

Interview Log

Interviewee: Gary "Rooster" Potter Tape #:
MAAF/KF/MD/FT12.1.98.321/231

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault # of Tapes: 1

Date: 12/1/98 # of Sides: 1

Location: Perryville MD; on Rooster's docks and property

Topic: fyke net fishing, stories, gearing net, place names

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS12.1.98.398-305

Comments: File name: Mdft321.doc. See Fieldnotes: FN12.01.98. *Italics* indicate emphasis; [brackets indicate additional information not on the tape or asides by fieldworker]; "quotations indicate direct transcription."

After interviewing Capt. Bob Jobes we drove over to meet Rooster Potter in Perryville, just across the Susquehanna in Cecil county. Rooster does fyke net fishing and pound netting and had just finished tarring his nets. He and Bob have a good repor and lively banter.

BEGIN SIDE A

[wind in background sometimes, sound of highway traffic behind us on the bridge; present are Bob Jobes, Rooster Potter, and Kelly]

who is full-time and who is part-time working on the water in the area
still catching turtles in spring; makes nets

explanation of hedgings and how to fish a fyke net; "return or wing" part of net helps turn the fish back to the fyke

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catching mostly perch and catfish; mostly yellow and white perch; in the spring; tar in fall, repair in summer, tar once every couple of years; uses fiberglass tub to tar; did them on Sunday; takes week to dry

[adjustment made to sound to decrease wind noise, slight decrease in recorded volume]

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fish won't trap in white net; in south dip them in green; sets all nets, protects them and helps the fish to trap

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boats he uses to fish difl. Nets;

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learned from father; Bob learned from Mr. Potter too; still learning every day; done since he was young

Shad fishing; fish house was where all the condos are now; burned down the fish house;

50s and 60s boats from up the river and down the bay came to fish shad plus the locals here; everybody fooled with a little bit of net then

repairing fyke nets is something you have to do yourself; takes 2 months; fortunate that he owns the property to do this; can afford to keep his tar pot etc; doesn't have to lease etc.; lots of people have lost that ability with the loss of waterfront property to city folks;

just like hunting you get enjoyment out of this work; if you like it its not work; some financial gains were made; lean years; goes with water business;

BJ: part of working by yourself with no bosses; until the state starts regulating you; then you're at their mercy

Rooster: true love is the Bay; peace of mind; enjoy yourself and work; hard work nothing free or given to you; you earn it; part of what you grow up with; lots of land work that is never seen; got to get ready;

BJ: hours spent working on crab pots getting the rig ready and everyone just sees you coming in with boat load of crabs; they don't see everything you do;

Probably will start regulating crabs next year

Rooster: cycles of the water; Bay full of rock but not up here this year; 3-4 yrs ago so thick out here you could stir them; who knows next year, "always live for next year"

On the project

Need some good press; lot they don't see or understand; but if don't want to listen to you they are never going to understand you

MEMORIES

Shad and rock

Haul seine fishing; seeing the back of the net full of rockfish, still remembers it; on a Thursday; beautiful day;

Shad so thick; father and he and a boat of fish; hunting with father; last one in Perryville; 2 guys in Charlestown that hoop net catfish; fish 7 days a week; 500 nets and handle by the tons; market drying up now; plenty of catfish but no market

"I think it has a lot to do with society. The younger generations they don't eat fresh fish. They want it in a supermarket already prepared. The old time cooks are gone. I think that even if they brought the shad fishery back and let us fish we wouldn't have a market for it because there's no people that would even eat them anymore."

The market is condos now;

Strong's, Owens and 2 in North East fish markets; description of pulling up to fish house wharf

"all the old fish eaters are gone. And fish became more expensive than steak so people started eating steak."

