

Interview Log

Interviewee: Harold B. Kennerly, Jr.

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Lee Wagard

BEGIN SIDE A

V.J.: Tell me your name, and just talk a little bit so we can see what the volume is like.

H.K.: All right. My name is Harold B. Kennedy, Junior. I am 86 years old. I retired from my business about 22 years ago.

V.J.: And where were you born, Mr. Kennerly?

H.K.: And I was born and raised in a little village on the Nanticoke River called Nanticoke. Both Dorothy and I were born and raised in the same village, graduated from high school there at that time. It was a very beautiful little village on a beautiful river at that time. All right?

V.J.: Perfect, thank you.

H.K.: Anything else?

V.J.: How did you get into the oyster business?

H.K.: Well I suppose it was a natural thing for me to do, or to be interested in the oyster business. Having been raised on the Nanticoke River where there was a very good oyster business, one that was far beyond most other sections that could be found in the bay, I was always interested. And my father had an interest from my grandfather's time, so that we, he and I both continued to do things to propagate the growth of oysters that was possible in the Nanticoke River. And we were pursued by a number of people, a number of other people other than ourselves. Conservation was a good word in the Nanticoke River. I guess when I graduated from Washington College, I had in mind, I had the offer of two jobs at that time. I did not like either one. And finally, my father said to me what do you want to do? Do you want to go in business with me? And very promptly, I answered yes. So I guess that's how I got into the oyster business.

V.J.: Did your father already have an oyster business?

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: And what was the name of it?

H.K.: At that time, we were -- at the mouth of the Nanticoke River, there's a point called Roaring Point. And we had - or he had assumed the name Roaring Point Oyster Company. And that's what he was trading as in the oyster business. It was very limited. His oyster business at that time was very limited. He was also interested in other things that helped him make a living so that the oyster business was probably, only interest he would have would probably be from late October on through the spring when he'd be interested in oysters. So the business was not a flourishing oyster business at that time. Most of his customers were customers out of Baltimore, which at that time had a number of oyster houses that had people, other oyster houses shucking for them on the Eastern Shore and in Southern Maryland, and even down in Virginia that shipped their oysters to Baltimore from which they were re-shipped to customers throughout the west. And dad was one of those that supplied a customer in Baltimore.

V.J.: Did he have his own boat?

H.K.: No. No, he did not at that point. He bought from the tongers. And the tongers were - well, they were plentiful in those days. And it was a matter of finding someone to sell oysters to. Both the tonger and the oyster house had trouble selling oysters. It wasn't that - it wasn't that much of a demand. So that's just how I got into the business.

V.J.: How many people worked at the Roaring Point Oyster Company shucking oysters?

H.K.: I suppose at one point, at one point we had room for 74 shuckers, and that, those benches were filled. And I know that I can remember very well a thought of mine. We were producing a gallon of oysters a minute with that 74. That's something I remember from way back. It was working like that. And I would say at that point other help would amount to probably about eight people besides dad and myself. And that's - that was, at the old oyster house, the first oyster house that dad had.

V.J.: What did he do with the shells?

H.K.: That is one of my favorite questions. I wonder why you asked that.

V.J.: Well it's part of the industry. You have these shells, and there are many things you can do with them: roads, and chicken grit, and putting them back into the bay. So just wondering -- or building more land.

H.K.: Well that's exactly what we did. As I mentioned before, we had - well, look, why don't you read this, and I think maybe it will help you probably understand from where a lot of this was coming from. Beginning with that there.

V.J.: Okay, thank you.

(OFF THE RECORD BRIEFLY.)

H.K.: I believe there's more copies there. But that is, I think he had a grasp of the situation. My grandfather had an oyster house back about the turn of the century. And he planted all the oyster shells. Well it was a branch of the old steamboat wharf, because a lot of them had in those days. And he put the shells overboard and spread those shells. And by golly, those shells were still producing oysters. And when we - dad started an oyster house, we bought a scow, and he says our oyster shells are going to be planted every year, we're going to add to this. Now you have not heard the fact that the Nanticoke River - well you just read it there, that we were one of the rivers that had least oyster bottom. Some in the Patuxent, some in Somerset, but it was very limited. Oystermen fought it. It was just not them to see what to do with conservation. They had no idea of it and did not care. However, this is what we did, and every year we planted our shells. And they are still producing today. Now we did not plant those shells but just a sprinkle on the bottom. They had to be at least two foot thick. It takes about 35,000 bushels of shells to plant an acre of bottom one foot thick. So every year, we were just about planting an acre. Later on, we bought from other places and supplemented that.

V.J.: You bought oyster shells.

H.K.: Oyster shells from other people and supplemented that. It was, it was a great part of our business. Now dad, I think, saw the future very well. Not only did we plant oyster shells for ourselves, but there were a lot of tongers, colored people, and some of the white people, who had private pieces of oyster ground, maybe only five acres, maybe we only planted one-tenth of that. But we had a deal with those people who were working for us that had this ground that if they would pay for the labor of planting those shells, we would put a certain amount of shells on their ground a year. And they could pay us when the oysters had caught and spat was came off of them, the oysters grew to size. We worked that for quite a bit, and there were a lot of other people that did the same thing. Also, the Nanticoke River was a great river for buying seed oysters out of the James River and planting oysters. We did a lot of that. Boats that would bring 5,000 bushels of seed at a

time and plant them in the river. In fact, I can remember that I think we over-planted the river, and the oysters were very, very poor for a couple years. And I think that really did happen. However, it outgrew that, and the oysters were harvested, and things came around correct again. Now, more questions.

V.J.: What was your grandfather's name?

H.K.: William Richard.

V.J.: And what was the name of his company?

H.K.: I don't really know. I imagine he just sold it as a private person.

V.J.: Did he have a shucking house?

H.K.: A shucking house that was just off of the old steamboat wharf.

V.J.: In Nanticoke?

H.K.: Yes. And under this place, what we call under the bar, under the Roaring Point Bar, this bar protected this little section from northwesterners, the reason, I guess, it was like that.

V.J.: And your father was Harold Kennerly, Senior?

H.K.: Senior. Senior. Yes. So as we began to be able to harvest more oysters, we got a law passed through the legislature after maybe three or four tries to allow us to harvest oysters off of our private beds in the summertime. And this is what really made for a good oyster business. We were able to keep good help, and good people into the business. It allowed us to afford travel, and to establish customers, and do all of those things that you cannot do with just a little bit of a seasonal business. And that's basically the answer.

V.J.: Do you remember what year that was that the law was passed?

H.K.: That is an excellent question, and I cannot answer.

V.J.: Was it in the 30's or the 40's?

H.K.: No, I would say it was the - in the 50's. I would say early 50's. I believe it would be somewhere about close. And eventually, for our boats, all of us were working together, in place of using the tongs in the summertime, we got so that we were using, got a bill through the legislature to allow us to use dredging on private bottoms. And that we did, and that was a very smart move, because if you are careful, if you're careful in not over-harvesting, it is a nice way to harvest oysters. And we would move from one, maybe this bed would go for two weeks or three weeks, and the next one would go for only 10 days and so forth, but we kept things moving like that. And we had a supply of oysters -- with the seed oysters that we would plant out of the James River, we would have a supply of oysters all summer. And those - surprisingly, we found out that oysters were really at their best during I'd say April and May and June, or would be as good at that time of the year as any other time of the year. Now when it got into July, they began to become more poor, as we would say, not as fat. And when they got into August, which was their spawning time, we would tell our customers about what was happening.

And we were very honest with it. We would tell them, we have oysters, but they're not going to be up to your quality. But if you want some, buy just the minimum amount that you need and things. And that way, we satisfied our customers, but they did not get displeased with us. They knew what the score was before they had - but we were able at times to keep part of our oyster beds further up the river into fresher water so that there

was a difference between the lower part of the river, and the upper part of the river in the solidness of the oyster or the fatness of the oyster. And that way we could work around it to a degree. And at some times, we also went over in to the Delaware Bay, and we had oyster ground over in the Delaware Bay that we could harvest by dredging. So we really had Virginia and Maryland - I mean and Delaware, from which we were drawing oysters. And it became a tremendous - we were selling oysters, more oysters in the summertime then we got selling in the winter.

V.J.: Who were your customers?

H.K.: We were nationwide. We were nationwide. One of the nicest things that happened to us after we began to, after I went on the road and began to do extensive travel for oyster business, we worked up a transportation system that worked exceedingly well. And we would go clear to - we had two trucks a week into Los Angeles, and one into San Francisco. One into Denver. Two to three in Florida. Can you imagine going to Florida? And at one time, I believe it was the Department of Agriculture in Florida said that we had 70 some percent of the total oysters that was used in Florida. And the reason for that was the packaging. Not only on the shucked oysters, but we began, we put in a washer and a belt which we would grade shell oysters. They were washed thoroughly, and we would pick out the sizes, we had three sizes. We had the blue points, the mediums and the large oysters. Originally, we used to pack them in about a two-bushel barrel. That was custom at that time. But we soon began to change into the regular wax box where they was just about a bushel into that box. We got down later in that of puffing 100 oysters in a box. And that went over big in Florida.

