Pick it to get the most -- get all the meat out without a lot of shells. And you don't learn it just one day. It's experience. And it's hard too. When you take and cut those knuckles off, you can't have a knife that's too sharp, you cut your fingers off, keep your fingers all scratched up all the time. So you have to have a fairly dull knife to -- I mean to cut those -- and it's an art. With cutting those knuckles off, you put your knife on top, and you work -- twist your wrist. It kind of pulls the knuckles out rather than cutting them off. Now you can go start a crab-picking operation.

K.F.: Well I'm trying to figure out how to give visitors at the museum the experience of, you know, what it would be like to work at a crab picking plant. So I'm trying to figure out how to do that.

C.B.: Well the thing that -- it's -- when you go home, you're smelly. That's the only thing that I know of that is against crab picking. It's not a high -- it doesn't have a high pay scale that some of your other companies have. All food processors are low-pay scale.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: Read about Perdue farmers? That's an example of it. I've been following it very closely because I know just what the growers are going through. And that's why chicken has always been real cheap because the Perdue's, Tyson's have kept the price to the growers low, Perdue's own the chickens, they own the houses, the farmer, I guess, owned -- maybe Perdue had a mortgage on his farm, whatever, where the chicken houses were. And the farmer just tied right down just as close to the Perdue's and the processors, I guess you call them processors, that they just had to do it or go out of business, lose their farm. I've been following it very closely because I can understand piecework, and the farmers depend on, just like the watermen depend on us, the farmers depend on Tyson's. But it's gotten so in the crab business we don't have the control we used to have years ago. Because like I say, years ago, hardly anybody went to the store and bought a dozen steamed crabs, took 'em home and fixed 'em. They went in the store and bought a pound of crab meat and took it home and made cakes or salad or what.

K.F.: When did it become popular to get the whole crab?

C.B.: You'd always -- Bill, do you know, were they selling basket crabs when you came here?

B.B.: Oh, yeah.

C.B.: I'm sure they were.

B.B.: I mean it's been popular a while, but it has become more popular, I think, recently in that people of any economic status can find a crab that suits their budget. You know, now people will stand in line for these crabs that years ago people wouldn't touch, the females or the poor male crabs. I mean they'll stand in line and pay a lot of money for them because that's all that they can afford. You know, and to have crabs, sit down and eat by the piece, to drink beer with, have a party with, you know, nice big fat males, number ones, I think -- oh, since I've been here and I would say for the last 30 years have always been pretty desirable to sit down and -- but I think Jack said as recently as he's been here, and he came here in the early 70's, that we bought crabs straight, and we didn't buy four different grades. They just all went into the one basket or barrel. We called out what we needed here, which was the minimal amount, and then the rest went to the pickers. So years ago, the pickers probably had a better chance of doing a little better because they had better crabs to work on. They had the nice fat male crabs that they could work with. And we do pick those in the fall when the demand's way off and the supply's good.

C.B.: And people, people will pay more per pound of crab meat and buy a pound -- a dozen steamed crabs and pick 'em themselves if they went and bought a pound of crab meat, they get a lot more ounces for their dollar. But they love to get in and mix it up, and get it all on their hands, and get about half shot off beer.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: It's just something they like to get mixed up in, but they don't want to work in. Recreation. And something I don't think I told you. The male crab, per pound live weight, will produce more meat than the female crab. And you can understand that. You know how the apron looks like on a female sook?

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: It's a lot of weight lost to the chum pile.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And that's one reason why the males demand more --and the males are easier to cut. The knuckles are easier to cut off than the female crab.

K.F.: Now speaking of chum, what did you do with your chum?

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: What did you do with your chum?

C.B.: Years ago, we produced what they call crab meal. And we had a plant right out of here where that boiler room is. And we dehydrated the crab pickings and ground it up into fine meal. And this was furnished to the poultry, mostly poultry industry for protein and also calcium for the egg, developing of a good hard egg in a hen.

K.F.: So you guys had your own --

C.B.: Huh?

