

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT A. WALTERS OF QUEENSTOWN, MARYLAND 7/86

Present: R. Dodds, Joe Liener

Schooner IDA MAE was owned by his father, and built in 1898.

Schooner AUSTRALIA was captained by his brother Harold. She was a prize vessel from the War of 1812, her exact age unknown. Now at Mystic Seaport.

JL: Her registry number is 25.

When did your father own the IDA MAE? He has been dead sixty years. Sold the IDA MAE before his death. He was on the CARADORA at the time of his death, Father was 61 when he died of appendicitis.

JL: When this picture of the AUSTRALIA was taken, do you know whether the Duponts owned her? No, the picture was taken 1933 before the Duponts owned her. At the time it was owned by Frank Dudley. Duponts bought her from them; they were going to make a yacht out of her.

JL: Do you know where the picture was taken? It was taken near Queenstown - had an excursion on board. Often took people to St. Michaels to watch the races.

When his brother had her he once pulled both masts out of her.

Mr. Walters was 14 years old when he started working for his father on the IDA MAE. He also sailed on the AUSTRALIA.

Came ashore from the IDA MAE when he was 24 years old to get married. After he got married he had a powerboat called ELIZABETH, hauling freight. He operated her for 2 seasons hauling grain and tomatoes from the Wye River.

When on the IDA MAE he went to many places as the boat took freight all over.

Mr. Walters sold the ELIZABETH to go crabbing and oystering.

The longest trip he ever made was 31 days getting up the Rappahanock River with a cargo of coal on the IDA MAE; head winds all the way. Coming back it took only three days.

The IDA MAE Cost \$20,000 when new in 1898.

Mr. Walters started on her as a cook, later moving up to mate. He started in 1917 when he was 14 years old.

How much did you get paid then? My father said you are not going to work for nothing. I will give you \$6 a month plus board, but you will have to clothe yourself out of it. It didn't sound like much but back then you could buy a suit of clothes for \$5-- nothing fancy - but a suit.

Did your father give you any special privileges? No, you could

Walters, p.2

not tell him you can't do it. You would just get a kick in the pants. He worked me like everyone else.

The IDA.MAE once left Key Highway and anchored in the cove out here in 5 hours. She was a fast boat. Once we passed the steamboat LOUISE.

She would be hauled out every year at Redman Vanes in Baltimore.

When he was a boy sailing the Bay you would often see sailing craft as far as the eye could see. There were thousands of them then.

The IDA MAE hauled wheat, corn, phosphate, railroad ties, rubber, canned goods (often from the Coan River) and cement to Bay where Maxwell was building that Catholic School. We hauled just about anything.

With wheat and corn we would load it ourselves. She was a 120 ton boat and carried 4,000 bushels of wheat.

In bad weather we would run on dead reckoning.

His brother lost both masts in the AUSTRALIA when the bobstay broke. The masts fell back over the stern but luckily nobody was injured.

The work was hard but he liked it. There were no winches on the boats. The sails had to be hauled up by hand. Anchors weighed a thousand pounds; had to be heaved up on the windlass.

How many crew were on the IDA MAE? Two besides the captain. Mr. Walters started cooking on the boat; they later hired another boy to replace him.

Did they like your cooking? They ate it. I could cook some good bread. Somebody had to do it.

Mr. Walters built two boats for himself. The last one he still uses and was built in the backyard. It is 47 years old and is still a good boat.

JL: Do you remember the names of the places on the Wye River? The points and so forth.

Grapevine Cove
Whetstone Point
Sandy Neck Point
Bennett Point
Mill Bar

and lots of points not even mentioned, just marked by buoys

JL: Did you know Mr. George Jackson? Sure, a boatbuilder. I knew all the old boatbuilders - O'Neill Jones, Bronza Parks,

walter Jones. I knew all those old captains down there : George Jefferson, Joe Faulkner, Stu Faulkner.

JL: Do you remember the MARY F? Mr. Walter Jones built her for Capt. Bridges. Do you remember the MARY F coming over and buying oysters on the Wye River? A man by the name of Haddaway was on it. Oh sure, that was Bill Haddaway.

JL: She was something like the model of your boat. She is still afloat somewhere.

Mr. Walters knew Capt. Ellis Haddaway. He ran shells out of Capt. Elly's oyster house.

JL: Were there any remains of the old ferry that ran across the Wye? Yeah, she's sunk down there at Back Woods (?) Hollow. Her bones are down there.

JL: She had a sail on one side of her.

She had a big hawser that was used to pull her across. The ferry was at Drum Point. When Sherman bought the place that was the end of the ferry. He closed the road.

I remember one time we were coming up the river. They had just put a new hawser across the river and it was floating on the water. We hit the hawser like a rubber band. Came to a halt.

I joined the IDA MAE when I was 14. Father took me out of school when I was in the 7th grade and said I need you to work for me.

JL: Where was the school you attended? At Perry Corner, it is torn down now. It only went to the 7th grade. You had to walk to school then.

My father said if I ever catch you smoking a cigarette I will ram it down your throat. He said I could smoke a pipe but not a cigarette. He later changed his mind about cigarettes.

Mr. Walters asked whether we knew Capt. Will Rowe (?); Capt. Bill Faulkner? Faulkner had two bugeyes built called the JOSEPH FAULKNER and EMMA FAULKNER. The EMMA foundered off Black Walnut Point. The captain got ashore in the yawl boat but later died of exposure.

The EMMA FAULKNER was a big boat, beautiful and fast.