And New England Oyster House, I don't know whether they're still in business or not, but they would buy an awful lot of these boxes, and they had different houses all over Florida, and we would land at one place, and they would distribute, you know, just like the chains do now. So it was a lot of things that were - but the shell oyster became a tremendous part of our business. And it was a good part of the business. Now we had to buy the best oysters that we could find for that. And not all oysters were suitable. They had to be a single shape oyster. Anything, a double or anything like that was thrown out. And that's what went to the shuckers. But for instance, we did such things - California was great on shell oysters as well as shucked oysters. And California was supplying, one of our dealers there was supplying oysters to different people in Las Vegas. So I went up to Las Vegas to find out how we could help them out and do anything. And I believe it was the Thunderbird Oyster Bar. I can't remember now whether it was Thunderbird or Flamingo, but I think it was the old Thunderbird. They were handling our oysters on a shell. And I went in and I noticed that this couple came in, and the gentleman was carried away with the shell oysters. And his wife would try one, but did not, did not seem to care for it. And I began - I introduced myself and began to question. And she said yes, she liked oysters, but she didn't want a great big oyster that you had to slurp, you know. Now that's when we sized down with this other 100 oysters in a little box. They were just about three to three and a half inch oysters. That oyster size was the size that people wanted, not the great big one. And that - little things like that helped out. And we had a lot of nice, a lot of nice shell business.

Then there was a, there was a local truck, trucker, called Dagostein (phonetic), out of New Jersey. And he was in every Friday, and he would pick up oysters for Chicago, all through the west, Dayton, Ohio, Cincinnati, he would take it back to his terminal and load out trucks, you know. That was another one. Then we had our own truck into Canada, Montreal, every week. The other truck that we had that we had to use of our own, we had Kroeger Groceries business from 1938 until the day that I left there. I think they lost it within a year after I left. But I had their Detroit Grand Rapids branches as well as their St. Louis. And they were, they were real nice people to deal with. Never had a minute's trouble with them. We also did other things with oysters. We were - the Campbell's Soup oyster stew was made in our plant. And we made, we made the ingredients for them, or they did the, they did the seasoning and things, but we were able to do that. And their business was so big that after the first six months, we told them that we'd work with them. I said you have got to look for a bigger supplier than we can, I said, because I can't handle all of our other business and your oyster stew demands. And that's when I introduced him to - or told him to go to J.H. Miles and Company in Norfolk, which they did, and they were successful in getting two plants over on the western shore of Virginia that had more access to the seed oysters in James River that would be very adaptable for what they wanted to do. However, we - the oysters that we were using and the amount of oysters we were using, we had two plants over on the western shore of Virginia, on the northern neck.

V.J.: Where were they?

H.K.: On the northern neck of Virginia. Just off the Potomac River. Oh, what is the names? The Hague, place over there called the Hague. And then there was the Calverts, and I forget the section, they were in a section called Callao, Callao, and on the Kohn River. We had one at Saxis that did a lot of work for us, one at Saxis. We had Bill Harrington over to Secretary. That's where Bill was, Secretary. We had - I can't think of his name, over in Delaware that was shucking oysters for us. And Chincoteague, we had someone shucking oysters for us. And that was more or less became eventually, really, a consolidation of things. We had to go, in freeze-ups, I guess we were one of the first that went down and began to get oysters out of Louisiana, Lousyana, and Texas. I shouldn't have said that other. But we always made it a point to never go beyond mid-February because their water would get warmer, and we were always afraid of oysters becoming spoiled or hepatitis or things. We never had any problem with that at all. I don't think anybody in Maryland ever had any trouble with hepatitis. But it has occurred in the south. I don't know where to go now. I think I have pretty well - oh, we did, we made oyster stew for A&P, we made canned oyster stew for Kroeger and for American Stores.

V.J.: Did you produce frozen oysters?

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: What did this wax label go on?

H.K.: It was what went over this.

V.J.: Oh, okay, on the cardboard box.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

V.J.: Okay. So Maryland House was another one of your brands.

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: We had a lot of brands, sorry to say. Here's - Food Fair that we had.

V.J.: Oyster cocktail. Seacrest.

H.K.: See it's got the -

V.J.: Oh, the Roaring Point.

H.K.: Yeah.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And Maryland House.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

V.J.: Okay. And Kenson? I haven't come across this one before.

H.K.: We had - here's something interesting. In Canada

V.J.: Oh, it's in French and English.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

V.J.: So this would hold a dozen oysters, this plastic bag.

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: I think that about covers it. I think that about covers it. While I'm looking here, let's see if I have a copy of that other - we're the ones that brought the Icelandic Company here. Their first plant was in Nanticoke, and they outgrew it.

V.J.: What was the relationship between you and Icelandic?

H.K.: It all began - well now you're getting into a long, long story. It involves GATT, General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs. We fought it because we were the first tuna canners on the Eastern Shore. Now we did this at Nanticoke. Not many people knew what was going on in our part of the world. We had tremendous freezing, or a lot of good cool storage, and we had the help where we - well the last year that we canned tuna, no, the last two years that we canned tuna, all of it went under one of their brands out there.

V.J.: Bumble Bee?

H.K.: No, not Bumble Bee. Chicken of the Sea. Chicken of the Sea. In fact, they came nearby at our plant one time. Well anyway, in the process of this having to go to Washington before the Senate Finance Committee to try to keep from having a duty imposed on tuna fish that we were buying from Peru and Japan in opposition to the west coast boys who were doing the same thing, the same thing occurred with fish coming from Iceland. And we both had the same attorney. And John Gunneston (phonetic), who was head of the Icelandic operation at that time, and I got the idea that he would like the idea to put up a fish stick. It was the beginning of the fish stick operation. And that he wanted to get into. At that time, there was plenty of fish. And so he knew I had the freezing facilities and the **M** storage. He came down, and he knew that I had the help, and he knew that new machinery would have to be bought, and he said if I pay for the additional machinery, will you set up a line for me? I said sure, I'll do it, on the provision that you have one of your men here as quality control that can stop or start production as to how he sees fit. I will not be responsible for anything. He will be in control.

Well that's when he brought in a fellow by the name of- eventually it was Chris Gunneston who was the head one. But there was another one before that, a real tall Icelander. And they did, they kept a man at the plant. So it worked out well. And then after we got things ironed out, and we both realized that having a ship to come in would be the thing to do for them. And that's how Cambridge come in. Well they moved to Cambridge. And when I, let's see, I sold my plant to them eventually, and I moved across

the harbor just for the oyster business. And we were very good friends. So when they moved to Cambridge, they sold the plant to a chicken processor, who ruined it, but nevertheless, they had been successful in Cambridge. And one of the reasons, again I hate to - but you ask me these questions, and it just - let's see whether this is it or not. I guess so. We used to have, every year, a party in the Rayburn Building's third floor in Washington, and I don't think you'll recognize any of those.

V.J.: Is one of these people you?

H.K.: I don't think I'm in that.

V.J.: No?

ILK.: What I wanted to show you, when we get into it- oh, dear.

V.J.: Looks like a great party.

H.K.: It was. Twice a year, we were in the tuna business, and..twieea yearthis ship from Pen+Oa` into *the river all the way from Peru and* brought us fish. And that's how we lighted her ashore.

V.J.: So the boat anchored out in the river?

H.K.: Right off the harbor in Nanticoke, and we lighted her ashore.

V.J.: May we borrow these pictures for the museum and make a copy? I'll bring them right back to you. Would you be willing to let us borrow them?

H.K.: Well let's see.

V.J.: I'll bring them back in a week or two, just as soon as we can get them copied.

H.K.: This is a good one.

V.J.: And what's this building?

H.K.: That's our oyster house.

V.J.: May we *borrow* that one too?

H.K.: Oh, you don't want a picture of that.

V.J.: Yes, we do,

H.K.: No.

V.J.: I certainly do.

H.K.: And this is a picture way, way back out at the old steamboat wharf, and that's my father.

V.J.: Oh, that's a great picture.

H.K.: We were - here's a good one that you would want.

V.J.: Right, the men unloading the tuna fish. Those are big fish, aren't they?

H.K.: Yeah. They're small in one picture and big in another one. That's why I'm trying to - that's when I was younger.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: This is Brice Phillips, Ocean City, you know.

V.J.: Yes.

H.K.: And that's Steve, his son, and this is a seafood bar for Safeway. Now you know we had to pull some - to get him to come down, but he - which would be the best? Which do you think would be the best?

V.J.: They're both good, aren't they? Actually, I like this one.

H.K.: Huh?

V.J.: I like that one.

H.K.: All right.

V.J.: The tuna boat.

H.K.: All right.

V.J.: What's this picture?

H.K.: That is the -- this is the - they are feeding the machine. See this is tuna here. And there's a belt there, and they're placing this tuna on this belt. And I don't have a picture -

V.J.: May I borrow that one too?

H.K.: All right.

V.J.: Thank you. These are wonderful pictures.

H.K.: Baltimore Sun did that.

V.J.: When was that? Do you remember when they came down?

H.K.: I would say it was early 50's.

V.J.: May I borrow that one too?

H.K.: No. A V.,

V.J.: No? Okay. pl'm getting too involved now. These are - she was a senator from Maryland. And shortly after that, she was from Prince George's, and she would always attend our parties. And she was an excellent senator. And shortly after that, cancer, in a very short time. Very short time. She was a nice lady.