K.F.: You had your own plant here then --

C.B.: We dehydrated. The crab chum was all --nothing was left here except crab meal and crab meat. But the crab, the chicken growers and producers learned how to get their protein and their crab meal, they didn't use crab meal anymore. They used meat meal and fish meal. And because crab meal had too much kiten in it. Kiten is a shell, the shell part of the crab meat.

K.F.: Okay. Now did other companies bring their chum to you?

C.B.: At one time, we took the chum from Elliott's Island and our plant down to Toddville. But now it's hauled out to landfills. It's not economically feasible to process crab meat anymore. I don't think there's anybody -- anybody dry their own crab meal, crab pickings?

B.B.: No, no.

C.B.: It was a great big company down Hoopersville took all that crab pickings from those crab packers down there. What was Ted Ranky's --

B.B.: Eastern Shore --

C.B.: Eastern Shore -- no, no. I forget what it was. Crab meal dehydrating plant.

B.B.: Forgot the name of the guy that bought Goose Creek.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: I forgot his name too.

B.B.: Franklin Murphy.

C.B.: Franklin Murphy, yeah. Crisfield Dehydrating Plant. That's what it was. They dehydrated all the crab pickings from Crisfield and also Dorchester County. But we were large enough that we dehydrated our own while it was -- while it was demand for it. Like I say, there was too much shell in it. The chicken poultry raisers could get their shell cheaper using other things like fish meal and meat meal, scrap, you know, from meat, scrap cuttings from meat. When the butchers have cuttings from butchering the meat, they would use that meat meal too. You're not going to remember all this.

K.F.: Well that's why I'm taping it.

C.B.: You'll have to come back about four or five times.

K.F.: Well yeah, I think so.

C.B.: I'm just kidding.

K.F.: We're hoping we can come back and talk with you some more. You know, take photos and make sure people get a good understanding of the crab industry here.

C.B.: We've always -- we've always had people from the west, or even from Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, wanting to go through a crab plant. We've always been willing to show `em through, spend 15 minutes with `em, let `em sit down watch people picking the crab meat out. They love to watch it.

K.F.: They do.

C.B.: But then the health department says no, you got all these people coming in, you can't do it anymore. So -- we do it anyway. That's not really -- we feel like we've got a justification doing it. In fact, we have whole classes, busload of kids come in.

K.F.: Oh, really?

C.B.: Yeah. From -- away from here. They call up, of course, and say we have 50 kids we want to bring through. The kids are real interested in it.

K.F.: Yeah, I bet they would be.

C.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). But like I say, the health department's got -- these people coming in, smoking a cigarette, or their hands are not clean, and they might want to reach over and touch a can of crab meat. It was some -- having people come in.

K.F.: And they must have lots of questions.

C.B.: Oh, lots. Yes, in deed. And we feel like it -- seeing it is worth a thousand words. Five minutes looking is worth a thousand words trying to explain it.

K.F.: Right. Well, Bill, I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the markets you were telling us when we were here the other day. You were telling us about the new markets in New York, for the whole crabs and the sooks.

B.B.: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's changed quite a bit in that it makes crabs more hard for us to have available to pick. As I was saying, a whole crab is much more desirable now than it was 20 or 30 years ago. People never thought of taking a sook home to eat it.

C.B.: Not even male crabs.

B.B.: Or hardly male crabs.

C.B.: They started off with male crabs because they were so big and full.

B.B.: Yeah. But the live sook market has become very popular with oriental trade, and the metropolitan areas, Philadelphia -- Philadelphia, New York. And they've even sent `em live to Honolulu, West Coast, Detroit, Chicago, all over the country. And from what I understand, Dad, and I didn't realize this until recently, that the Orientals like to take `em, pull the back shells off and eat the roe --

C.B.: Oh, yeah. That's why --

B.B.: Before it's cooked.

C.B.: Oh, I didn't know that.

B.B.: I didn't realize it either.

C.B.: Eat it raw?

B.B.: That's -- they say that's the way it is. And I'll tell you how we learned that. There's a guy that we sell some live crabs to every now and then that does this, and that's all his market is. He said how about pasteurizing me some crab roe, you know, the crab eggs.

K.F.: Yeah.

C.B.: The yellow.

