

INTERVIEW LOG

Interviewee: J. Ramsey Speer

Oral History #325

Interviewer: Pete Leshner

Date:

Location:

Topic: Mr. Speer discusses building and repairing of small boats, commercial boats and building custom made boats during his years as owner of Oxford Boat Yard, formerly the Conley Yard in Oxford. He also talks about building and racing Star Boats.

Comments:

Documentation:

Transcribed by:

Marge Berman
29709 Lyons Drive
Easton, MD 21601
410-770-4814

BEGIN INTERVIEW

J. Ramsey Speer: As a youngster, I was raised in Talbot County, Maryland, down at the end of Island Creek Neck between La Trappe Creek and Island Creek at the Choptank. I mean on the Choptank at Chloras Point...the Wilderness..., the name of that farm, and a part of that thing was built in 1690, the earlier part of (unintelligible). But any rate, when I was about 10 years old, Lowndes Johnson undertook to teach me how to sail.

Everybody knows who...I mean I'm sure that you know who Lowndes Johnson was.

PL: There he is (pointing to a picture?).

JRS: Oh good, yeah, wonderful. So, I acquired the first *Surprise* at that point---shortly after that---a little 13 foot cat boat. As a youngster I sailed around in front of the wilderness and largely up Trappe Creek and I remember when maybe I was 11 I got venturesome and sailed all the way out to Sharps Island Light and visited the lighthouse keeper at age of about 11. By the time I got to be 13 or 14, gee, I was born in 1914, so 1928 or '29, along in there, I acquire an ancient Star boat and raced Star boats for a good many years after that.

PL: For Gibson Island Club or for Tred Avon?

JRS: Yeah, well there was no Tred Avon then. It was called the Kap Dun Club and I'm a charter member of the Tred Avon Club which started in 1931. This was after we started sailing Star boats in Oxford. At any rate, as a youngster I did quite a bit of sailing and enjoyed it immensely and in 1934 I busted out of the University of Virginia. I never quite determined...I can't remember really whether that was an academic frailty or bad behavior, but it was probably a combination of the two (laughter) and my father said, "Clean out that old rotting dock and build me a new one," so I took the summer off and did that with the help of some Oxford people and a little pile driver and after that, my father said, "Why don't we buy a boatyard over there," and he put up the money and I did the running. So we bought the Conley Yard, which is now the Oxford Boat Yard Company in 1934. I'm quite certain of that date...it can be checked by looking at the...very interesting, there was something like 13 separate 99 year lease holds involving that three acres and so we unscrambled that and got the whole thing on a fee simple basis. Well, Conley Yard had a couple of buildings that had been on there that burned. So really all we had was a couple of old dilapidated railroads---marine railways---needing repair and I was 19 at the time. I got a crew of boys together. We paid them a dollar a day---I'm certain of that. We went into the woods, we chopped a bunch of trees down, both oak and pine. We rafted the pine. This was up near Trappe Creek, so on Trappe Creek we rafted the pine and I borrowed a barge from somebody and put the oak which wouldn't float very well on the barge and repeatedly sank the damn thing. I then went and borrowed (laughter) the Model A Ford fire engine from the Oxford Fire Department to pump the barge out. That worked pretty well. I went into the woods and discovered... as a kid I'd been in there and I knew there was an abandoned sawmill, so I stole it. I don't know who it belonged to. Nobody claimed it...this was 1934. I put it on a concrete foundation, rebuilt the damn thing so it would work. The one saw I had was sizable, but I had 10 feet to throw cheek (ph) out occasionally, so the sawyer had to be alert. I went into the woods again and I found a single cylinder gasoline tractor, 12 horsepower, and the fly wheels were large and the RPM was low and the back end of the connecting rod

bearing was missing. So I made an oak one and put it on there and it worked. You know what I'm saying.

PL: Yeah, I think so.

JRS: The back end of the connecting rod bearing...well anyhow, I then changed the ignition system so that we could speed it up. We didn't speed it up quite enough to fracture the flywheels, but we got about 25 horsepower instead of 12 by speeding it up and so that ran the sawmill. We sawed timbers and planks and we built the buildings that stayed there for many years. I don't have any of Bob Hollyday's pictures, but you're probably familiar with the area.