V.J.: At one point, did you can tomatoes?

H.K.: Yes. We canned tomatoes, we canned herring, we canned - as you know, we canned tuna, and over in the vegetables again, we canned lima beans at one point, we canned blackberries in syrup, and we froze strawberries in large tins. Another interesting thing, I always thought because it was the beginning of things, H.J. Heinz came out with tuna. I forget how they had it prepared. And then they had it in a baby food too. And we were their first suppliers. My, golly, look, nobody remembers that now but me, I guess.

V.J.: So they had tuna as baby food?

H.K.: Yeah. How did they, they emulsified it or something. They did that. Eventually - no that was not - unless you have other questions, I think - to spark my imagination or memory -

V.J.: Can you tell me about the Nanticoke Seafood Company?

H.K.: Yes. That was our company, it was the frozen division of H.P. Kennerly and Son. Out of the same office, same personnel and everything.

V.J.: Why did it have a different name?

H.K.: Because we kept our frozen from the fresh was all. It became a big entity, the frozen did. We went into the sea clams, frozen clam strips and clam chowders and all those things -

V.J.: So they did clams, frozen - did you freeze the -- frozen oysters?

H.K.: Did the frozen oysters and the frozen oyster stews. Anything that was frozen or prepared went through the Nanticoke Seafood. The Kennerly Company was the sole owner, but we separated it, thought we could keep better controls, which I think we did, on the thing.

V.J.: And is Nanticoke Seafood Company still in business?

H.K.: Yes. I sold out, I believe, in 1970, '78, I believe - no, it would be '68.

V.J.: According to my records, it was established in '68. Is that correct?

H.K.: What?

V.J.: The Nanticoke Seafood Company. No.

H.K.: Huh-uh (negative).

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

V.J.: Well it may be that's when you sold it was '68, and that's what my records are showing.

H.K.: I'm a little fuzzy on that. No, we did not sell that company. In 1956, we sold the original company, H.B. Kennerly and Son. We sold that to Coldwater Seafood. I then purchased this other place across the harbor, and I would say within about five or six years, we put up some - because of the breaded frozen oysters and the oyster stews that we were begun to make again, we put up another huge building in which we had ee storage, freezing facilities, we used nitrogen freezing at that point a lot. And that remained, as a part of- I mean it wasn't any separation there at all. But I'm wondering -

V.J.: What was the name of the new company?

H.K.: Nanticoke Seafood.

V.J.: Okay.

H.K.: But you know what, I'm trying to - what's got me puzzled, H.P. Kennerly and Son was incorporated in 1947, I believe it's 1947. And I don't think there was any incorporation of Nanticoke Seafood. So it remained under the incorporation papers of Kennerly. It must've been another Nanticoke - but you say it was sold in, what, 60's?

V.J.: My information said it was established in '68, Nanticoke Seafood Company, on Harbor Road.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative). But it was long before that.

V.J.: So that's wrong.

H.K.: Yes, it's long before that. When I moved across the harbor, my father died in '56, and he knew that we were in negotiation to sell the plant to Coldwater Seafood. So I never stopped the deal after he passed on. I still let it go through, and it was the same time this place became available on the other side of the harbor. And it had nothing but an oyster house at that time, which we had to rebuild absolutely 100 percent.

V.J.: Do you remember the name of that company that you bought?

H.K.: He traded as Travers Willing, a Willing Oyster Company. Let me see now, I don't know where this came from, but I ran across this looking for some other papers. I don't see that in here, and I know it should be.

V.J.: A list of packing houses?

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative). This is a list of them. Now I don't know where this came from. That was Willing. Willing, he was my neighbor. But he sold all these oysters to the old Bivalve oyster complex, which was a big complex at that time. What other name could he have had that under? Here's Bivalve Oyster Packing Company, at Bivalve and at Mount Vernon. I'm sure that had to be both he and his father, Travers Willing, and it had to be under that name. He was the only one, other than us, we were on the harbor. There was about 100 oyster tonger boats working in that harbor at one time, 100. And I knew that we had three balls going, and we had about, I would say usually anywhere from about 35 to 38 boats that we would unload each day, and the rest went to Willing, and then there would be a couple trucks on the other side of the harbor, and a boat from Crisfield laying out in the river. And it was a lot of oysters in those days, a lot of oysters. And I guess I sold about the time that the oyster business really took a bad turn. I have, I

have - I no longer own my oyster beds because of my age and the fact that I cannot tend to them. And I had a friend that was willing to purchase them. So I do not own any oyster ground anymore, or any oyster beds. But he was telling me Sunday that he had a beautiful catch year before last, but last summer he thinks probably it was a little -- and he said we did not work them very hard, which is the thing to do. You can work a bed, and you can destroy it. But if it's, if it's something that you care about, and watch about and you don't take the last bushel, and you watch that none of the small ones are coming off, you'll always have something to go back to.

And that is the trouble today with the Chesapeake Bay. They will never recover the bay the way they are doing it. They are planting oyster shells thin. They get a catch, they harvest the oysters, and what's left sinks again. And they cannot keep using these, bateif  eat tongs. Those things, do you know what they are? Do you know how they dig it up? They have destroyed the oyster's habitat. A dredge can do it, but not - that is if you would get heavy enough dredges. But if you notice some of those entongers, they even put weights on the tongs to carry them down, so it grabs in. And once you break through, which these things are capable of doing, of breaking through a bed, then the mud comes up. There's no way in the world, you know way back I used w attend all the meetings that they had, the oystermen took a vote about this tong. And they voted it down. Nobody stopped. And now I guess it's impossible to stop it. But they're going to dig their selves right out of business. You notice the dredgers have still held on pretty well onto what little bit of rocks that they had as on as the tongers, ongers didn't get on it. The dredges will not destroy like that ng. That's awful. And the oysters, the shells they plant, blow them over everywhere. They'll cover two or three acres with 20,000 bushels. And that is too thin. Yes, they'll catch, and they'll have a nice catch, a nice oyster, but after the original catch, a couple years after it, you can't find anything. It's all got to be done over again. I don't know how they're going to do it, but something should be done. It is a shame. It is a shame.

Our oyster, the Chesapeake Bay oyster, had a lot of things going for it. I'm very well acquainted with the oyster business up in the State of Washington and Oregon. And I know a lot about it, and I've been there and bought oysters and so forth and so on, but those oysters do not taste like our oysters, and they will not carry in the shell like our oysters. You can shuck them and shell them fresh, and we can can them, like an oyster stew, and they do good. I don't know whether I have something I'm sure you'd be interested in seeing it if I got it. I'm digging at too much today. Yeah, here it is. Here's something I get a kick out of every now and then. I'm a firm believer in imagination.

V.J.: That's a good one.

H.K.: Huh?

V.J.: I like that cartoon strip.

H.K.: Yeah. Now this is private oyster planting ground in Coos Bay, Oregon.

V.J.: Wow, that's amazing. How many acres is that?

H.K.: I really don't know. But you can see poles - and things.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: Now the secret of this, or the idea is that they have 10 to 12 foot rise and fall of tide. So they can look at their oysters on the low tide, they harvest on a low tide and harvest in creeks about like this, and about that square, and they tie a float to it so that the boards comes along and hooks onto it, onto the deck of the boat, when the tide comes in. But they rake these up. They had at one time what they called ghost shrimp that would tunnel under these oysters and they would fall in the tunnels. But they were able to spray with an airplane and correct it. Isn't that something.

V.J.: That's a wonderful picture.

H.K.: Yes, it is.

V.J.: Did you take this series of pictures?

H.K.: No, it was sent to me by a fellow by the name of Lee Wagard. He was a guest we were at a convention or something, and he wanted to see our end of the oyster business, and he said you're welcome to see my end of the oyster business. And I said, Lee, send me a picture of this, so he did. So he went to a lot of trouble to join these folders up accurately like he has.

V.J.: Yeah.

H.K.: That is amazing. I don't guess you'd be interested in this.

V.J.: No, actually, because we're concentrating on the Chesapeake Bay.

H.K.: Chesapeake. Right.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)

May 8, 2001

I met with Harold B. Kennerly, Jr. at his home in Salisbury, Maryland for a second interview, the first being April 11, 2001. At this time I returned the ten photographs that he had loaned the Museum to copy, and asked him further questions about his seafood business. This interview was more relaxed than the first. He apologized for being dressed informally. He was wearing a short-sleeve dress shirt, tie and slacks and was probably referring to his slippers. We sat in his office at his desk. This time, I noticed that much of the art in the home and in his office was of horses and cowboys. He had two framed, autographed pictures of cowboys in his office.

This interview was more comfortable than the first. Several times he asked me to turn off the tape recorder while he made a comment about an individual or a personal event. He was more ready to laugh and to tell stories and at the end remarked that he had been rambling again. However, he did not seem to be concerned about this as he had the first time.

At the end of the hour, as I was putting away the recording equipment, I remarked that seafood seemed to me to be a risky business. He animatedly replied "It was exciting!" He told me a story about a cold December when the river was frozen over and they had trouble getting oysters. On Christmas Day, he got up from the dinner table and told his wife and father that he was going to Texas. The next morning he was in Houston. He said that he found men harvesting oysters in Seabrook, Texas, and contracted for a truck load to be sent to Nanticoke. He says that he was one of the first to import oysters from Texas and Louisiana, the other being a company in Virginia. He said that he stopped buying southern oysters in February as the waters were getting too warm and he was afraid of bacteria.

