

Interview Log

Interviewee: Robert Mollock **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/MD/FT8.24.610

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

Date: 8/24/98 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: Weston Farm; south of Vienna toward Elliot's Island; private hunting ground, formerly Royer's Farms

Topic: trapping, hunting, farming

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS8.24.661-677

Comments: File name: mdft6lO.doc. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape or commentary by fieldworker].

Francis O'Donnell who runs Royer's market on route 50 recommended that I speak with Bob Mollock. Francis' family once owned the property that is now Weston Farms and grew truck vegetables and fruit on the land. A wealthy Philadelphia restaurateur bought the property and kept Bob on to manage the land and develop a private hunting reserve. Bob has trapped up to 1,000 muskrats in a season and was born across the creek from the farm, so he was raised in the area. After the interview we drove around the property, see FN08.24.98 for those details. Bob has a slight stutter, not too noticeable unless you've met him. There are some background noises from the kitchen down the hall and a bird chirping, but nothing too distracting.

BEGIN SIDE A

BIO: Nathan Bobbie Mollock; born in 1944 in Cambridge; in Dorchester all his life; lived on a farm, large family; 6 boys, 4 girls; father and uncle farmed and everyone worked it; raised tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, field corn, all hand picked; had dairy cows; children's job to take care of cows; raised pigs; hog killing every year

TRAPPING/HUNTING: started at age 8; father trapped; learned from him; went along with Dad, would get 8-10 traps when starting and trapped a little marsh on the Nanticoke; picked up spending money and school money; after a few years got good at it and then would trap with Dad;

dad in one boat and bob in another; not much walking could do it all in boat; set on low tide, check them on low tide; trapped tidal marsh so had to do it on the tide; always had to be aware of the tide;

[how is the tide a daily cycle for shore residents, this was one cycle I didn't include in previous reports; watermen especially drift netters work on tides etc.; how to draw this chart?]

TIDE AND WATER: runs 7 hrs in and 6.5 out; always on the same schedule but in recent years had lot more high water and stay 2-3 days or go out and stay 2-3 days; past 5-6 yrs; still set on same scale; gradually had to get used to set them; tide would go out but not as far as it once did; had to set traps a little higher than before; work harder because you can't see your holes [muskrats make dens, visible by the holes they dig] so you have to feel for them; wear a rubber glove now that fits to your shoulder; big difference; takes longer to set them; sets 175-200 traps whereas 30 yrs ago only did 100-150 traps and caught more back then than now;

MEMORABLE: caught as much as 2,000 in a season; Jan. 1-Feb 15; muskrats, coons, nutrias and 1 or 2 otters a season; at age 14 or 15 was out on own setting traps; catching more than his dad; neighbor trapped too; helped him too; at age 18 was setting 200 traps including with neighbor; yr he caught 2,000 was the most memorable; only had 144 traps then; all muskrat; caught 98 rats one day in 144 traps; good percentage; if you catch 3-1 or 4-1 it's a good catch;

CHANGES IN MARSH: marsh grass not growing as tall; vegetation not there; due to pollution; not as many rats as past; more predators now; hawks, foxes, coons, eagles, all predators; rats don't have the cover or protection that they used to because of grasses;

Place trap over hole; if rainy or wind coming from south you have high tide; had to gauge the tide at night because nocturnal animals; have to do it repeatedly to get feel of how high and how low to get the traps; if see the trap won't catch them; have to move it around if don't catch in 2 or 3 nights; traps certain segments at a time; stops up every hole in a given geographic area; moves 50-60 traps everyday to have a constant catch; averages 800-1500 a season

PRODUCTS: Meat he sells to customers that he and his father used to sell to; using same customer base; meat has to be fresh so must check the traps everyday; carries furs all the way to NJ to a guy; gets a better deal than from the local buyers; in NJ running \$4 a fur; [that's \$6000 a season if he catches 1500]; fur prices dropped; animal rights people; need to manage the population to control disease; finds that areas he *didn't* trap the previous year has less rats than the areas he *did* trap the previous year;

[phone rings]

trapping for coons: trap around woods and marsh; coons see rats in a trap as a free meal; he tries to set coon traps around the muskrat trap; uses connibear traps in wooden boxes that he builds and then baits them; catches 50-80 a season; coons fur pretty good this year; \$15; year before were worth nothing;

fur goes overseas; had a big demand for coon and nutria flit last year; \$9-10 for nutria; [diff. in](#) furs: muskrat has "all fine, nice, pretty flu but a nutria has fine hair on the bottom and then has got jaggy fur with it" have to pull the jaggy hair out when manufacturing to leave the fine hair; more work;

raised on the Baker farm at Lewis' Wharf, when got married moved onto this farm; not like a lot of people who rent marsh; they lived on the marsh; don't have to go to so many places; he just runs to the wharf and jumps in boat; 400 acres on this farm to trap; better marsh to trap because don't have to walk it; can go by boat; if walk across marsh with hip boots on and 25-30 traps on back it's hard work, then add the rats on your back too; better on a boat

does own skinning; been on this farm 32 years; had two bosses, 1` one was "little Francis' grandfather" worked for him for 20 years; they got divorced and Bob went with the new people; Royer's had cash crops; new guy has it for hunting; brings in friends to hunt; not big parties or strangers; deer, rabbit, duck, quail, dove, mostly a wing shooter; bob grew up with rabbit, squirrel and deer hunting [how does class and race play into this?]; didn't do wingshooting until new guy came on;

working for new guy is some of the best years he's ever had; excellent guy; comes down 13-14 times a year during hunting season; bob manages land for him; the whole place including the house and hunting lodge; go fishing in Nanticoke river; also has inner city kids come down and stay; go fishing and Bob explains different types of wildlife to them; owners very generous with the wealth they have; most of the kids haven't seen these animals or this type of land;