PL: I've seen some of them, yes.

JRS: We built the main building---well, hell, I rebuilt *Highland Light* in that building and she was a pretty damn big yacht and we built half a dozen custom boats in there also. We ran the small railroad after we rebuilt it back up into the building and the big railroad was outside. At any rate, we put that whole thing together and some of what we did is still there...things like the spar shed and the inboard part of the pier on the left hand side as you look toward the harbor. The derrick has all been replaced, but the hardware is still there. I got that in a junkyard in Baltimore...the winch and so forth and so on...and built a wooden derrick for removing spars and that sort of thing and so, we rocked along in the thirties mostly doing commercial repair work. There weren't many yachts on the Bay...very, very few of them.

PL: Was *Kessie Price* down there at that time...*Kessie C. Price*, the Moorshead boat? She was (unintelligible).

JRS: Oh yes. I knew her. Indeed, I did...Frank Moorshead.

PL: Yeah, was that that early or did he only start coming down to Oxford a little bit later.

JRS: I don't remember when. I think a little bit later. Anyhow, we did mostly commercial repair work on bugeyes, skipjacks, buy boats and that sort of thing and we also converted two or three...I think maybe two...sizable bugeyes to little freight boats and you know exactly what I'm talking about.

PL: Yeah.

JRS: They were easily driven and sort of interesting. I remember one we put a 45 horsepower Fairbanks Moore (ph) semi-diesel in the damn thing, about 70 feet long and she'd go up the Bay at 8 knots, I suppose loaded. Remarkable. They're easily driven of course. Uh, yeah, I remember the date, because something reminded me of it, in 1938, I designed a little 28 foot cruising sailboat using Chesapeake Bay workboat-type construction.

PL: A V bottom or dead rise-type boat?

JRS: A dead rise sizable, moderately deep keel, cast iron, top side ballast, longitudinal bottom hiking (ph) instead of transverse.

PL: Okay.

JRS: And a simple sloop rig, high field levers for back stays (laughter). You know what that is?

PL: What would you call them again?

JRS: High field lever.

PL: No.

JRS: Well, a running back stay comes on down through a ship (ph) on deck and goes back to a lever that pushes forward, but's free (ph) and back a little bit more (ph). Am I making sense?

PL: Yeah.

JRS: Okay. Anyhow, I saw one of those things about eight or 10 years ago, still existed up in the head of the---way up the Potomac. She wasn't in very good shape, but she was still (unintelligible).

PL: One of the ones still at Oxford.

JRS: Yeah. We've got about, oh, I don't know three or four of those. I took the first one and perhaps the first class D race on the Chesapeake Bay and borrowed somebody's spinnaker and won the race hands down (laughter). She wasn't a fast boat, but there wasn't anything else that was there (laughter) and I knew something about sailing at night and I knew most of these boys didn't you see. They wandered around (laughter). It was funny. Um, yeah, during that period, we built a number of custom boats actually. We built one---that's the latter part of that period---getting close to the time World War II started. We built an interesting boat for a guy by the name of Lynn (ph) Hendrickson, an old friend of mine. We used to race Comets together and she was called *Restless* and Olin Stephens designed her and she was a centerboard...fat ass affair...and the prototype of Harvey Conner's (ph) *Revenot* (ph) and *Restless* was 28 feet long on the waterline and the *Revenot* was 30 or 32 and those two boats were indeed the forerunner of Carleton Mitchell's *Finisterre*.

PL: Oh, is that right?