I told him that I had visited Nanticoke since we had last met and he was genuinely pleased. He offered to take me down and have his wife ride along to show me the area. He said that it is not as well kept as they remember it when they lived there and that it bothered his wife. I remarked that the seafood processing plant smelled good and he told me that they were probably frying clam strips or shrimp. He told me that they got shucked ocean clams from a company in Saxis, Virginia. He said that he briefly handled soft-shell clams but he is glad that he did not get into that business. He did not see any future in it.

I wondered about locating a plant in Nanticoke and then bringing in fish and shellfish from Virginia, New Jersey, and all over the globe. He said that since the sources changed frequently, it did not make much sense to locate near one port. It was just as efficient to have the equipment and experienced labor in Nanticoke as anywhere else.

Interview Log

Interviewee: Harold B. Kennerly, Jr.

Tape #:

Interviewer: Virginia Jenkins

of Tapes: 1

Date: May 8, 2001

of Sides: 2

Location:

Topic: $5 \sim e \sim -6 rct$ *L*
--Skipjack Project.

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments:

BEGIN SIDE A

V.J.: Nice to see you again.

H.K.: It is nice to see you again.

V.J.: Let's see, I have a few questions.

H.K.: All right.

V.J.: I'm interested in the impact of the Second World War on your business. Did you have labor problems or market problems?

H.K.: No. We did not. We were nearly, I would say two-thirds, 65 percent, producing for the government. Turn that thing off a moment.

(OFF THE RECORD.)

H.K.: We were about 65 percent foods for the government. In the summertime, we ran the tomato-canning factory, and they constantly checked our quality and put their stamp on it. And most of our product went to the Army. In the fall when we started to can herring, or in the spring we were canning other fish products, all of those things went to the Army. Surprisingly, I wondered what in the world they were doing with all of the herring that we canned for them. And they said this was in preparation to feed some of the islanders in the Pacific that they had to move from one island to another. And that these products, a lot of them were going to the Pacific, which I heard later was really the truth that some of our products did show up because we had on them most of the time K-E-N-S-O-N embossed on the lid. So I guess that is one of the reasons why I was declared 4-F, being that I had a child at that time, and 4-F, that I did not have to go and serve in the armed forces.

V.J.: What size cans did you pack herring in?

H.K.: Herring in?

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: I think it was a number 300 can.

V.J.: About how big is that?

H.K.: A number 300, I'm sorry, I can't remember all of- a number two can was -

V.J.: Was it like a sardine can or was it a big can?

H.K.: Oh, no. No, no, no, no. It was like - it was smaller than a number two can. And a number two can doesn't mean anything to you, I suppose.

V.J.: Size they pack the salmon in today?

H.K.: It was, I would say the number two can was a good pint.

V.J.: Okay.

H.K.: Number three can, 300 can, I know that we packed 15 ounces of fish in. It was a large, tall can. It wasn't like a sardine can or a tuna can.

V.J.: More like a salmon can.

H.K.: It was an ordinary can that you would find. Cans have changed so much in sizes that it's hard for me to give you a can today and say this is the, this is the size. Excuse me a minute.

(OFF THE RECORD.)

H.K.: That's more like a number two can. This is more like the 300. This will ring a bell with my memory, 207 rings a bell somewhere.

V.J.: That's three inches across.

H.K.: No, that's two, about 13. About 13/16ths, that doesn't ring any bell with me.

V.J.: Four and a quarter?

H.K.: This is about four and three. Now that's 4-0 - let's see, that's 8/16ths. They went in 16ths, 4-0 - well nothing matches anymore. So I mean it's impossible. But this is a little larger, the number two can was a little larger than that. If I remember correctly, it was a 409.

V.J.: A little taller than this.

H.K.: That, it would be about 3/16ths taller than that.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: There's a whole can - my golly, 4-0 -

V.J.: They're not the same size are they? Not quite.

H.K.: No, they're not. Well I tried to help, but I -

V.J.: Thank you. That does help.

H.K.: It gives you an idea what I'm talking about. But this was a tomato can size about, this was possibly a little larger was a fish can, a little larger.

V.J.: During the war, did you lose watermen to the draft?

H.K.: Yes. But there were enough of the older ones that we were able to carry on the regular, our normal oyster business. We were not hurt at all in that score. I don't recall. We lost a lot of them, but seems as if someone jumped in and took their place, and that's the way things went again.

V.J.: What about in your packing house?

H.K.: We lost several, several that went. I lost my wife's sister's husband, he went into the Army. We lost quite a few.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Shuck went into the defense industries?

H.K.: They went into the services, they went into the services. Elton went in the - another person went in the Navy. One of the people that, well he didn't join us until after the war, but he was with Kennedy in the, in the group of boats that Kennedy was in, in the South Pacific.

V.J.: Did you have any impact of the Canadian oyster embargo?

H.K.: No.

V.J.: I know the canners in Talbot County were selling oysters to Canada, and then there was an embargo that disrupted their market.

H.K.: I don't remember it. But you know, I don't think that we really started selling Canada until about '47 to '48, and so that would be -

V.J.: Well after the war.

H.K.: Well after. Yes, yes. I think that was the answer. But I don't remember any embargo because I had no reason to probably know it, that I know of now.

V.J.: Curious about how you marketed your products. Did you use brokers, or did you use direct mail, or how did you find the buyers?

H.K.: By extensive travel. In the month of August when we first started out, the month of August, I was married in 1936. My wife and I traveled the full month of August looking for oyster customers. And we did that every year. And after 1939, when my daughter was born, I was on my own traveling. And even the last year that I was in business, I logged 73,000 miles on United Airlines alone, besides a trip to Japan. So it

was travel, and also one of the nicest things that was, that helped us was that we were able to establish good distribution systems, good trucking systems. That was a must.

V.J.: Did the railroad ever run down to Nanticoke?

H.K.: Pardon?

V.J.: Did the railroad ever run down to Nanticoke?

H.K.: Oh, no. Oh, no. All this was trucking lines, refrigerated trucking lines. I think I mentioned before that we had two refrigerated trucks into Los Angeles a week. We had one into San Francisco. Sometimes more, sometimes it would be one that had something for each one of them. Denver was a truck each week. That was a nice customer. Montreal. We had two to three trucks in Florida every week. And then we had the trucking company in New Jersey that would come in, and he would load a trailer at our place on Friday nights, take it to his terminal in New Jersey where he would unload the truck and break up the load and put different shipments on different trucks. And this was available to everybody. But our Canadian was nearly a closed deal. We had one other person that we had on it. Our Denver and our Los Angeles and San Francisco were all closed deals unless we allowed people to get on the truck. Now not only did we deal in oysters, we also dealt in clams in the shell. And a lot of those clams came from Chincoteague or on the Eastern Shore at that time, and we also, this same truck that came out of - that came out of - for California, always they brought in a load of frozen shrimp from the Nogales, Mexico was where they picked up the Mexican shrimp. And they brought it into New York, sometimes Philadelphia or New York. And then they would have a couple days to layover. But they always went by the New York fish market where they would pick up some more clams. And also mussels from Maine we were shipping out at that time. So it was a little bit of a mixture.

But you asked, that's not answering the question exactly. We did use some brokers. We did have a broker in Michigan. But really, I think - and then we had one in Florida, yes. We had one in Florida. But brokers were not very active in the fresh oyster business at that time. We had, we were lucky enough, I think once we attended all of the shellfish meetings and frozen food meetings and all, this is another place where we would meet a lot of customers. Visibility. And on top of that, the visibility with a visit, we could secure business. And then when the time to perform came and we did well with our shipping and there was no, we built up confidence in that, there was no delays and we filled our orders. I guess that just about answers why we were successful in the business. One other thing that you must not forget was that when we came, when we were finally allowed to run our business 12 months out of the year, we were able to afford a lot of other things that other packers could not do in the cost of sales and so forth and so on. And not only that, those customers that we sold through we'll say the end of the regular oyster season till the next oyster season, they stayed with us regardless. They didn't leave us because somebody else had something cheaper during the regular oyster season. If anything, we maintained a solid, even price on the deal. Turn it off a minute.
(OFF THE RECORD.)

V.J.: How did you choose your prospects when you were traveling?

H.K.: As a rule, I would know something about the people that I wanted to call on. I would use the, as I mentioned before, a big - an important part of our business was we

had three conventions. We had the oyster convention, which was called SINA (phonetic) at that time. Then we had the fisheries, the NFI, the fisheries convention. And then we had the frozen food convention. And we attended, went as far as Hawaii one year for a convention. And then the next year it would be in Boston. next year New Orleans, and so forth and so on. But we became a part of it. And I would take some of our personnel with us so that they would become acquainted with the people that they were talking with. And that's the way it worked.

V.J.: Good business.

H.K.: Way it worked. Now any other -

V.J.: I'm wondering when you, you said you moved the business from one side of the harbor to the other.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

V.J.: How did you finance that expansion?

