

Interview Log

Interviewee: Edith Maddox & Sam Maddox

Tape #: MAAF/KF/MD/FT8.14.223/316

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1 of 2

Date: 8/14/98 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: Tyaskin MD near Whitehaven; in Edith and Sam's kitchen

Topic: sassafras tea making; work during the war; riveting; tonging oysters; working in canneries; quilting; death

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS8.14.259-269

Comments: File name: mdft223.doc. See mdft224 for continuation of this interview. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape]. See FN08.14.98 for more details.

Shanie Shields recommended this couple to me. They are not the most talkative, but Edith did begin talking and telling stories when she pulled out her quilts at the end of the interview. A friend stops by on one of these tapes to check on the couple as Edith does not drive and Sam is ill and cannot drive. The recorder and mic were on the kitchen table, but I shifted the mic around because Edith and Sam sat at opposite ends of the kitchen: Sam at the table, Edith behind me on a twin bed in corner of the kitchen.

BEGIN SIDE A

[ask each to say their name; Edith begins but Sam interrupts to say that I need to speak up because his hearing aid doesn't work well]

Edith Lamour Maddox [EM]: hard to get root for sassafras tea; bulldozing all the trees to build now; pushes up the smaller stuff, land is theirs but had to sell the timber rights for money;

Sam Maddox [SM]: how lumbering has changed the mosquito population and their location; land management so that the little trees aren't killed in the process; nobody is replanting the trees; farming in this wet weather been hard; corn didn't last

EM: turkeys eating corn too; story of cat chasing wild turkey; making sassafras tea: cut the root of the tree, Sam cuts it in blocks; split the big ones into usable size to work with knife, need to make it into strips; put in water and boil it; turns red color; love the taste, always had it in March every year; purified blood; mother drank it a lot and lived to be 103 years old;

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interviewee.

Started in March because family always did that

SM: family always made it too; go with father to get roots;

EM: red and white kind; family always had the red; take skin off and then turns red; keeps better; no other uses besides tea; last time made it was 2 years ago; now the woods are posted and can't go in them; not good to be in woods alone now; don't know what you'll meet; best to dig up in winter around Dec.

EM: other home remedies; herbs; making poultice or "poulster"

SM: finding sassafras; look for sanding soil not in the low bottom because that's white; checking to see if it's red or white sassafras; "bleeding it red"

EM: good to chew on just the root; other herb called "live for ever" which was good for boils and things; beat it and added some things then put it on a splinter or something to get it out; other plant called cat nip can't remember what they did with that, lots of mints always growing;

[SM doesn't hear EM asking him questions]

EM: plant with thorns that grew in the soybeans; herb used for making a paste; tall plant; been long time since she's seen these plants; horseradish good to grow too but she finds it too hot; grows it for neighbors; heirloom plants

SM from Somerset county, Fairmount; EM born in Whitehaven;

SM: don't pull up the entire tree, don't want to kill it; [my experience has been that you dig up the youngest trees];

EM: how they would dig up the roots and chew on them to school; teachers would make them throw it away; school was around the corner but now it's a house; was a store too but not there anymore; walk across the field to school; parents farmed the land around the area and dad oystered the winter; only around that area; used to go to Potomac; but one winter it froze and snowed and waited so long to get home decided not to go that far again; promised the lord he wasn't going again; didn't own his own boat but used one; worked alone

SM: oystered too in the winter with his father; didn't like it; hated to go to the Potomac;

EM: hand tonging was the work men did in the winter around there; in summer they farmed or worked in canning factory; women peeled tomatoes; cap strawberries [cut the caps off the berries]; most women worked for Mr. Roberts who owned a fruit processing plant: strawberries, peaches, canning plant sweet potatoes; tomatoes; tomatoes were the last of the season; then women would make holly wreathes and ship to Baltimore; Philly;

not much to do then; no factories except for shucking oysters in the winter; her mother never shucked oysters;

[why not? Is this why Edith never went into the business but instead into the canning factories?]

EM: [I ask her about her work experience] "Oh, no I left, I went to the city." Too boring down here; piece job couldn't make any money; couldn't get ahead; wanted year round job; worked in aircraft factory making planes; was a riveter; during WWII; left when soldiers began to return, all their jobs waiting for them so she had to come back to the shore; lived in NJ but worked in Bristol PA; sent you to school to learn the trade first; lots of women in the plant mostly women

[Edith gets up and gets a scrap book to show me photos and clippings; I quickly learn that she keeps everything]

worked at Delaney's when returned home; then went to Cole bros [Cole Waters ?]. Fruit in Nanticoke; then worked at chicken plant; quit work to stay with her mother until she died; 13 years taking care of her mother who was sick and couldn't be alone; worked at Buddy boys canning too

preferred the reviting work; others were harder; standing; not regular hours; swing shift work; standing in water at veggi plants and canning factories;

[Edith has used Sam's inability to hear everything to reframe the visit as an interview with her. I feel like I need to include Sam and ask him more about his oystering days and periodically ask him a few questions. Edith asks him to put in the hearing aids. But the conversation always returns to Edith]