JRS: The same hull form exactly except *Finisterre* was a little smaller than these boats. But, I built the first of that bunch for Olin. I built a number of boats for Freddy Geiger. You may or may not know the name. Freddy was a naval architect. I don't know whatever became of him. His sister married Buzz Wilford's father and they got a divorce. Anyhow, I built a number of custom boats. George Sidell...I built boats for him as well during that period and I didn't mention that when we acquired the Oxford Yard, we called it Oxford Shipyards and we bought the little yard across the creek that now belongs to Bates and when we bought the thing, Harry Sinclair and Price Sinclair were running it and owned it and Price was fairly young and Harry was getting a little older and so when we bought it, we let Price run the little yard and Harry came over as our foreman on the big yard and in the little yard we had a lot of fun---built several hundred Comets at one time or another and whereas Stanley Ellis (ph) charged \$450 for a Comet, we charged \$1,000 and it was worth it. We built very good little boats (laughter). We built a number of custom lap straight dinghies for yachtsmen here and there. We built a number of small boats that I designed, including a couple...I wish to heck I had the lines for that thing...I've even forgotten the name of the man I built it for. He lived off the Wye River. These were little 25 foot round bottom, more or less conventional keel open day sailers. They were quite lovely. I have just delightful recollections of sailing (unintelligible) those things and it looked a little bit like a slightly small...it looked a little like a 6 meter...it wasn't quite as extreme, but it was that general form...a little shorter ends and a little chubbier, but saw it like that. We built those things. We built a couple of them actually and I don't know what became of them. Uh, so we had a lot of small boat work going on over there and commercial work going on and some new construction later also. And, then about the time World War II was upon us, I'm not certain of the day really, I'm

really a little vague about some of the chronology, uh, father and I decided to sell the yard and I went to work with some people in Baltimore and then eventually ran the machine shop over there making parts for army tanks and airplanes actually and after the war it was unfortunate we put the damn thing into bankruptcy. We couldn't convert it from World War II. It was sort of a junky operation then. Well, we weren't able to buy any new machinery and so we had a bunch of old junk machinery which we rebuilt---we had a wonderful tool shop (laughter). But, anyhow, we lived through that and then we did have the sailing on the Bay, and right after World War II, I started doing quite a bit of ocean racing. Jimmy Brickley (ph) had a prototype of the New York 32s, not the late ones, but the early 32s that were designed by Olin and Rod actually, and they were 32 feet on the waterline and about 41, 2, 3 feet overall. And *Starlight* was the prototype of the boat being built a long time ago. And I sailed as mate on the *Starlight* for three Bermuda races and god knows what else---three or four Miami-Nassau races and it must have been in 1946, late '45 or early '46 that Jimmy Brickley and I, the owner of *Starlight*, bought the yard back and we brought Bob Welsh in as one of the three co-conspirators. It was a corporation. Bob and I had building little sailboats up at the Severn River up at Indian Landing for a few years. Briefly, I had a yacht broker's office in Baltimore and Bob Welsh and I built little boats up there and then we consolidated and bought the yard. By that time, Johnson and Grimes had owned the yard during the war. Bobby Henry had run it...they built a bunch of boats for the Coast Guard and god knows what else and they built most of the yachts in four hundreds, several were not complete. When we took over the yard, we completed the rest of the Oxford four hundreds. Oh, interesting comment, to me at any rate, we sailed a real bad race in 1946 from Miami to Nassau in *Starlight*. There were only 14 Stars and the boats weren't in terribly good shape because they'd all been sort of laid up during the war. The sails were old Egyptian cotton and doesn't store for five or six years very well. So, come on to blow when we started that race and I was second in charge and then charted the fore triangle mostly. I remember changing one jib after another after having destroyed the jib (laughter). We blew out about three or four...finally wound up with a little storm jib. The navy recorded 60 knots sustained for 24 hours and we were beating to windward against this nonsense out of the south. Well, obviously, it was a (unintelligible) hurricane is what it was, because when we got to Nassau...only five of us got there out of 14. When we got to Nassau, it was dead calm and then it come from out of the northeast (laughter). It was the only really bad race I've ever sailed. We lost two men...not from our boat...but from a little Cuban boat, and that's what I'm leading up to. The deck house came loose on deck and what happened, it took two men with it. So, we came home---we put a tack rode (ph) on *Starlight*. I think it was the first tack rode to go on any American boat. I really do---right here in Oxford (laughter). So, let's see.