Nobody wants fish that you have to pick bones out of now

Large mouth bass and pike catching now; used to catch them for live market to stock markets like catfish now; but pike really made comeback in Gary's lifetime; recalls in 50s and 60s it was no big deal if caught a couple; but in 70s never saw them; now in last few years catching quite a few; caught one in Bush river too; catching in fykes which is unusual because they don't trap easily;

Recalls some nasty days; wind and winter; ice build up; cold; floods in Susquehanna in spring; many a day seen pile of sticks in the boat and not a fish; nets full of leaves and trash

Fishing with rag nets [old, should have been tossed out]; decided to try it in little creek; caught 17 rock in 21 feet of net, that's good

BJ: more details on the large 10 ton catch on cherry point; how it froze up after that catch;

Rooster: same place fished it and watched the net go over and then immediately float up with rock; rock will float the net up when they are thick;

BJ: don't happen every day that's like a once in a lifetime experience; friends in NC fishing;

Rooster: catching tons in a seine; most caught was in the early 1990s only allowed 450 lb and had to turn them loose after that; tons were in the net though;

BJ: now if you caught that where would you take *them*; ice, where do you get ice around here, you can't; when you catch 10 ton of rock you need 5 ton of ice; "once there is a link out of the chain"

Rooster: when they took the rock fish out those 4-5 yrs we lost the market and we'll never gain it back; never fmd the buyers; and now price is so low and with quota can never make enough to get a profit.

BJ: when catching 1500 lb a day and getting \$1.25 per pound then making money but not now with the quota That's how all the older guys got money.

Rooster: prices of nets; what is your time cost; materials cost maybe 12 dollars per net but you have to make the net and bend the hoops, weld them etc;

going over meshing and newer nets; 4-5 hours to make the top fimnel; 88, 44, 22 meshes for each funnel to taper it down.

Some nets are 30 years old; they last as long as the boat traffic doesn't get them or somebody doesn't cut them with a knife; pick the net up and cut the whole bottom out, steal the fish and throw the net overboard. Happens every year.

Ice only thing that can totally destroy these nets; used in such shallow water; explaining how to fish the nets;

NAMES OF FISHING GROUNDS

Cherry tree: on aberdeen proving ground shore, good for rock and perch;

Flats: always good

BJ: "there's on place called Rooster's Hole out there

RP: "he laughs but I've caught a lot of fish out there.

BJ: "if it wasn't for Charles you wouldn't a caught nothing

RP: "he wanted to call it Charles' hole

BJ: "they were going across-let me tell you this story right quick

RP: "now this is a good story. Wait a minute, let me tell it I was there

BJ: `yeah you was there but you ain't going to tell it the right way

RP: "no I'm going to tell the truth. We were all fishing together and the tide was real low. So I took his seine-matter of fact, there's the boat-and I was towing his seine out across the flats, and we were going across the flats. And the tide was real low. And I got to a place where if you know the flats you can tell where there's a little deeper water by being there every year and fooling with it all your life, you know. I happen to see two lines of grass so I knew there was a little ditch in there. So I got the boat over to that ditch ark4 was heading down that ditch and we, the ditch is not very wide but it's pretty long, and we got down it a good ways and as I was going along the rockfish just boiled tip.

~J: "Charles said he seen them you didn't see them

ft P: "they were along side me, they came up alongside my boat

BJ: "I wasn't there

RP: "anyway, his brother got a little nervous, he said, `what are we going to do?' I said well, `that grass right over there means there's a sand bar or shoal.' So we eased over there and took his net and laid it off real easy and just went around and made a haul, and

we had a load of them. Come to find out there was a big log about 30 feet long 4 feet high, smooth log, and the fish were laying right there behind it. So we named that Rooster's hole. I did."

BJ: been back a few more times, but if didn't know that log was there wouldn't know the fish are there.

Rooster: has the log marked, least ever caught back there was 1100 lbs

BJ: McGee's Bar, shoal there to hunt or fish;

Rooster: how the flats change too; Wilson's ditch was always good in the fall;

BJ: shad ditch behind the battery

Draw ditch

How the ditches run lengthways down the flats and fish will swim in them

" when running around on the flats you say, `where you at?' say, `I'm down by the shad ditch or the draw ditch, I'm on the head end or tail end, I'm on the eastern by the boyscout camp."

Beaver damn, wild duck, and that's just the flats

Rooster: but everything goes in cycles, "fish have tails, they swim" not like an oyster; old keene house is good spot, marked by old house that is gone now

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