H.K.: I was the promoter, well you're getting into a complicated long story now. Let's go back into the years that we were started that we were canning tuna. Dad was alive and we were doing very well, very pleased with ourselves and our business in the canning of tuna. After the war, we had limited most of our canning to tomatoes in the summertime and tuna at the rest of the year. Tuna was nearly a year-round business for us because we were drawing tuna, as I mentioned, from Peru as well as from other places. We had tuna from Norway, we had tuna from Angola and East Africa. We had tuna out of the - not Mediterranean, the - out south of Cuba. We had tuna out of Chile. We also had tuna from Japan immediately after the war. They were selling tuna in place of canning it. They were selling tuna because they needed the dollars. We even had tuna from the South China Sea. We had a pipeline of tuna thanks to some connections I had in New York. I was very fortunate to make a friend in the old National City Bank of New York years ago. And they, of course, had instant notice of any tuna that was to be sold anywhere nearly in the world, being shipped. And they kept me posted on this. At one time, I was, this is in the late 40's and 50's. I was going to New York on Tuesdays, all in the day. I would leave home at about 5:00, catch an 8:00 train out of Wilmington, be in New York at about 10 minutes after 10, and go to the bank and open up letters of credit, and I also, yes, there I had another broker there at that time in New York. I forgot about him, and he was very important too.

And we did a lot of business with some of the chain stores out of New York. So I would do that twice a week, do the same thing on, probably on a Thursday. It got to be quite a job. But the bank would, and did, finance my letters of credit very nicely. And I have a letter today that I keep, that I'm very proud of, that I bet you you will not find a bank in this country saying the same thing. But I have a letter from National City Bank that said today is the first anniversary of you opening your account with us in New York. We thank you very much for your account, and are pleased to serve you. Can you imagine a bank doing that? I have that letter. And it was always a prize, I thought. But nevertheless, I was fortunate enough - so I'm losing sight of the end of that conversation, I mean that question.

V.J.: Talking about financing your expansion and move.

H.K.: Oh, yeah. So but I was - we were, dad and myself were of the old school. If we needed something and we could pay for it, we bought it. But we did not finance anything. Now we did borrow money at the bank, at both of our banks in Salisbury as well as New York. Well I would say one bank in Salisbury and the bank in New York was our source of money, but we borrowed that against our statements and so forth. When Coldwater, when I brought them to this country and established them in Nanticoke and started their work on building fish sticks and so forth, and fish portions and everything, after about a year, John Gunnerson (phonetic) said we'll buy you, we'll buy the plant. I think why he wanted to buy the plant was because there was other activities there that was getting in his way, and I could understand that. So we agreed, dad and I agreed to sell. Well dad died at that time, 1956. And but I went through with the sale. And at that time, I thought well, by golly, I'll possibly retire. Glad I didn't. I moved at that time, another person died across, that owned the plant across the harbor, and it was for sale. And in the contract of the sale of my original business I had agreed not to go in if it was competitive, of course, to them. So I went to them and I told them, I said I'm going to move across the harbor and go in the oyster business. Go right ahead. Anything we can do to help you, let us know. I mean we had good rapport with them. And so that's what we did, what I did. And from there, things began to grow again.

First thing you know, we were back into making clam strips. And then we put in nitrogen freezing, which was a big plus. No one else on the shore had it. But it was a real plus for us. And it gave us a good quality product. Nitrogen will freeze small products, but not products with a mass or volume to it so easily. So anyway, that's where then I started to develop my oyster, well I moved to this place particularly for oysters, and that's where we really turn on with our oyster business. And that's where we really got ourselves straight with the legislature that we could harvest oysters in the summertime. And it worked, that itself was the secret of it. The fact that you can, if you have - it's a job to have a place of business that you could keep in good repair, that you would be proud of, that you only use about five months, six months of the year, and then - but if it's continuous operation, you can really take care of it and build it and have it to mean something.

V.J.: In Wicomico County, could you - I guess that's where Nanticoke is.

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: Could you dredge under power on private beds?

H.K.: Yes. Yes, we finally got that through. That was, that was an oddity. And that is what they're doing today. That's what they're doing today.

V.J.: The company that is Nanticoke today, is that the site of your second business?

H.K.: Yes, yes. My original business is still a lot of concrete and things there. But when Coldwater finally decided to move to Cambridge so that they'd get a boat in, I'll tell you a story. Chris Gunnerson was the manager, and the guiding light of Coldwater at this time. And he said to me, he said Harold, there's one thing that I left in Nanticoke that I cannot find in Cambridge. And I said well, what is it? He says the trained help that you had. And he proceeded to have about five or six cars of help from Nanticoke that followed him to Cambridge. And some of them worked there until they retired. And they were the, they were the management teams. And these were colored people that had, they were well trained. I think our colored people in that part of the world were a little better

educated and way beyond education than some of the other places that I could mention. Smart. A lot of them had sons that were doctors, teachers, so forth and so on. Very proud of them. I was very proud of them. They did a good job. A lot of them had inside toilets, and running water and things like that that you just didn't find. Now there were come that never made the grade, naturally, but as a rule, they were a very, very reputable high class people. And this young man from Iceland recognized it. He did. And he recognized it. And they were a big part of his management team for many years over in Cambridge.

V.J.: Do you remember any individual names?

H.K.: Oh, yes. Yes. But do you think that should be mentioned?

V.J.: Well we'd like to maybe interview some people if they're still around.

H.K.: Well, let's see. The one that I would love for you to died about two years ago, I'm afraid. I could give you their names. And Chris Gunnerson's wife still lives here in Salisbury. But she would be unable to tell you anything. I can't think of a one at the moment that is living.

V.J.: It's been a while.

H.K.: I've outlived my time. That's right. This gets to be a problem. You asked me about an oyster shucker. I can think of one. Rob Bailey. And he lives, I guess that he has a (indiscernible) address, I guess that would be his address. But he was the bus driver, and he's still living. And I -

V.J.: Did most of your workers live in Nanticoke -

H.K.: Yes. Now -

V.J.: -- or did you get migrants at certain seasons?

H.K.: Now we had no migrant labor. I said Nanticoke. But we had all the way to White Haven and Quantico busses. We had, besides the cars that they used, I think it was three buses. Bailey ran one bus. He had a nice bus, and he ran it a lot. And he started in at White Haven and he came all that. A place called Clara, you probably don't know it, but if you rode that way, there's still a lot of the homes that I know that are still there. One fellow died about two years ago. I wish that he were here to talk. And he was, he was an intelligent person. And he was one of the ones that I think I really, I know he and his brother I thought most - I depended on them the most. Floyd and Wilmer Wright. Floyd was a particular, very astute person. Very astute and smart. Unfortunately, they have passed on. I know one lady that's in the picture there if she's well enough. She's a white lady. One of the ones who were placing tuna on a belt, the younger one. She is still living. Sometime ago, I went through these pictures. I found an extra one, and I sent it to her. And I heard later that she was very overjoyed with it.

V.J.: What was her name?

H.K.: Madeline Webster. Madeline Webster. And she lives in Bybel (phonetic). She was on the tuna line, the tuna packing machine. For instance, you ask how we accomplish things like this. I suppose a lot of things we did we were possibly lucky. But anyway, in the canning of tuna, it was done by hand on the West Coast just as we were doing it here. But then the West Coast, I heard about had an automatic machine. It was called a Caruthers Machine. It was successful, and the companies on the west coast were using it. So I wrote to the Caruthers Machine people at Warrenton, Oregon, and had some correspondence with them. And the fellow said I will talk - if you are coming to

the convention, the frozen food convention in Chicago, I will be at the Stevens Hotel, give me a call. So I was at the convention, gave him a call, and I made an appointment, and we went up, and I met the young - or the gentleman. And we just started talking, and he said he wanted to know more about my business and how much I was using it and so forth and so on. I told him that we were growing each year, and the number of cases that we were packing, and our source of tuna. And I was telling him what we had, what we hoped to do. And we kept on talking. He says there's no way I can let you have a machine. He said all of the people on the west coast, he said we just back order for he says I don't know how long. And we kept on talking. I mean he was very friendly. And he just kept on and kept on. Finally he said to me, he says can you write a check for \$7,500? I says yes, sir, I can. He says that's what we require was for the down payment on an order for a machine. And then he says we get a royalty on every case that you pack. And that's how that machine was paid for, a royalty. I forget now what it was. As the amounts over the years increased, it went down, you know.

And so anyway, he says I am going to let you have a machine. And he said are you ready for it? I said yes, sir. I wrote him a check. I didn't even take time to consult with dad. But I knew that we could write a check for \$7,500. And don't you know, in a month's time this machine arrived, and on the crate that it came in was Van Camp Seafood crossed out, and H.P. Kennerly on. And it was the number, it was number 11. It was the 11^h machine that was made at that time. They even sent a man in that stayed a month to see that that machine was running correctly. And by golly, our personnel, our personnel knew what they were doing to adjust it and so forth. He stayed a month. And he became a friend. He boarded in the community, he enjoyed the community, and was just a nice person to have around. That is another -you asked me how we did things. That's how it was done. I don't know, but I guess we were lucky. A lot of funny things happened, a lot of funny things happened. They - we were getting tuna from several sources around the world when I got a call from a friend at National City Bank and said that there's a Jewish person here that says he has tuna to be canned, and he has it on a ship over in Jersey City. He wants to talk with you. Well I said well, I'll be in Thursday and you can set up an appointment. And the bank said at that time, said I don't - said we can't find out anything about it, and don't know whether he has credit or what, or anything about it. Well anyway, what had happened was this wealthy person from Tacoma, Washington, who had three tuna clippers was having - he was sort of, he always impressed me as being a little bit of a bully. And he thought that he could, he had some disagreement with the tuna people on the west coast that he could send his tuna to the east coast to have it canned, and make more money on it. So he loaded this boat, called the Bering Sea, and sent it to New York out of Peru, that's where he loaded it.