B.B.: Yeah. So we said okay. So we did it, and he sent it to his customers, and they didn't like it because it's been cooked. He said well they don't cook it before they eat it? And he says no.

C.B.: Never dream of that because --

B.B.: Well I didn't dream of it either.
C.B.: -- a crab is a scavenger.
B.B.: Yeah, it's full of bacteria.
K.F.: Right.
C.B.: And that's why I can't imagine eating something raw.
B.B.: Their immune system's must be tough.
C.B.: Scavenger.
K.F.: Well I guess it's not really like caviar, you know --
C.B.: No.
B.B.: That doesn't appeal to me either.
K.F.: No, me either. I can't even make cooked fish roe.
B.B.: Yeah. So anyway, that itself has put a great demand on Chesapeake Bay Sooks because they're the fattest, they're the best.
K.F.: Right, right.
B.B.: And, you know --
C.B.: Where do they get -- they take it and eat it raw?
B.B.: That's the way I understood it, Dad. I'm as surprised as you are.
C.B.: My, God. I can't imagine. First thing, you know, I know a crab is a scavenger. Right?
B.B.: Yeah.
C.B.: And when they find somebody drowned, the crab have --
K.F.: Yup.
C.B.: And that tells you right there, you know they've got all this stuff on their claws, in their mouth.
B.B.: Well raw oysters comes out of waters too. I mean, you know, and it's exposed to --
C.B.: Yeah, but oysters filter, oysters filter.
B.B.: Well they do, but they --
C.B.: You know, oysters will filter, you know, clear an oyster stream up --
B.B.: Yeah, but it's still coming out of a bacteria-filled body of water.
K.F.: Right, okay. Well how much does of a basket of those sook sell for when those crabs are selling on the market?
B.B.: Well they can bring a very premium price, and they will start calling here any time for `em. And, you know, it can be as -- they can bring almost as much money as a nice bushel of number ones for domestic -- or, you know, for a Baltimore market-type thing or Ocean City market. So, you know, they love it. Again, it's become very, very popular. And, you know, it's a nice little market on the sooks. Benefits the watermen greatly.
K.F.: Okay. Now how did you discovery this market?
B.B.: Well they discovered us. I mean shortly after I came here, and we are not big into it. There are a lot of other crab buyers that are. But shortly after I came here, you know, we started getting visits from a lot of Orientals wanting to get crabs with roe to Japan, and crabs with roe to here to there, to New York, to this, to that.
C.B.: Really -- must be gourmet.
K.F.: Live, and they're still alive.
B.B.: Yeah, yeah. And we just have never fooled with it much because our primary business is picking crabs, you know, picking crab meat. And we didn't think we'd have the supply to supply them and also, you know, to keep our help in work. But they found other people that would. So

that's where a lot of the Chesapeake Bay crabs are going, female crabs. Now when you asked Dad about crabbers, who are -- does any particular crabber's name come to you as being an outstanding crabber? I was doing something else at the time.

C.B.: Well Wilson Todd.

B.B.: Did you mention names?

C.B.: Emerson Todd. There's a big family of Todds. Emerson, Wilson, William, Cook, they're all brothers. And their mother worked here picking crabs. And a sister, Wilson's sister.

B.B.: Worked here?

C.B.: Yeah, two sisters worked here.

B.B.: I didn't know that either. Now was their father a waterman? Must've been.

C.B.: He was Colonel Todd, yeah, he worked for us. But mostly oyster.

B.B.: And Elliotts worked here a long time.

C.B.: Yes, the Elliott family. We have all the Elliotts at one time sold us seafood.

K.F.: Okay. And those connections are still there? I mean do they still --

B.B.: Yeah, we still have Todds and Elliotts. But again, their -- you know, their kids are not exclusively watermen like they used to be.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: They're doing other things. And, you know, a couple of them have gone onto do other things. And like crab pickers are retired and gone back on the water. They come back to do this as a second living.

K.F.: Right.

B.B.: One of the Todds is a retired state trooper, you know, and his father was Wilson.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: --crab potter as compared to a trot liner. Years ago, they didn't have crab potters. They were all caught by trot line.