[Bob already doing public programming and presentations with these kids and visitors]

Explains how he does programs for kids; takes them in boats and shows them muskrat holes etc.; in fall can see the mounds; can see the trails and runs in the marsh; best way to explain it is to show them;

Decrease in number of trappers because of decline in fur prices; lots of work; older trappers could live off a lot less money; if he doesn't get \$5 or more for meat and fur it's really a waste of time; renting marsh also adds to decrease in trappers; difficult for older people because physically demanding but "you gotta do something you're used to doing, and the trappers now been doing it for many years."

Constantly moving traps so doesn't use as many traps as other trappers; burning marshes makes thicker vegetation and younger undergrowth for animals; eat and build houses; build houses according to weather so can predict the winters; had lots of rain and high tide last year so built higher mounds;

Setting marsh fires: go according to the wind; use the wind to control fires; and use water ways; burns only in sections; burns just before trapping; must rap after burning because predators will get rats etc; if too cold will have winter kill from weather; burns in

February; a week before; how he focuses on the short term; better manage the situation because he lives on the property; marsh once burnt you can see the muskrat houses and creeks, flat not blocked by tall grass; can see trails etc.;

Wearing goggles to protect eyes; grass so tall and wind blowing will cause eye damage;

NUTRIA: other dangers in the marsh: nutria are very vicious; if walking through marsh not burned off and come up on one he won't run away; he'll attack; got big teeth; 4x size of muskrat; 2 dogs been bit; got 18 stitches; story of dog chasing a nutria in the pond and the nutria grabbing the dog by the throat and trying to drown it; nutria hold breath longer than dogs; boss saved the dog and shot the nutria; some are 35 lbs; solid meat; excellent swimmers; "lazy animals"; don't believe in building a house; to keep warm they huddle together or lay around an old stump or something; if really cold then they die out;

Trapping for nutria: set traps on their pathways; not smart as a coon or muskrat, can catch 15-20 nutria in same place repeatedly whereas a muskrat or coon once you catch one in a spot you must move the trap;

Trapping fox: must be real smart to get a fox; has someone else come in to trap foxes; requires so much more work; everything has to be descented, no human smell at all; special gloves, traps everything; wax on trap; scent killer; rubber boots and gloves without human scent; last year had a guy who caught 8-900 foxes; waste of time for Bob; rats and coon is different;

Diff. Btwn still water marsh and tidal marsh; still water marsh doesn't move so you must set underwater; not used to setting underwater; takes diff. Skills;

[two good things: diff. Waters produce diff trapping styles; and a possible heirarchy of trappers with fox trappers at top; trappers specializing in certain animals]

END SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

Royer's farms: cash crop farms; peaches apples, corns, 3000 trees; big orchard; lot of man labor; sold fruit from Annapolis to O.C.; Acme, Superfresh and IGA food stores; year round work; pruning spraying; Bob and Francis in charge of maintaining the orchard; 25 people working for picking and stuff,

LOOK OF LAND THEN AND NOW: farm was 100% diff. Back then; no hedge rows all was flat; when leaves fell of trees in fall could see from the house to the road [a couple of miles]; "I worked 20 years and the year that they sold it there wasn't a tree or nothing in the fields. Everything was mowed right down to the ground. And we planted everything that we could plant we planted. And in less time, 12 years, it's back the same way we started."

Planted hedge rows and trees and let it grow back for natural for cover for animals;
movements of animals; 100x more wildlife now; out in the fields;

Dogs: training; whistles; doesn't really use one because animals are used to him and they
follow commands; gets them already trained; before hunting season they go back to the
trainer and he gives them a "refresher course"; [who is this]

Practice with dogs before hunting season starts; dog's parents make it good; get what you
pay for; parent's must come from good backgrounds; bom into them;

WHAT HE LOVES ABOUT TRAPPING: outsmarting something else; been doing it all
his life; loves being outside; every yr. Animals get smarter and smarter; challenge;

Otters really smart too an dhave short legs so hard to catch;

Rather be outside; more breathing room; and raised on a farm makes a difference; sons
have teamed if interested; but not as interested; too much work for them; prefer the
hunting aspects of the farm and land management; peaceful and quiet out here so likes
that; hunting season real busy and more people

[Bob and I end the interview to go take photos and ride around the farm. 1 " he shows me
some taxidermied animals that he's trapped. His living room is full of trophies.]

END SIDE B
END TAPE