And it had swordfish and tuna fish. He thought that he had this cannery in Jersey that was going to can the tuna for him. The cannery went broke. He was sitting there for two months paying the marriage on this ship. He had to do something, and he got these Jewish fellows to intercede somewhere whatever they could do to get it canned. So I said well, send me some of the tuna so that I can see it, and they did. And I said well, I will can it for you. But in the meantime, this thing had become financially embroiled. The

Coast Guard had a lien or had a fine on the vessel. I don't know all the things that had transpired. So it ended up, and then these Jewish fellows had faltered, and they had got out of it somehow, but they wanted out of it, they were still not out of it. So we all had a meeting in the boardroom at National City Bank. And everybody had a lawyer but Kennerly. I think it was, I think it was a total of 14 there. And here I sat, I had canned some of the tuna for him, and it was in my warehouse canned. I had the first lien on the production costs. So that's why I was there. And anyway, it evolved after some wrangling and everything. It was all agreed that a person in New York, in the brokerage business, and he was a dapper-looking individual, a little bit on the cocky side in the meeting. And he was appointed to be the supreme being and handle everything, you know. And then, that's when -

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

H.K.: -- I can't find anything out about you, but I'm still looking because I've never known a fish man that was honest before.

(Laughter.)

H.K.: This was in the boardroom at the bank. Well anyway, the reason I tell it is because he became one of the best friends I ever had. Yes. And he was a world of information. Yes, he was. Yes, he was. He had such accounts in New York. Sunsweet Prunes and those things, you know, like that. He had the big California accounts, and he was well-known, well-liked and a very astute individual. And I had a lot of pleasure in dealing with him. He was a great guy. I think that should answer that question.

V.J.: Thank you. I have - you piqued my curiosity when you talked about your business trip to Japan. What happened there?

H.K.: Well, you know, you open these questions, and I don't know how to answer them in just a few words. I wish I could. This cumulated my looking and searching for some way to open an oyster automatically. We had tried microwave and - microwave and macro wave in this country. We tried steam, we've tried steam and freeze it, we've tried many things. We tried nitrogen freezing, instant freezing and machines to open it. And we had succeeded to a great extent with Raytheon. They finally got the patent on it, but they never went any further with it, and I don't think it was worthwhile. But you could move oysters down a belt through a microwave tunnel. And they would pop one shell. But you still had to cut the oyster loose from the other shell, which was halfway there. And I was led to believe that the Japanese had an answer to it. They did not. So it was a trip that I enjoyed. Dorothy went with me, and I had another lady who went with me who was Japanese, was born and raised and distantly related to the royal family. So we got to know Japan quite well in the few days that we were there. Hiroshima was where I ended up for one of the days, and we were glad to see that and see how that had been rebuilt, tremendously. And this lady that was with us had lived in Hiroshima, and she said five days before the bomb fell, all the children had been moved out. So she was away from it when it happened. So they must've been, they must've had suspicion that something was going to happen. But nevertheless, the machine did not work. They were not as far advanced as we were. So that was why I went to Japan.

V.J.: Another question. Reading William Valliant's papers from 2nd Vermont County, at one point he was approached by a Midwest oyster broker to pack his oysters in church containers. Do you know what that was?

H.K.: Yes. And how can I explain it to you? Church containers was before there were - there was refrigeration. And these were refrigerated containers, insulated, in which you could put ice or even if it were frozen, it would stay frozen. And that was your church container. And at one time, you would ship one out, and probably another one would be coming in this way to take its place and all. But it never, it really never worked, really never worked. No. Not to my knowledge, it never did. I remember one person trying to sell stock in it at one time. I really do. And we didn't - wasn't interested.

V.J.: What kind of shipping containers did you use?

H.K.: We always used a barrel with ice with express. That's the way we started out. And that's the way we, I guess, the way we ended it.

V.J.: Did you have your own ice plant?

H.K.: Yes. We had a machine that made our own ice. Yes, we did. That's one thing that we was always very necessary for us was good refrigeration. I don't think we would start anything without refrigeration. The health department gave us good bills of health. Yes, they did. And I don't remember that we ever had, I know we never had a complaint as far as any hepatitis or anything like that. Nothing like that ever -

V.J.: That's a pretty risky business, I would think.

H.K.: Well, no. The oysters, the oysters were, I think, very clean in those days. I wonder about them now. I wonder how we're going to clean the bay. All right, did you have another question?

V.J.: I think we've covered the questions that I had.

H.K.: Wonderful. Well, let's see. I had something here that I thought might've been interest to you. Could be that.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)

Interview Log

Interviewee: Harold B. Kennerly, Jr.

Tape #: O H 212,.

Interviewer: Virginia Jenkins

of Tapes: 1

Date: May 8, 2001

of Sides: 2

Location: Salisbury, Maryland

Topic: Seafood Industry Project.

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments:

BEGIN SIDE A

V.J.: Nice to see you again.

H.K.: It is nice to see you again.

V.J.: Let's see, I have a few questions.

H.K.: All right.

V.J.: I'm interested in the impact of the Second World War on your business. Did you have labor problems or market problems?

H.K.: No. We did not. We were nearly, I would say two-thirds, 65 percent, producing for the government. Turn that thing off a moment.

(OFF THE RECORD.)

H.K.: We were about 65 percent foods for the government. In the summertime, we ran the tomato-canning factory, and they constantly checked our quality and put their stamp on it. And most of our product went to the Army. In the fall when we started to can herring, or in the spring we were canning other fish products, all of those things went to the Army. Surprisingly, I wondered what in the world they were doing with all of the herring that we canned for them. And they said this was in preparation to feed some of the islanders in the Pacific that they had to move from one island to another. And that these products, a lot of them were going to the Pacific, which I heard later was really the truth that some of our products did show up because we had on them most of the time K-E-N-S-O-N embossed on the lid. So I guess that is one of the reasons why I was declared 4-F, being that I had a child at that time, and 4-F, that I did not have to go and serve in the armed forces.

V.J.: What size cans did you pack herring in?

H.K.: Herring in?

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: I think it was a number 300 can.

V.J.: About how big is that?

H.K.: A number 300, I'm sorry, I can't remember all of - a number two can was -

V.J.: Was it like a sardine can or was it a big can?

H.K.: Oh, no. No, no, no, no. It was like - it was smaller than a number two can. And a number two can doesn't mean anything to you, I suppose.

V.J.: Size they pack the salmon in today?

H.K.: It was, I would say the number two can was a good pint.

V.J.: Okay.

H.K.: Number three can, 300 can, I know that we packed 15 ounces of fish in. It was a large, tall can. It wasn't like a sardine can or a tuna can.

V.J.: More like a salmon can.

H.K.: It was an ordinary can that you would find. Cans have changed so much in sizes that it's hard for me to give you a can today and say this is the, this is the size. Excuse me a minute.

(OFF THE RECORD.)

H.K.: That's more like a number two can. This is more like the 300. This will ring a bell with my memory, 207 rings a bell somewhere.

V.J.: That's three inches across.

H.K.: No, that's two, about 13. About 13/16ths, that doesn't ring any bell with me.

V.J.: Four and a quarter?

H.K.: This is about four and three. Now that's 4-0 - let's see, that's 8/16ths. They went in 16ths, 4-0 - well nothing matches anymore. So I mean it's impossible. But this is a little larger, the number two can was a little larger than that. If I remember correctly, it was a 409,

V.J.: A little taller than this.

H.K.: That, it would be about 3/16ths taller than that.

V.J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

H.K.: There's a whole can - my golly, 4-0 -

V.J.: They're not the same size are they? Not quite.

H.K.: No, they're not. Well I tried to help, but I -

V.J.: Thank you. That does help.

H.K.: It gives you an idea what I'm talking about. But this was a tomato can size about, this was possibly a little larger was a fish can, a little larger.

V.J.: During the war, did you lose watermen to the draft?

H.K.: Yes. But there were enough of the older ones that we were able to carry on the regular, our normal oyster business. We were not hurt at all in that score. I don't recall. We lost a lot of them, but seems as if someone jumped in and took their place, and that's the way things went again.

V.J.: What about in your packing house?

H.K.: We lost several, several that went. I lost my wife's sister's husband, he went into the Army. We lost quite a few.

V.J.: Uh-huh (**affirmative**). Did shuckers go into the defense industries?

H.K.: They went into the services, they went into the services. Elton went in the - another person went in the Navy. One of the people that, well he didn't join us until after the war, but he was with Kennedy in the, in the group of boats that Kennedy was in, in the South Pacific.

V.J.: Did you have any impact of the Canadian oyster embargo?

H.K.: No.

V.J.: I know the canners in Talbot County were selling oysters to Canada, and then there was an embargo that disrupted their market.