K.F.: Right.

C.B.: And now you'll go by and see somebody's back yard full of crab pots.

K.F.: Yeah, hundreds.

B.B.: Hundreds of `em.

K.F.: Hundreds of `em. Now you were telling me about -- I guess it was a picker who was related to a -- who lives in Wilmington?

B.B.: That's her daughter, and she's coming here tomorrow to talk to you.

K.F.: Okay, okay.

B.B.: Two of Rony's daughters, I think her granddaughter and another granddaughter will be talking to you. One of them may be a great-granddaughter, I'm not sure. But they're all going to be related to Rony.

K.F.: Okay. This is not the first time I've heard of people retiring and then going back into the crab picking business.

B.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: And I'm wondering, I'm going to ask them tomorrow, but what do you think it is that makes women want to come back to the industry when they're retired?

B.B.: Well, you know, these girls have a strong work ethic, I think. And they're family's here, they started off working here, and I think it's something they always enjoyed, but knew that possibly there were some better things out there, and they took advantage of it, or got married

and moved away. And, you know, they're coming back to do something that they enjoy, and be with family.

C.B.: Had a big crab house at one time, Roy Harrison over in St. Michaels.

K.F.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah, we actually did talk with Roy two weeks ago.

C.B.: I mean he's still around. He's not still active, is he?

K.F.: No, he's not in the business. He's retired. Bay 100 Seafood has what used to be Harrison's Crab House.

C.B.: Oh, is that right?

K.F.: We're going to talk with them. I think they're the only crab picking place left in Talbot County.

B.B.: Well Bellevue Seafood.

K.F.: Bellevue Seafood and I think that's --

C.B.: Yeah, Bellevue and Turner, Turner.

K.F.: -- for picking crabs.

B.B.: Well Turner's not doing anything anymore.

C.B.: No, no, no.

B.B.: W.A. Turner.

C.B.: That's a colored family over around Bellevue. They got a lot of kids, and they shuck clams, and shuck oysters, and pick crabs. Grandson of the old man Turner, John Turner had the crab industry, and he would work very closely with us. We bought crab meat from him. He'd pick it back then.

K.F.: Oh, he would.

B.B.: Still does. Bellevue does.

K.F.: Oh, Bellevue still picks for you guys.

B.B.: Yeah.

K.F.: Okay. Do they have their own label, or are they just --

B.B.: They have their own label. Plus they'll pick for us.

K.F.: Okay. Now what do you call that when somebody will pick for you?

B.B.: Co-packer, I guess.

C.B.: You identify them on the can, their number.

B.B.: They have to have their license number on the container, although it's our name on it, our brand name.

C.B.: -- name or something like that.

B.B.: We've been doing that forever. Well go back as far as Toddville, you've been doing that. That plant was a different licensed plant.

C.B.: Yeah. Each plant is identified by number, a health department number.

K.F.: Okay.

C.B.: And though they might put it in J.M. Clayton Company's cup, but we can identify it because of the number on the can.

K.F.: Now do the pickers here have their own numbers?

B.B.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

K.F.: Okay. And does that go on the can?

B.B.: Yeah. They write it on the bottom of the container.

K.F.: Okay. So somebody --

B.B.: Yeah, like when Margie was here, we used to have customers come in and want Margie's.

C.B.: That's the truth. They'd say I want number 27.
B.B.: That's right. That's what happens though.
K.F.: And can you fill those orders?
B.B.: Sometimes. Yeah, sometimes. We do what we can.
C.B.: If they call ahead of time, you can do it.
B.B.: Yeah.
C.B.: It's too late if it's all just mixed in a barrel together, in a box.
K.F.: Okay. I should let you all get back to work.
C.B.: Well I've enjoyed talking to you. I don't have anything else to do.
B.B.: You're welcome.
K.F.: Well thank you.
C.B.: I enjoyed it.
B.B.: If you can think of any other questions for him, or if there's anything that maybe you don't think he interpreted the way that you thought --
K.F.: Yeah, well I'll just listen to the tape.
B.B.: -- I'll try to clarify it and ask him again.
K.F.: Sure, sure.
B.B.: He doesn't do well over the phone. But, you know, she's coming back tomorrow to talk to some of Rony's kids. And she's going to look through this big bag of old newspaper clippings. I'm going to move this typewriter, and you can sit right there.
K.F.: Okay, great.
B.B.: So she's going to know more about us than we ever knew here.
(End of Interview.)