JL: Do you remember the AGNES, a single-masted round-stern bugeye that upset off Choptank Light and drowned the crew? No, I knew a schooner that upset around there. Her hame was GENERAL HARDCASTLE. She was bought afterwards and her name changed to LOUISE. A beautiful schooner. The boat tripped over her anchor chain and capsized.

Rams were no use to me. We could sail circles around the rams. One time we made it here from Key Highway in 5 hours, Had a reef in the mainsail; it was blowing a gale of wind.

Walters, p.4

Mr. Walters knew Capt. Johnny Crouch up at Rock Hall.

JL: He had a big buy boat called GEORGE CROUCH; used to run to Centreville to the fertilizer plant.

I also used to run fertilizer to Centreville.

The AUSTRALIA had her masts knocked out of her off Bodkin Creek. It didn't hurt anyone, everyone ran inside the cabin. They had to get towed into Baltimore. The owner Frank Dudley had her re-rigged. He was wealthy, a couple of masts meant nothing to him.

Used to run up the Coan River to a place called Bundick. Picked up railroad ties. Used to have two fellows come down to the wharf and play fiddles.

Used to run tomatoes in the Fall; to George Caulk in St. Michaels. Once coming in I was hit by a squall. The fence fell down on one side and the baskets fell overboard. She rolled the other way and the other fence broke. If they hadn't broke would have been capsized. Lost 60 baskets. Caulk sent some colored boys to the shore to pick up the tomatoes; got most of them. Used to run tomatoes from the Wye River. Everyone grew tomatoes in those days. F could carry a thousand bushels.

Ney Dodson used to own the land down there (St. Michaels). Used to let the boys tie up for nothing - didn't pay any wharfage. Had a whole string of boats along there.

Do you remember Chad Jones? JL: Yeah, he had a little narrow shop right there on the street. Place is all gone now (Mill St.)

JL: Do you remember the grist mill on Mill Creek that runs into Skipton Creek? No, but we used to go up Skipton Creek in the IDA MAE to load grain.

JL: When you went up there did you push with the yawl boat or have it pulling under the bowsprit? We put the boat under the stern. Had a 7/ hp Mianus, a powerful engine. It could push the schooner to Baltimore in 10 hours.

Grain used to be hauled to the wharf in wagons. Would then use a local scow to go out to the wharf and bring it back to the boat.

JL: What kind of stove did you have on the schooner for cooking? A Shipmate, had several stoves onboard including one in the forepeak. Didn't cook in the cabin, cooked in the forepeak. The cabin was like a palace, off-limits.

Mr. Walters knew the LITTLE JENNIE and the Pope boys from oxford. They also had a powerboat, used to run fishing parties on the DEAN, a nice boat. Last saw her in Rock Hall.

Walters, p.5

During the Depression he had a \$100 in the bank and couldn't get it out; funds were frozen. He sold the money to a guy from Baltimore for \$80 cash. It was tough in the Depression. Once he had to sell his boat because-he was-sick and needed the money to support his family.

Mr. Walters knew many of the pungsies:

AMANDA LEWIS
KESSIE PRICE
WAVE
PLAN

The last two were owned by Capt. Johnnie Crouch. He made some money on the PLAN. Would sell coal in small lots on the wharf.

He could once tell the name of a boat by her appearance from miles away. Knew the schooners, LOUISE, MATTIE DEAN and the BETTY CONWAY, SARAH CONWAY and FLORA KIRWAN.

McGee once made a set of sails for the IDA MAE.

Mr. Walters will be 84 but still goes crabbing. His father would never let him go swimming on Dog Days - would get Tidewater Fever.

Used to eel pot using clams, but haven't eeled for a long time.

Once used to set his pickle barrel on a nice organ stool. Daughter rescued it about 25 years ago from the boat.

JL: Did you know Uncle Nick Haddaway'...from Tilghman Creek? No, I knew Alec Haddaway though.

Alec used to handscrape which was illegal. That is where he made his money? never did catch him.

JL: He used to have a little shucking. house in Tilghman Creek. When he got low on oysters he would come out of the shucking house and you could hear him clear over in the Wye River.

Mr. Walters commented that Tilghman Point looks the same now as it was when he was a boy, on the Miles River side.

His grandfather was a doctor; was a surgeon in the Civil War. Later he had to amputate the arm of one of his patients, a waterman. The waterman continued to tong oysters after that. Had a ruuber boot that he put on his arm to keep from getting wet. Would put one shaft under the amputated arm and haul with the good arm. He could do it as he was a big man, and strong.

Shafts used to be made of Georgia pine. Used to work 26's in his time. Used right handed tongs.

Nearby there used to be a blacksmith by the name of Wrightson. He used to make a pair of shafts for \$7 and a pair of heads for

Walters, p.6

\$6. Made the heads with a hammer. He closed about 40 years ago;; died of diabetes.

While on the IDA MAE the schooner was frozen in several times. There was no sheathing.

His father made a pretty good living from the schooner. It took care of six children.

Mr. Walters knew Capt. Heath on the ram JENNIE BELL. He lived on board with his wife and a bunch of dogs at Salisbury. The schooner could sail rings around the rams; in a headwind they wouldn't go anywhere.

Mr. Walters knew Lee Ford, lived in Sherwood and owned the round-sterned bugeye GRACIE. He then bought the EDNA WARFIELD.

Was never on an outside boat. During World War II, he worked at the Tzumpy Yard in Annapolis on PT boats that were modeled after the British Vosper boats. Did the work on the sterns.'