

Interview Log

Interviewee: Chris D. Clarke **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/MD/FT.4.13.213/604

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1

Date: 4/13/98 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: Frenchtown MD, in C.D.'s studio

Topic: fly fishing, hunting, new-comers to the shore, painting and wildlife art

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS4.13.290-291

Comments: File name: mdft213.doc. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape or commentary by fieldworker].

C. D. Clarke is a popular wildlife artists, doing the cover of the book *Marsh Tales* and making a good living from location painting. This is where he goes fly fishing or hunting with a group and makes paintings of the trip, then sells them to either the travelers or other interested sportsmen. He talks extensively about the community of sportsmen, fitting in on the shore, and was open about marketing art.

BEGIN SIDE A

Chris introduces himself and I check the levels; born in Rochester NY, attended Syracuse U. Majored in art, he and his wife Iris moved down to the shore 16 years ago to exact site; Iris grew up on Shelter Island and they didn't like that it was being rapidly developed and changed; didn't want to set down roots in an area that everything you liked about it was disappearing

Heard that there was inexpensive waterfront property down here on shore, took a week trip and zig zagged the shore from bay to ocean, DE to Cape Charles; last day stumbled into Frenchtown on last day and saw this property; house was a complete wreck and they bought it; scariest day in both their lives was writing the big check in Princess Ann for the house and then driving down to the house to a yard that was chin high with weeds and a house that all windows were smashed, roof caved in; kitchen linoleum was baked and buckled into a rigid surface that broke off when you walked on it; dead bird in toilet and toilet cracked from water freezing in it; moved their stuff into the house and slept in the moving van the first night

fixed house up and built studio adjacent to house; Ovid French owned their house, family that Frenchtown named after; liked it because it was fishing and farming economy; Iris sails, he hunts and fishes, loves salt marshes, 2 miles of open salt marsh behind house

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description of C.D.'s work: landscape painter, on location painter--pleinair painting--because he loves to hunt and fish most landscapes are of sporting subjects; painted their new neighborhood when first moved to shore, marsh, workboats, watermen, etc; got grounding in painting on location that way; always a fly fisherman and that got him into destination travel painting which doing for last 8 years

first one was a trip to Chile with friend who was editor of fly fishing magazine; painted there, met lodge owner there who had lived in alaska prior to chile and he invited chris to alaska, then another person in alaska and on and on; his thing is that he is doing the paintings there, not taking photos and doing studio paintings later; uses photography but much work done there; figures done in studio but landscape done on location; light and feel captured better on location

sense of place on the shore: marsh and water; constantly changing on minute to minute basis and daily basis; seasonally and through weather they change; marsh grass is amazingly colorful: rainy day it is maroon, on a sunny day it is violet colored; grass is highly reflective and therefore colorful; mood of the grass and its changing moods is the sense of place

everything he does fits together like a puzzle; food they eat is either what they've shot or caught or grown in the garden, he loves to cook so cooking his own food; cooks like he paints creates as he goes along; hunting and fishing fits into life that way and art fits in by him trying to capture his experiences doing these things in art for other people; hard to define when working and playing;

Tourism and development: tourism only thing that can save the eastern shore; ecologically fragile so industry and development are bad ideas; particularly in the lower shore where most is non-tidal wet lands and rest is tidal wetlands; not good for waste sites and dumps, tried here; not good for building houses even; but Eastern shore can't stay the way it's always been; mankind just doesn't do that and traditional ways of making a living are not fitting into society as they used to; tourism is lesser of evils, yes it will bring more people down here, but if Crisfield became a Newport RI it might be a good thing; deep water port, sailing destination with interesting things for people to see; restaurants etc; could have a thriving economy based on tourism that wouldn't have too much of an environmental impact

Cultural impact: culture based on being isolated, nothing that is isolated anymore; need to preserve stuff in museum sense which is sad because I want things to be real not in a show case, but either that or it will go away completely; 15 yrs he's been here he's watched the watermen's culture disappear; old timers die off and what made them who they were is not here anymore; every one connected to everyone in the world now by computers, cable tv, telephones, kids grow up not that much differently than kids in the cities really; exposed to same things: violence, bad language, and good things too; disappearing really; will be the odd young person who will want to do it the old way, seen before with some friends

[if kids are exposed to same things in cities and on shore then what is the thing that makes them "cityfolk" or "rural kids," is it the more daily experiences of where you shop, get your mail, church suppers, environment? Kids in the city live close to relatives too, so that may not be it. Many city neighborhoods are tight-knit communities that people never leave, just like on the shore.]

Locals making money off the newcomers, locals forced into working in industries that bring development; traditional ways of living and occupations will always be here, but dwindle down to a scant few that become "the last" whatever, a tourist attraction in themselves.