PL: That was motivated by the safety of (voice over).

JRS: Oh, absolutely, yeah. After that...well, in the 1946 Bermuda race...that year, we rebuilt *Vamarie* and *Highland Light*. Do you know the names?

PL: I know them.

JRS: *Highland Light* was also owned by the Naval Academy and she was about 65 feet long, short-ended, and gosh, I don't know, 50 tons or so. She was a heavy boat and did quite a bit of....well we rebuilt the Star which was a big piece of machinery actually. You know, in those days they used casein glue and varnish (unintelligible). So, we rebuilt the

damn thing and I rerigged her completely and that was an interesting engineering task actually and we also redid Vamarie...put new decks on her and so forth and so on. She was wrought iron frames built by Abeking (ph) and Rasmussen in Germany and teak planking bolted to the frames and quite a vessel. Uh, one of those boats I think, maybe both of them, went down in the 1946 race to Bermuda from Newport. There were only 50 boats and we outfitted 10 of them in this yard in Oxford which was sort of indicative of what was going on. I'd been doing a lot of ocean racing, I knew the people. I knew the designers, I knew most of the formalist ocean racing sailors along the coast (unintelligible) and I sailed on a number of boats as well as *Starlight* and we got a lot of business. That period after the war was largely characterized by maintenance of ocean racing lots actually. We did an awful lot of that at one time or another. So what have I left out (laughter)? Oh, the second period, see I had managed that yard for Brickle and Welsh and me...I was one of three. We weren't partners, but we were major stockholders in a little corporate structure and I was the manager. And actually, Jimmy Brickle was a screwball bastard and I think he got quite jealous because everybody referred to Oxford as old Jim Speer's yard and then it was young Jim Speer's yard instead of Jimmy Brickle's yard and frankly, Jimmy put a little more money in it than I at the outset. I put the deal together and he put a little more money in it than I did, but I had a substantial interest in it and eventually, it became quite acrimonious and I had to get the hell out of there and I did.

PL: When did you get out?

JRS: I'm not certain exactly. It was probably 1951 or 2, probably '52.

PL: I assume Bob Henry was still involved in the yard at that point?

JRS: No. He was manager during the war and when we bought it back, he was no longer managing.

PL: Okay.

JRS: He went to Sparkman and Stephens at that point.

PL: I see. So his association with the yard ceased in 1946.

JRS: I didn't hear that.

PL: His association with the yard ceased completely in 1946.

JRS: Right, right. Then Bobby worked for Sparkman and Stephens either before or after that experience, and then he set up an office of his own and did some designing and did some very nice work and died very young. I knew Bobby when we were kids together. He was a little older than I, but not much. Hell, most everybody I used to sail with is dead (laughter) and I'm only 82 and I haven't quite decided what I'm going to do when I grow up (laughter).

PL: I've seen a number of those aerals from the forties—the Bob Hollyday aerals of Oxford Boat Yard and Mears and there's one wreck that always shows up, an old schooner, *C. W. Willey*, just off the yard, sort of in the cove.

JRS: Afloat?

PL: No, sort of awash, sunk.

JRS: Oh, I don't place that. You got a copy of the picture handy or not?

PL: I do. Actually, may I bring out a number of photos?

JRS: Please do. Light displacement cruising sailboat about 30 feet long, plywood, a little bit boxy. Masthead for a triangle. In '48 that was fairly modern. In fact, it was quite unusual actually.

PL: Oh, really.

JRS: Yeah. And very light displacement, cast iron fin keel, not unlike a Star boat's keel, except much larger and, oh, I don't know, we sold oh I don't know about 12 of those things I suppose. And they were fast little boats. I'm not going to look at that picture. Is that the one you're talking about?

PL: This is not the one I'm talking about, but that's a war-time photo of Oxford Boatyard.

JRS: Right. This is the shed I bought in '34.

PL: The main shed there.

JRS: The main shed. I built this shed as well.

PL: And is this what you call the spar shed over here on the right-hand side.

JRS: Yeah, and this is the derrick I was talking about.