H.K.: I don't remember it. But you know, I don't think that we really started selling Canada until about '47 to '48, and so that would be -

V.J.: Well after the war.

H.K.: Well after. Yes, yes. I think that was the answer.. But I don't remember any embargo because I had no reason to probably know it, that I know of now.

V.J.: Curious about how you marketed your products. Did you use brokers, or did you use direct mail, or how did you find the buyers?

H.K.: By extensive travel. In the month of August when we first started out, the month of August, I was married in 1936. My wife and I traveled the full month of August looking for oyster customers. And we did that every year. And after 1939, when my daughter was born, I was on my own traveling. And even the last year that I was in business, I logged 73,000 miles on United Airlines alone, besides a trip to Japan. So it

was travel, and also one of the nicest things that was, that helped us was that we were able to establish good distribution systems, good trucking systems. That was a must.

V.J.: Did the railroad ever run down to Nanticoke?

H.K.: Pardon?

V.J.: Did the railroad ever run down to Nanticoke?

H.K.: Oh, no. Oh, no. All this was trucking lines, refrigerated trucking lines. I think I mentioned before that we had two refrigerated trucks into Los Angeles a week. We had one into San Francisco. Sometimes more, sometimes it would be one that had something for each one of them. Denver was a truck each week. That was a nice customer.

Montreal. We had two to three trucks in Florida every week. And then we had the trucking company in New Jersey that would come in, and he would load a trailer at our place on Friday nights, take it to his terminal in New Jersey where he would unload the truck and break up the load and put different shipments on different trucks. And this was available to everybody. But our Canadian was nearly a closed deal. We had one other person that we had on it. Our Denver and our Los Angeles and San Francisco were all closed deals unless we allowed people to get on the truck. Now not only did we deal in oysters, we also dealt in clams in the shell. And a lot of those clams came from Chincoteague or on the Eastern Shore at that time, and we also, this same truck that came out of - that came out of - for California, always they brought in a load of frozen shrimp from the Nogales, Mexico was where they picked up the Mexican shrimp. And they brought it into New York, sometimes Philadelphia or New York. And then they would have a couple days to layover. But they always went by the New York fish market where they would pick up some more clams. And also mussels from Maine we were shipping out at that time. So it was a little bit of a mixture.

But you asked, that's not answering the question exactly. We did use some brokers. We did have a broker in Michigan. But really, I think - and then we had one in Florida, yes. We had one in Florida. But brokers were not very active in the fresh oyster business at that time. We had, we were lucky enough, I think once we attended all of the shellfish meetings and frozen food meetings and all, this is another place where we would meet a lot of customers. Visibility. And on top of that, the visibility with a visit, we could secure business. And then when the time to perform came and we did well with our shipping and there was no, we built up confidence in that, there was no delays and we filled our orders. I guess that just about answers why we were successful in the business. One other thing that you must not forget was that when we came, when we were finally allowed to run our business 12 months out of the year, we were able to afford a lot of other things that other packers could not do in the cost of sales and so forth and so on. And not only that, those customers that we sold through we'll say the end of the regular oyster season till the next oyster season, they stayed with us regardless. They didn't leave us because somebody else had something cheaper during the regular oyster season. If anything, we maintained a solid, even price on the deal. Turn it off a minute.

(OFF THE RECORD.)

V.J.: How did you choose your prospects when you were traveling?

H.K.: As a rule, I would know something about the people that I wanted to call on. I would use the, as I mentioned before, a big - an important part of our business was we

had three conventions. We had the oyster convention, which was called SINA (phonetic) at that time. Then we had the fisheries, the NFI, the fisheries convention. And then we had the frozen food convention. And we attended, went as far as Hawaii one year for a convention. And then the next year it would be in Boston. next year New Orleans, and so forth and so on. But we became a part of it. And I would take some of our personnel with us so that they would become acquainted with the people that they were talking with. And that's the way it worked.

V.J.: Good business.

H.K.: Way it worked. Now any other -

V.J.: I'm wondering when you, you said you moved the business from one side of the harbor to the other.

H.K.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

V.J.: How did you finance that expansion?

H.K.: I was the promoter, well you're getting into a complicated long story now. Let's go back into the years that we were started that we were canning tuna. Dad was alive and we were doing very well, very pleased with ourselves and our business in the canning of tuna. After the war, we had limited most of our canning to tomatoes in the **summertime** and tuna at the rest of the year. Tuna was nearly a year-round business for us because we were drawing tuna, as I mentioned, from Peru as well as from other places. We had tuna from Norway, we had tuna from Angola and East Africa. We had tuna out of the - not Mediterranean, the - out south of Cuba. We had tuna out of Chile. We also had tuna from Japan immediately after the war. They were selling tuna in place of canning it. They *were* selling tuna because they needed the dollars. We even had tuna from the South China Sea. We had a pipeline of tuna thanks to some connections I had in New York. I was very fortunate to make a friend in the old National City Bank of New York years ago. And *they*, of course, had instant notice of any tuna that was to be sold anywhere nearly in the world, being shipped. And they kept me posted on this. At one time, I was, this is in the late 40's and 50's. I was going to New York on Tuesdays, all in the day. I would leave home at about 5:00, catch an 8:00 train out of Wilmington, be in New York at about 10 minutes after 10, and go to the bank and open up letters of credit, and I also, yes, there I had another broker there at that time in New York. I forgot about him, and he was very important too.

And we did a lot of business with some of the chain stores out of New York. So I would do that twice a week, do the same thing on, probably on a Thursday. It got to be quite a job. But the bank would, and did, finance my letters of credit very nicely. And I have a letter today that I keep, that I'm very proud of, that I bet you you will not find a bank in this country saying the same thing. But I have a letter from National City Bank that said today is the first anniversary of you opening your account with us in New York. We thank you very much for your account, and are pleased to serve you. Can you imagine a bank doing that? I have that letter. And it was always a prize, I thought. But nevertheless, I was fortunate enough - so I'm losing sight of the end of that conversation, I mean that question.

V.J.: Talking about financing your expansion and move.

H.K.: Oh, yeah. So but I was - we were, dad and myself were of the old school. If we needed something and we could pay for it, we bought it. But we did not finance anything. Now we did borrow money at the bank, at both of our banks in Salisbury as well as New York. Well I would say one bank in Salisbury and the bank in New York was our source of money, but we borrowed that against our statements and so forth. When Coldwater, when I brought them to this country and established them in Nanticoke and started their work on building fish sticks and so forth, and fish portions and everything, after about a year, John Gunnerson (phonetic) said we'll buy you, we'll buy the plant. I think why he wanted to buy the plant was because there was other activities there that was getting in his way, and I could understand that. So we agreed, dad and I agreed to sell. Well dad died at that time, 1956. And but I went through with the sale. And at that time, I thought well, by golly, I'll possibly retire. Glad I didn't. I moved at that time, another person died across, that owned the plant across the harbor, and it was for sale. And in the contract of the sale of my original business I had agreed not to go in if it was competitive, of course, to them. So I went to them and I told them, I said I'm going to move across the harbor and go in the oyster business. Go right ahead. Anything we can do to help you, let us know. I mean we had good rapport with them. And so that's what we did, what I did. And from there, things began to grow again.

First thing you know, we were back into making clam strips. And then we put in nitrogen freezing, which was a big plus. No one else on the shore had it. But it was a real plus for us. And it gave us a good quality product. Nitrogen will freeze small products, but not products with a mass or volume to it so easily. So anyway, that's where then I started to develop my oyster, well I moved to this place particularly for oysters, and that's where we really turn on with our oyster business. And that's where we really got ourselves straight with the legislature that we could harvest oysters in the summertime. And it worked, that itself was the secret of it. The fact that you can, if you have - it's a job to have a place of business that you could keep in good repair, that you would be proud of, that you only use about five months, six months of the year, and then - but if it's continuous operation, you can really take care of it and build it and have it to mean something.

V.J.: In Wicomico County, could you - I guess that's where Nanticoke is.

H.K.: Yes.

V.J.: Could you dredge under power on private beds?

H.K.: Yes. Yes, we finally got that through. That was, that was an oddity. And that is what they're doing today. That's what they're doing today.

V.J.: The company that is Nanticoke today, is that the site of your second business?

H.K.: Yes, yes. My original business is still a lot of concrete and things there. But when Coldwater finally decided to move to Cambridge so that they'd get a boat in, I'll tell you a story. Chris Gunnerson was the manager, and the guiding light of Coldwater at this time. And he said to me, he said Harold, there's one thing that I left in Nanticoke that I cannot find in Cambridge. And I said well, what is it? He says the trained help that you had. And he proceeded to have about five or six cars of help from Nanticoke that followed him to Cambridge. And some of them worked there until they retired. And they were the, they were the management teams. And these were colored people that had, they were well trained. I think our colored people in that part of the world were a little better educated

and way beyond education than some of the other places that I could mention. Smart. A lot of them had sons that were doctors, teachers, so forth and so on. Very proud of them. I was very proud of them. They did a good job. A lot of them had inside toilets, and running water and things like that that you just didn't find. Now there were some that never made the grade, naturally, but as a rule, they were a very, very reputable high class people. And this young man from Iceland recognized it. He did. And he recognized it. And they were a big part of his management team for many years over in Cambridge.