Not his favorite thing to see the shore heading toward this preservationist mode, would rather see it kept alive for people to really work at those jobs and earn money; but also because it's a poor area local gov't jump at any money scheme that comes along; some examples: prison just built off 13 near the exit for Crisfield, bad for environment, culture everything, but brought money into county and some jobs; also tried to bring in a super landfill into somerset county, 1 Ox size of local dump on road out to Frenchtown (several acres, fenced off); wanted to bring in refuse from Baltimore and other big cities, like 100 18-wheelers a day, company offered county commissioners 300,00.00 a year and said they would take care of all the county waste too; commissioners jumped on it thought it was free money; but beat back by community coming together, across all lines and races; all afraid it would run off into the bay; that's the other direction that eastern shore could go, also wanted a trash burning electrical plant in Crisfield; as a deep water port Crisfield could also bring in ocean going vessels full of trash, and industries would love all this cheap labor;

Shore needs to look beyond their own 3 acres and band together to see whole picture; lots of people trying to get out of Delmarva so sell off farms etc; not a big sense of stewardship among people out here; think they have a right to do what ever they want, plenty believe that Salisbury's development is great, like all the malls etc.; people think that dragging Delmarva out of depths of tradition and into 20th C. Is what should happen that's growth

People will have to work together and done on a big scale not a bit by bit scale, to guide the shore; pfiesteria episode will force some decisions like that, can't decide farm by farm; these decisions may cause the chicken industry to leave the shore over a period of 20 years; that decision should be made on a heads up basis, not one step at a time; huge decision;

Goose moratorium: goose hunting boon peaked in 1980 or so, 1 million canadas wintering on the shore; 8 yrs ago that was only 250,000; series of late springs on the Engava peninsula where birds nest; geese if in bad nesting grounds will not lay and so all birds here inwinter were all adults no juveniles at that low; phased out goose season from 90 days with 3 birds, to shorter season with 2 birds, then 1 bird then it didn't improve had bad nesting season after bad nesting season and they closed it; very big impact down here, goose hunting was a majoy industry; big guide services thta employed dozens and

dozens of guides; rented 30 or 40 farms at \$10,000.00 a year; prices for fields went up and up, farmers making lots of money renting fields, guide services making lots of money from hunters around the world who came here; communities made fortune on restaurants and hotels etc; DNR announced it was closing the season and the head of DNR waterfowl had to wear a bullet proof vest to the meeting due to threats; got very nasty; nothing else to do;

shut for 6 yrs. And that whole economy has dried up and blown away; farmers not making any money

[is this related to them selling off their farms?]

Next battle: geese are at 500,000 mark and DNR wants this younger generation of birds to reach sexual maturity and breeding before they reopen the season, but lots of pressure from former guiding people and gun shops; DNR made mistake of giving a figure before they would consider opening the season; fall should be a major battle about how this decision will be made either politically or environmentally and eastern shore has long history of making them politically; done with fishing and hunting regulations all the time;

DNR wants to keep it from being as big as it was, some services got too efficient at killing birds, killing 10,000 birds a year; would lease all the farms in one area and put pit blinds in each field, 6 hunters in a blind and all blinds were in radio contact with each other; geese would use one field and those hunters would get their limit quickly, then they would radio other fields to come over there and they'd shoot the field out and the birds wouldn't come back, but the birds would go to another field owned by the same service and get shot at there too; virtually guaranteed of getting some geese, not very sporting; picking houses where you took your bird and then go have a beer, done by 10 or 11

Instead of geese being a trophy that you strove for and worked hard for it got to be a given, like going to a grocery store; DNR wants to avoid that; only person being clever and crafty was the head of the guide service, he was making all the money; nothing illegal about it, but just too efficient; this is one of those situations where people like me who live and breathe hunting and fishing hate regulations because I like to go where I want when I want to go there, but because of the way things happen in this country and our pioneer ethic, and we hate legislation there are too many people to hunt that way anymore so you have to have regulations; I hate them but I find myself arguing for them other wise you have nothing; you just destroy the resource and the resource has to come first no matter who you are;

A lot of people say that this is big gov't at work etc, but I know a lot of the game biologists and they are all hunters themselves; and at the same time as this moratorium we have a population explosion of snow geese; same folks saying that we don't want to open the Canada season are saying go shoot all the snow geese you want so it's not like we're talking about stopping hunting

How he got is business going; alot was luck; lots of things that he likes to do have fallen into place as key elements in this business; fly fishing that he started at age 12 is now a key component of his work, because of his talents as a fly fisherman that has led to lots of business

[phone rings in background]

fanatical about waterfowling and quail hunting and bird dogs has also fed my business; not a conscious decision to say that if I get good at this or at painting on location it will be good for business; just something that I wanted to do at the time, wayt to get good at painting; especially on location and that has fed into me doing magazine articles and commissioned pieces because I got good at capturing a certain place while I was there; I really just looked at events as they happened and deciding how to use those events; my advice is to keep your eyes open and look for opportunities and then work with htem;