PL: Okay.

JRS: I built these piers and we rebuilt the railroad and so that's the way it was.

PL: I assume because these photos came from Bob Henry, that most of these are wartime photos. Is there something in there that would clue you in whether it might be from your time or his?

JRS: I think it's more my time. I believe that's a Bob Hollyday photo.

PL: I'm sure it is, yeah.

JRS: That looks to me like an 8 meter.

PL: On the T pier.

JRS: I don't know who that is.

PL: It's hard to tell under some of these winter covers.

JRS: Well, that was prior to World War II.

PL: This is before World War II, okay.

JRS: I think so. I remember after I got that building built, I'd never designed a truss before in my life and I saw a big thunderstorm coming in and I went in there and stood and looked at that truss while we (unintelligible) for a while (laughter).

PL: Okay. This is another print of the same.

JRS: Yeah.

PL: But, there's at least one in here I think...here...there it shows a cove and there's that schooner wreck out there which I happen to know to be the *C. W. Willey* which is a St. Michaels built Kirby Yard built schooner.

JRS: Okay.

PL: You don't know this.

JRS: I remember it being there and I'm trying to figure out when this was. I think I built that bulkhead and we filled it in slowly.

PL: Okay. There's some boats here with letters on the bow and so forth, so I assume this is either during the war or post war.

JRS: This may have been during the war. Probably was. I've never seen that picture. Maybe Bobby took it.

PL: Actually, here, this one's dated September 1945.

JRS: Right. Well, that's right at the end of their tenure.

PL: Yeah. Here's some other shots. I think this one, anchored just off, or maybe it's tied to a couple of pilings, is the *Kessie C. Price* which is Moorshead's boat.

JRS: I never saw that picture either. I'm not sure when it was.

PL: Okay. Some of this other stuff...I think that's a group of Penguins that the yard was building. When you bought the yard back in '46, you didn't buy the Bates yard back, it was just the Oxford Boatyard portion.

JRS: That's right.

PL: So, from that point on, the one that's now Bates, was in different hands.

JRS: Exactly.

PL: Okay.

PL: Hoster. Did you know a yachtsman names Ted Hoster?

JRS: That's familiar now. You used a word I didn't hear. Did I know the blank.

PL: A yachtsman.

JRS: A yachtsman named Ted Hoster. Probably, but I can't place him.

PL: He had a boat named *Tejeria*.. I can show you a model of it downstairs. That's simply why I asked.

JRS: I don't really place him.

PL: Okay. Also, he did some of these Bermuda races and went down to Miami one winter and this sort of thing.

JRS: I knew a lot of the boat builders and architects and I knew Henry Hinckley. We had fun. We bid against one another in coast guard work on occasion and before World War II, I got a contract to build about 40 Monomoy surf boats, 26 foot Monomoy surf boats, and I beat Henry out by \$1 (laughter). We had a lot of fun.

PL: It seems a little odd for a Chesapeake boat builder to be beating out a Maine boat builder for Monomoy surf boats.

JRS: Yeah. We did it. We built a heavy, heavy, two-wheeled trailer to tote those things up to---what's the name of that maritime academy up in the western end of Long Island Sound?

PL: Kings Point?

JRS: Kings Point. Yeah, we put them on a two-wheeled trailer and toted them up one at a time behind a pick-up truck. I took the same trailer and the pick-up truck to get a keel for a custom boat on one occasion. I think it was about 6,000 pounds. I put it on the damn trailer and the only way over here, except north around Elkton, was to go to Annapolis and go on the Annapolis-Claiborne Ferry. So, I ran down the street...it was a little pick-up that weighed not too much...and a trailer with about 6,000 pounds of cast iron on the damn thing down to the ferry dock and then the ramp. So I had to hit it with some speed or I'd never get up there, so I stopped it before we went off the back end of that thing. I was alone. It was a terrible ride (laughter). But, I knew...well, I mentioned I built a boat for Olin and Rod Stephens. I knew Phil Rhodes quite well. I used to drink whiskey with John Alden. Oh, hell, who is the old editor for a great many years of the magazine "Yachting?" Herb Stone, was the editor of "Yachting" proposed me as a nonresident member of the New York Yacht Club a hundred years ago. But, I knew that whole bunch in yachting. They were a nice bunch in those days. They weren't commercial, you know. They were yachtsman, is what they were. Alf Landon, Landon, is that right under the lee of the the long boat. So, questions?