EM: goes into cycle; in Aug. be in the canning factory but before that you would be picking beans and before that picking strawberries; all gone now [does this mean that black workers really were responsible for much of the food production, not only picking but canning the same things?] no jobs coming in now;

[hearing aid squeaking in background]

some of her family moved up to NJ and stayed there working in "good jobs" meaning they kept the same job and didn't switch seasonally; the ones that stayed were the male siblings;

[mosquito around the mic; Edith gets up to get something to show me about her family]

father wouldn't take the boys oystering with him; didn't want them in the business

[similar patterns as in Bellevue]

says they didn't get any money for their oysters;

SM: how plenty of old people in the area worked themselves hard to cultivate the land in the area and now people are letting it grow up wild or plowing it under; they prefer to grow their own veggies then now what's sprayed on it;

Aesthetic of growing and doing for yourself; prepared for winters; makes preserves; EM makes all sorts of preserves; makes jelly; how this work gives you something to do

SM: can't sell these preserves anymore;

EM: this generation won't pick they won't work the fields; [but the Hispanics are working the fields]; factories disappeared in the 70s; Steven Daubly's factory; Will Dauber; all had factories; she peeled tomatoes got so much a bucket; came scalded; description of the process; paid by bucket; beans got paid by the hamper;

EM: description of community flour mill that was near the Whitehaven ferry;

SM: describing changes in agric. And farming; generational changes and technological changes; planting by signs; call it planting by the "moon"; describes calendars;

EM: used farmer's almanac, goes and gets a 1968 copy

[can hear cicadas in background outside]

SM: talks about oystering in winter; and how he didn't like it; learning how to make diff. Things; mules his father owned;

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

EM: describing homecomings, now called "Back Home days" in October, annual event;

[I try to engage SM regarding his mule stories]

SM: farming practices, mule driving; working and walking 12 hours a day; only work you could do; glad things changed; school [it is difficult to understand SM at points]

EM: how safe things were then; nobody bothered you; leaving doors unlocked people knew what was theirs and what was not; didn't bother other people's property or things;

[shows me almanac]

EM: still has WWII stamp books to get shoes, food, etc.;

[I ask about working in PA and NJ]

EM: describes security at airplane plant; couldn't leave without showing id. Badge; guards walking through looking for badge every 30 minutes; story of one day she took it off; reasons for security; description of guard tower in water outside plant [it was on the waterfront];

Description of security measures at home; not letting light outside; blocking windows during the war; describes how she felt about this; "when you're younger you don't take too much at heart like that"; not allowed to talk about work off plant grounds;

Story of time when 8 of them decided to come back home for visit, going to Salisbury; bus loaded had to be back at work by Monday, told driver had defense jobs; driver got them a cab; story of cab ride; flying to Philly; one girl was praying the whole way;

Quite many women from her area working in the plant: sister, 2 sister-in-laws; and some others from shore; but rest was Philly, NJ;

Liked the work, met lots of people; had to leave MD, nothing to keep her here; no opportunities; say lots of things during this time; went to World's Fair in NY; would go Thursdays and Sundays; doing house work then; those were her days off; go to Coney Isl;

Coney Island: remembers the tunnels, the rides, how it has changed went there a few years ago; saw Pres. Roosevelt's body procession on the train; mother went to World's Fair;

[Edith's oral history is much more interesting than what I originally came here to talk with them about]

describes side shows at World's Fair: fattest woman, biggest this; people with deformed limbs; technology shows; [gets up to get her scrap book of the world's fair]

SM and I discuss his current crops and the drought; tomatoes on table; hunting, rabbit and turkey hunting; belongs to hunting club in Somerset county where he grew up; no muskrat trapping because he worked on the water and didn't have time to wander the marsh

[EM returns]

discuss muskrat as food; not being able to sell hides now; prices on the meat this year [2 for \$5 in their area]

SM: working the water; tonging and dredging oysters; decline in oysters; walked 2 miles to Rumbley and Goose Creek to get boats and go to work [walking long distances is a recurring theme in Sam's conversation]; 4 on boat, sometimes couldn't get enough men;

Rough weather; working on a skipjack; sailing as slow process; didn't like being gone so long; worked on the potomac; come home for xmas, and new years, then not again until March; now drive home from places; model T's not that fast;

Food on boat; sleeping cabin on boat

Father took him on boat; recalls the first year; didn't like it; had hand cranks; 2 guys working together the hand crank; had to orchestrate moves

WWII changed things; remembers that was when the hand cranks were taken off and motors put on skipjacks;

Loss of resources; Rumbley full of skipjacks and bugeyes when he worked there; recalling oysters bigger than his hand; misses eating them;

[silent pause]

SM: learning from father about working the water and a farm; grandfather taught him to sail; boys on the deck, father's in the cabins [I guess they were captains, sounds like his father was the captain]