[tape off so C.D. can answer phone]

network of hunters etc up and down the shore; for him bigger than on the shore; how he connects people with similar interests;

talk about some painting techniques, now working in oils again, working bigger too; makret for these things; enjoys the smaller quicker location pieces and thinks they are better pieces but there is a market for the bigger studio portraits; gaining as an artists from these, you have to think about them and plan them, strategize over a longer period of time; both have different markets too, oils and water colors;

sporting magazines that his work ends up in; Fly Rod and Reel, Gray's Sporting Journal; Fly Fishing in Salt Waters; Shooting Sportsman; Sporting Classics; Field and Stream; he and a writer will go out and C.D. will do the illustrations instead of having a photographer;

[I tell C.D. about the taxidermist who took up doing safari mounts after close of goose season]

Rage of goose hunters were stuffed geese as decoys; quickly done and made big money, ordered dozens at a time; some taxidermists had crews of people who did these decoys in steps, like an assembly line; \$100 a piece; call them stuffers, the decoys;

Dog training for quail hunting; not enough wild quail on the shore to train a doy anymore, enough to hunt but not train, so he raises quail feeding, watering etc, and even training the quail through a recall box and their natural instinct to covey; release a # of birds from a pen and leave some in box, then at night the boxed ones will call the others to covey and they will return and actually get back in the house, the box;

decoy making too, dog training, tying flies upstairs, collecting feathers etc for flies; collecting squirrel tails for fly tying; fly shop now in Salisbury, but not many still on shore; fly fishing has grown enourmously; tuna and marlin are now caught on flies, several fly fishing guides on the bay now;

[see interview with Ernie Bowden and Sam Swift where Sam complains that a fishing companion wasted an entire day with a fly rod on the bay]

Kevin Josenhands in Crisfield, fly tyer and guide; could be a supplemental income for watermen as this sport explodes, brings more people into the area; stripers have really brought in some fly fishermen, and these types of fishermen like to go to unique areas;

community of hunting dog trainers; older dog just died

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

more of a network btwn folks who breed gun dogs; Chesapeake breeder in Salisbury, Tara knows him; lab breeder in Princess Anne;

talk of Frenchtown; used to be all watermen; now 1/3 are summer or retirement people; younger watermen don't have the appreciation for waterfront property, more likely to see them buy a new place Nanticoke homes [double wides] in Fairmont on an acre lot; these family homes come up for sale and are snatched up by outsiders; no friction between watermen and new people

told when moved there that it would be difficult; watermen have been great neighbors, always helpful; not stand-offish; group of them showed up to help us unload the moving van when we showed up; problems occur when people move in and want to change the rules; we tried not to be like that; story of waterman's dog in neighborhood harassing their dog and desroying their garden; how to communicate to this waterman about the problem; worked out fine

[this is the same waterman that Iris told me over lunch is still not happy that they moved in, the man's wife won't speak to htem even after 16 years;]

could be a problem later on, rules from outsiders that the watermen just don't understand; "like the watermen are up at 3 in the morning in the summer, and their diesel engines are not quiet. And they *love* to turn their radios *way* up. They have remote speakers in their crab houses that pick up all the radio transmissions of all the watermen that are out on the water, and they leave them blaring at 3 o'clock in the morning, you know, with `HEY, Billybob what's going on over there' just screaming across the cosmos, and I can see that kind of thing not fitting very well with some Washingtonian who's sleeping in on Sunday morning." Those are the kinds of things that we saw happening on shelter island where Iris is from and that's why we wanted to get out of there; city people telling the locals who'd been there for 300 years how to live; not happening out here yet, could interaction between everyone here;

Leads:

Wayne Bozman: waterman, next door to them

"Blue Dot": waterman

Wayne's mother is nextdoor to them, Mary Bozman

Frenchtown traditionally softcrab oriented; alot hard crab too now; someone inthe family is doing some aspect of crab business: potting, bank trapping; fishing up; etc;

bank trapping is like pound netting for soft crabs: line of poles off the shore with wire and soft crabs running in marsh scoot along wire into 4x4' pot;

some netmakers here; some muskrating;

Dickie Ford: not a waterman but born and raised down here, wife Ellen the postmaster; good story teller; pilot too; has an air coup in Crisfield;

MoSam: Elmer Ford, Dickie's wife's sister's husband; builds boats; big gardener, huge vegetable garden; connect with wife for quilts in area;

Cameron MacIntire: Greenbackville, VA in Captn. Cove; moving to Pitts creek across from Shelltown; moving 18th C. House to site with brick end wall; decoy maker; does high end restoration work on decoys; 757-824-5125

check out the historical society in Fairmont, MoSam live on the right before that; his wife would be great to talk to about quilts: Mini Ford;