PL: Well, the bugeyes and the other commercial craft that you got involved in...do you remember some of those boats or the people who were operating them?

JRS: Not too well. My father owned the *Little Jennie* at one time and if you got a book on bugeyes, you probably know the boat the *Little Jennie*.

PL: She's still up there in Long Island.

JRS: Is she really?

PL: Yes she is. Sort have been rebuilt. She's had her planks covered with fiberglass. But, she's inspected to carry passengers still.

JRS: I would recognize a number of those names.

PL: Tell me about some of the other people around you. You mentioned that Lowndes Johnson taught you to sail.

JRS: Yeah.

PL: Did you have other associations with him as well. I assume that you saw him in a number of races and regattas and that sort of thing that you got involved in.

JRS: Oh, I guess Star Boats. We started racing Star Boats in Oxford about, well let's see...I have really forgotten. I was probably 13 or 14, which would be '27 or '28. In 1927, Lowndes and Graham won the International Star Boat championship in (unintelligible) and shortly after that we started sailing Stars in Oxford and Jerry Valliant who started the Tred Avon Yacht Club...actually he started the Kap Dun Club before the Tred Avon Yacht Club.

PL: Where does that name come from?

JRS: I have no idea. Kap Dun meaning captain I suppose. It was a collection of local waterman who would sail skiffs actually mostly at the outset and we apparently acquired Town Point then probably for \$20 an acre and now it's probably worth what a million dollars today (laughter). But anyway, we sailed Star Boats very enthusiastically and some of the people---Mason Shehan (ph) was good, Billy Myers is still around and he was pretty good and I had Star Boat #141 and that was a pretty old boat and she wasn't in too good shape and the Pegasus. Apparently, I had forgotten about it, but I saw him recently. I sold it to Buzz Wilford and Buzz decided that on the starboard tack, the port shrouds looked a little slack, so he tightened them and tack over on the port tack and he'd tighten the starboard shroud and pushed the barb (ph) out of the damn thing and sank her (laughter). But we used to race particularly besides locally and among ourselves, we had great competition with the Gibson Island people and we'd tour over there once or twice a year and Rascob (ph) was a political type. He was a Roman Catholic with 13 children and he had a bout six Star Boats up on the Corsica River at one time and we sailed with them and then we eventually got sailing cruising boats.

PL: And you got out of Stars once you started sailing the cruising boats a lot.

JRS: Yeah. I quit sailing Star Boats I remember I built a few...not too many. I built one that was a freak. I'm more of a heavy weather boat and I got a heavier weather boat, but she certainly was awful in light weather. What I did...there was a certain amount of flexibility in the lines and so forth. So, what I did, was to planker (ph) the bottom with about close to two inch teak tapering out to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch from the keel out. So, I was putting a lot of wooden weight down (unintelligible) the damn thing. She was a good heavy weather boat, she was a fine heavy weather boat, but she certainly wouldn't drift very well. I thought I could overcome the extra weight, but I don't know how much it was, I have forgotten, but I calculated it and it seemed like a good idea at the time.

PL: You built that one for yourself then?

JRS: Yeah, I did and then I sold it. But, I built I don't know a half dozen Stars I think. It took me about 400 man hours to built a Star Boat. It took Lowndes and Graham a thousand. But, you know the name Bosendorfer (ph)?

PL: No.

JRS: It's the most beautiful piano you ever saw in your life.

PL: Oh, yes, sure.