V.J.: Do you remember any individual names?

H.K.: Oh, yes. Yes. But do you think that should be mentioned?

V.J.: Well we'd like to maybe interview some people if they're still around.

H.K.: Well, let's see. The one that I would love for you to died about two years ago, I'm afraid. I could give you their names. And Chris Gunnerson's wife still lives here in Salisbury. But she would be unable to tell you anything. I can't think of a one at the moment that is living.

V.J.: It's been a while.

H.K.: I've outlived my time. That's right. This gets to be a problem. You asked me about an oyster shucker. I can think of one. Rob Bailey. And he lives, I guess that he has a (indiscernible) address, I guess that would be his address. But he was the bus driver, and he's still living. And I -

V.J.: Did most of your workers live in Nanticoke -

H.K.: Yes. Now-

V.J.: - or did you get migrants at certain seasons?

H.K.: Now we had no migrant labor. I said Nanticoke. But we had all the way to White Haven and Quantico busses. We had, besides the cars that they used, I think it was three buses. Bailey ran one bus. He had a nice bus, and he ran it a lot. And he started in at White Haven and he came all that. A place called Clara, you probably don't know it, but if you rode that way, there's still a lot of the homes that I know that are still there. One fellow died about two years ago. I wish that he were here to talk. And he was, he was an intelligent person. And he was one of the ones that I think I really, I know he and his brother I thought most - I depended on them the most. Floyd and Wilmer Wright. Floyd was a particular, very astute person. Very astute and smart. Unfortunately, they have passed on. I know one lady that's in the picture there if she's well enough. She's a white lady. One of the ones who were placing tuna on a belt, the younger one. She is still living. Sometime ago, I went through these pictures. I found an extra one, and I sent it to her. And I heard later that she was very overjoyed with it.

V.J.: What was her name?

H.K.: Madeline Webster. Madeline Webster. And she lives in Bybel (phonetic). She was on the tuna line, the tuna packing machine. For instance, you ask how we accomplish things like this. I suppose a lot of things we did we were possibly lucky. But anyway, in the canning of tuna, it was done by hand on the West Coast just as we *were* doing it here. But then the West Coast, I heard about had an automatic machine. It was called a Caruthers Machine. It was successful, and the companies on the west coast were using it. So I wrote to the Caruthers Machine people at Warrenton, Oregon, and had some correspondence with them. And the fellow said I will talk - if you are coming to the convention, the frozen food convention in Chicago, I will be at the Stevens Hotel, give me

a call. So I was at the convention, gave him a call, and I made an appointment, and we went up, and I met the young - or the gentleman. And we just started talking, and he said he wanted to know more about my business and how much I was using it and so forth and so on. I told him that we were growing each year, and the number of cases that we were packing, and our source of tuna. And I was telling him what we had, what we hoped to do. And we kept on talking. He says there's no way I can let you have a machine. He said all of the people on the west coast, he said we just back order for he says I don't know how long. And we kept on talking. I mean he was very friendly. And he just kept on and kept on. Finally he said to me, he says can you write a check for \$7,500? I says yes, sir, I can. He says that's what we require was for the down payment on an order for a machine. And then he says we get a royalty on every case that you pack. And that's how that machine was paid for, a royalty. I forget now what it was. As the amounts over the years increased, it went down, you know.

And so anyway, he says I am going to let you have a machine. And he said are you ready for it? I said yes, sir. I wrote him a check. I didn't even take time to consult with dad. But I knew that we could write a check for \$7,500. And don't you know, in a month's time this machine arrived, and on the crate that it came in was Van Camp Seafood crossed out, and H.P. Kennerly on. And it was the number, it was number 11. It was the 11th machine that was made at that time. They even sent a man in that stayed a month to see that that machine was running correctly. And by golly, our personnel, our personnel knew what they were doing to adjust it and so forth. He stayed a month. And he became a friend. He boarded in the community, he enjoyed the community, and was just a nice person to have around. That is another - you asked me how we did things. That's how it was done. I don't know, but I guess we were lucky. A lot of funny things happened, a lot of funny things happened. They - we were getting tuna from several sources around the world when I got a call from a friend at National City Bank and said that there's a Jewish person here that says he has tuna to be canned, and he has it on a ship over in Jersey City. He wants to talk with you. Well I said well, I'll be in Thursday and you can set up an appointment. And the bank said at that time, said I don't - said we can't find out anything about it, and don't know whether he has credit or what, or anything about it. Well anyway, what had happened was this wealthy person from Tacoma, Washington, who had three tuna clippers was having - he was sort of, he always impressed me as being a little bit of a bully. And he thought that he could, he had some disagreement with the tuna people on the west coast that he could send his tuna to the east coast to have it canned, and make more money on it. So he loaded this boat, called the Bering Sea, and sent it to New York out of Peru, that's where he loaded it.

And it had swordfish and tuna fish. He thought that he had this cannery in Jersey that was going to can the tuna for him. The cannery went broke. He was sitting there for two months paying the mortgage on this ship. He had to do something, and he got these Jewish fellows to intercede somewhere whatever they could do to get it canned. So I said well, send me some of the tuna so that I can see it, and they did. And I said well, I will can it for you. But in the meantime, this thing had become financially embroiled. The Coast Guard had a lien or had a fine on the vessel. I don't know all the things that had

transpired. So it ended up, and then these Jewish fellows had faltered, and they had got out of it somehow, but they wanted out of it, they were still not out of it. So we all had a meeting in the boardroom at National City Bank. And everybody had a lawyer but Kennedy. I think it was, I think it was a total of 14 there. And here I sat, I had canned some of the tuna for him, and it was in my warehouse canned. I had the first lien on the production costs. So that's why I was there. And anyway, it evolved after some wrangling and everything. It was all agreed that a person in New York, in the brokerage business, and he was a dapper-looking individual, a little bit on the cocky side in the meeting. And he was appointed to be the supreme being and handle everything, you know. And then, that's when -

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

H.K.: -- I can't find anything out about you, but I'm still looking because I've never known a fish man that was honest before.

(Laughter.)

H.K.: This was in the boardroom at the bank. Well anyway, the reason I tell it is Bert Nease he became one of the best friends I ever had. Yes. And he was a world of information. Yes, he was. Yes, he was. He had such accounts in New York. Sunsweet Prunes and those things, you know, like that, He had the big California accounts, and he was well-known, well-liked and a very astute individual. And I had a lot of pleasure in dealing with him. He was a great guy. I think that should answer that question.

V.J.: Thank you. I have - you piqued my curiosity when you talked about your business trip to Japan. What happened there?

H.K.: Well, you know, you open these questions, and I don't know how to answer them in just a few words. I wish I could. This cumulated my looking and searching for some way to open an oyster automatically. We had tried microwave and - microwave and macro wave in this country. We tried steam, we've tried steam and freeze it, we've tried many things. We tried nitrogen freezing, instant freezing and machines to open it. And we had succeeded to a great extent with Raytheon. They finally got the patent on it, but they never went any further with it, and I don't think it was worthwhile. But you could move oysters down a belt through a microwave tunnel. And they would pop one shell. But you still had to cut the oyster loose from the other shell, which was halfway there. And I was led to believe that the Japanese had an answer to it. They did not. So it was a trip that I enjoyed. Dorothy went with me, and I had another lady who went with me who was Japanese, was born and raised and distantly related to the royal family. So we got to know Japan quite well in the few days that we were there. Hiroshima was where I ended up for one of the days, and we were glad to see that and see how that had been rebuilt, tremendously. And this lady that was with us had lived in Hiroshima, and she said five days before the bomb fell, all the children had been moved out. So she was away from it when it happened. So they must've been, they must've had suspicion that something was going to happen. But nevertheless, the machine did not work. They were not as far advanced as we were. So that was why I went to Japan.

V.J.: Another question. Reading William Valliant's papers from Talbot County, at one point he was approached by a Midwest oyster broker to pack his oysters in church containers. Do you know what that was?

H.K.: Yes. And how can I explain it to you? Church containers was before there were - there was refrigeration. And these were refrigerated containers, insulated, in which you could put ice or even if it were frozen, it would stay frozen. And that was your church container. And at one time, you would ship one out, and probably another one would be coming in this way to take its place and all. But it never, it really never worked, really never worked. No. Not to my knowledge, it never did. I remember one person trying to sell stock in it at one time. I really do. And we didn't - wasn't interested.

V.J.: What kind of shipping containers did you use?

H.K.: We always used a barrel with ice with express. That's the way we started out. And that's the way we, I guess, the way we ended it.

V.J.: Did you have your own ice plant?

H.K.: Yes. We had a machine that made our own flake ice. Yes, we did. That's one thing that we was always very necessary for us was good refrigeration. I don't think we would start anything without refrigeration. The health department gave us good bills of health. Yes, they did. And I don't remember that we ever had, I know we never had a complaint as far as any hepatitis or anything like that. Nothing like that ever -

VI: That's a pretty risky business, I would think.

H.K.: Well, no. The oysters, the oysters were, I think, very clean in those days. I wonder about them now. I wonder how we're going to clean the bay. All right, did you have another question?

V.J.: I think we've covered the questions that I had.

H.K.: Wonderful. Well, let's see. I had something here that I thought might've been interest to you. Could be that.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)