Last time he was out on Tangier sound; wind blowing story; diff. Btwn working on a sailing vessel and motorized vessel; tilting and leaning diff. On both;

Didn't like anything about working the water; had to go; nothing else to do; then went into the Army and "bid the water bye-bye;" 2 men to a crank and sometimes a 3^d man; to dump the rake;

[EM is going through a scrap book looking for things to show me]

SM: went to school in Manokin in Somerset County; story of family horse "Dan" driving the buggy; shell roads; roads much brighter than today;

EM: [return to world's fair topic]; found the plant handbook from where she worked at Fleetlings in PA;

Bridge they crossed to get to plant was in Burlington NJ; shows postcard/photo; took the bus to work everyday; changed in Burlington then went to Bristol; plant had its own bus [sorting through more memorabilia]

how Fleet planes were sturdy and didn't fall apart; not a rush job; she worked on the rutter and the tail; 3 plants on compound; shows me picture of where the guard stood out on the water;

END SIDE B
END TAPE

Interview Log

Interviewee: Edith and Sam Maddox

Tape #: MAAF/KF/MD/FT8.14.224/317

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault # of Tapes: 2 of 2

Date: 8/14/98 # of Sides: 1

Location: Tyaskin MD; in Edith and Sam's kitchen

Topic: Edith working as riveter during the war in NJ; farming; skipjacks; quilts; truck driving for seafood companies; re-visualizing the landscape

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS8.14.259-269

Comments: File name: mdft224. See Fieldnotes: FN08.14.98. *Italics* indicate emphasis; [brackets indicate additional information not on the tape or asides by fieldworker]; "quotations indicate direct transcription."

This is a continuation of tape MAAF/KF/MD/FT8.14.223, file name Mdft223. Please see that log for additional comments.

BEGIN SIDE A

[sound quality has diminished for some reason];

rationing plans during the war; showing me Army postcards that made fun of the military and war; entertainment during the war;

[EM is determined to share her entire scrap book with me; conversations about items in it continue; sound improves]

EM: family members who worked at the plant; knew when they started that the jobs would be taken away after the war;

quilting; mother taught her to quilt; her grandmother died when mother was young so mother decided to teach her children what she had known because her mother couldn't

[John drives up]

r y foodways trads: making pickles, sausage, lard, canning; mother had 5 children and made
a each one a quilt; then made all the grandchildren one;

John comes in; begins to tell me about the flour mill they had in the town; [he stimulates Edith into talking more and louder]
General conversation about the weather lately;

John: was raised at the flour mill [phone rings]; used to be on the corner where I turned onto Edith's road; two brothers had the industries there; one had a canning factory and another had the mill; it was a roller mill; flour machine;

Remembers those days; if headed to the ferry when you get to next crossroads flour mill sat across from there near the yellow house which was the miller's house; not the owner just the miller;

How landscape used to look: all the trees were cleared and it was all marsh; you could see all the way to the water and the ferry; could see the boats and workboats from Edith's current home;

Would trade things to get flour or to mill your flour; was 8 when started working there; used to be 5 stores down in Whitehaven; plus the hotel; how Wingate had a big store [not sure if this is the town or a name of a family]; DeShields had a store and the marine railway that used to be in Whitehaven; could take the boat to Salisbury; steamboat docks; Victor Lynn line was there too; on Somerset side was another steam boat wharf plus another one down the road; "was alive around here then and me in the midst of it"

EM: recalls her first trip to Salisbury on a steam boat, "I thought I was *going* somewhere" how it was an all day journey;

John: ship yard; workboats were also there; big railway; closed down 20 years ago; used to go down at night and get work loading boats; boats used to go to Mt. Vernon too;

John: worked on water in later years; out of Lewes DE; fished on boats; glad to see old hotel being restored; good landmark;

[phone rings again; EM picks it up and talks while John and I continue our conversation]

John: after left the flour mill went into trucking business; did long distance trucks; hauling seafood; for nanticoke or Catalan oyster packers; did that for 34 years; did runs to New Orleans in summer; NY or Boston too; ice and snow driving conditions; heat in summer;

How it has changed and how the drivers have changed; "ain't got not good sense"; after driving would stay around home, didn't want to venture far; go to Salisbury to dance; juke joints; "everything went along all right though, people got along" [hear this often from African Americans, what does it mean]

EM: quieter then than now; "wasn't enough people to make a noise"; hear people going down the road singing and talking; that was normal to hear that kind of noise; in the

house less; now if you hear it you are out looking to see where it's coming from; how you don't hear whistling anymore;

John: would hear spirituals; excellent whistlers; coming in on a wing and a prayer;

EM: shares story of cat chasing a turkey with John; how deer ate tops off of sweet potatoes the other night; sitting in the trees at night and watch for the deer to come out; used to do that when young;

Sharing some schedules for next week; John is taking Sam to the doctor next week for a cataract operation;

[John gets up to leave]

EM: more talk about seeing boats going up the river from her house; no bushes or trees like now; glad to share history with people;

END SIDE A

END TAPE