Interview Cover Sheet and Checklist

Name of Interviewee: (~psa.~c~¢- . -- -

Male ☒ Female ☐ Race: /4 **O4** -. **5**

Address

Street: **OZ-9 2, 6, Gn**

City: **Cambridge**

State: Zip: **2 / / 4P**

Home Phone: **OD -.2 ' - oo-30**

Work Phone: **A Clayton Seaford**

Date of Interview: */2 **3** iTime: 10

Place of Interview **J. 'a Clayton office**

Number of Original Tapes: Approximate Length of Interview: **2. a o minutes**

Name of Interviewer

[Redacted Signature]

Items checked are completed and will be returned to the contracting agency.

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|-------------------------------------|--|----|
| ☒ | Push in tabs on the original tape(s) and label each according the Program standards (see attached). | 1\ |
| ☒ | Arrange with the Program office to have original tape(s) copied. Only use copies to complete tape index. | 1 |
| ☐ | Submit completed Interview Tape Index. | |
| ☒ | Release Form | |
| ☒ | Field Notes | |
| ☒ | Interviewee Life History Form or vitae from interviewee | |

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| ☒ | Fieldnotes to be made available to researchers who request them. |
| ☒ | Interviewee has photographs that should/may be copied. F |
| ☐ | Interviewee has papers or records that should/may be considered for archival collection. |
| ☒ | Interviewee would like a copy of the tape(s) and or indexes. Specifically: |

Note: 4 other pickers interviewed on same tape

Interview Cover Sheet and Checklist

Name of Interviewee: 1,0 rWU --

Male ☒ Female ☐ Race: 44w, .
P O

Address

Street: S~2- O Lv

City: &L%L

State: M Zip: 2 (3 t (Q

Home Phone: 4(0-22-0- 4+3b

Work Phone: 3, Mr Clayton C

Date of Interview 3123btTime: 10 --

Place of Interview. J, AUK Clayton Office

Number of Original Tapes: Approximate Length of Interview minutes

Name of Interviewer. Kelly Feltault ~~Resident in Clayton Office~~ to use

Items checked are completed and will be returned to the contracting agency.

Push in tabs on the original tape(s) and label each according the Program standards (see attached).

Arrange with the Program office to have original tape(s) copied. Only use copies to complete tape index-

• Submit completed Interview Tape Index.

Release Form

• A0, Field Notes

Interviewee Life History Form or vitae from interviewee

Fieldnotes to be made available to researchers who request them.

• Interviewee has photographs that should/may be copied.

• Interviewee has papers or records that should/may be considered for archival collection.

Interviewee would like a copy of the tape(s) and or indexes. Specifically:

Interview Cover Sheet and Checklist

Name of Interviewee: *Georgia Sephus*

Male ☒ Female ☐ Race:

Address

Street (, / *Wj"l 51.*

City: *Cambridge*

State: *Ma* Zip: *02138*

Home Phone: *617-552-5611*

Work Phone: *J.A. Clayton Co.*

Date of Interview: *11/13/97* Time: *10:00*

Place of Interview: *Clayton dt?a-*

Number of Original Tapes: *2* Approximate Length of Interview: *20* minutes

Name of Interviewer *Kelly Feltault* ~~_____~~

Items checked are completed and will be returned to the contracting agency.

9

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Arrange with the Program office to have original tape(s) copied. Only use copies to complete tape index.

O

Submit completed Interview Tape Index.

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Release Form

Field Notes

Interviewee Life History Form or vitae from interviewee

Fieldnotes to be made available to researchers who request them.

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Interviewee has photographs that should/may be copied.

Interviewee has papers or records that should/may be considered for archival collection.

Interviewee would like a copy of the tape(s) and or indexes. Specifically:

*12/1/97
Sephus, Georgia*