JRS: And they're extremely expensive. Lowndes and Graham's work on Star Boats reminds me of Bosendorfer's work on the piano...quite similar in my view. They did beautiful work, but they did it slowly and laboriously and so forth. Graham died while we were sailing Star Boats. In fact, he was sailing with Barbara Marseillis. He was crewing for Barbara Marseillis in Oxford and I wasn't in that race for some reason or another and I had my father's 22 foot *Chris-Craft* and Barbara stood up, hove to, stood up and started waving and I went over and Graham was dead. We picked him up and took him ashore. Probably a pretty good way to go.

PL: There's a star on his tombstone.

JRS: Yeah, I know. I know that tombstone.

PL: What about some of the other boat builders in Oxford? There's Ralph Wiley (ph).

JRS: I knew Ralph. We didn't see a whole lot of one another. There was no jealousy, but we just went in different directions and the Crocker Brothers I knew again, and we had a rather different type of operation. Those are the only two I can think of.

PL: Yeah, I assume Curtis Applegarth came along later.

JRS: I think so, yeah. Oh, have you talked to Jimmy Taylor?

PL: I don't think so.

JRS: Do you know who Jimmy Taylor is?

PL: Not offhand, no.

JRS: Jimmy Taylor is...well he'll be 85 this year. He's a black man and he wears a hat that says Harbor Master and I think he's still on the Oxford Boat Yard company payroll and he worked for me in the early days. In fact, he worked...you know he's been working in that yard since 1932. I thought he worked for Conley before him. But, you probably better go talk to Jimmy. You better take a little extra time, because he talks slowly and at great length (laughter). He will tell you stories about coming to me one time and saying, "I'm not making enough money, and I've got an idea, and what I want to do is piece work. I want to paint copper paint on the bottom of work boats piece work." And, I said, "Okay, Jimmy, we'll work that out" and I worked out some sort of a deal. Next thing I know, here he was with two paint buckets and two brushes painting two handed. He did it and he did it well. But, he'll tell you that story at great length. You should go see him.

PL: Okay.

JRS: He's still around.

PL: Okay.

JRS: I mean if you're interested in pursuing this.

PL: Yes, sure. Downs (ph) and Albert Curtis?

JRS: Oh, I knew Downs Curtis when he was just a youngster and an apprentice to Dave Pritchard and I've seen Downs in recent years. I didn't know his brother very well, but I've seen both of them in recent years to say hello and that sort of thing and he's a great man. I'm for him (laughter), yeah. Downs is fine.

PL: He's trying to get out of it now.

JRS: Is he?

PL: Yeah, well he's going to be closing the sail loft down this winter and then turned into this spring and now it's been extended to the fall, but he's working on winding things down. He keeps taking on more jobs though.

JRS: He does good work actually. I knew the Ratchie (ph) brothers pretty well. In fact, I sold one of the little cruise kittens (ph) which is what we call the little plywood 30 foot cruising boats.

PL: Okay.

JRS: I sold one to the younger Ratchie (ph) brother, what's his name?...Colin Ratchie (ph).

PL: The cruise thing...that was the motorboat that Oxford Boatyard made.

JRS: No, it was a cruising sailboat.

PL: Okay.

JRS: Now, I've got a brochure on that thing which has some sketches. I don't have the lines and I've got a reprint of an article in "Yachting" on the 1938 *Bay Bird*. Would you want to see these?

PL: Actually, if you could give me the references, we've got a pretty good collection of "Yachting" from that era and I could copy out of them. The problem is that "Yachting" isn't indexed, so I don't necessarily know where to look unless...

JRS: Well, I don't know either, but I could send them to you if you'd return them.

PL: Sure.

JRS: Do you want them?

PL: I'd love them.

JRS: Brochure on the cruise (unintelligible) and a reprint. They'll be framed and I'll pack them. I don't think I'll unframe them, or at least one them will and I'll send them to you.

PL: If I can copy them and return them that would be terrific. Who did all the design work for the yard with this sort of boat. Did you do that yourself or did you have somebody else...

JRS: Whatever design work we did in the yard, I did, but custom construction we did for the various architects.

PL: So most of the work would have been Stephens or Phil Rhodes or John Aldin or something like that.

JRS: Right.

PL: Okay. I don't know, what else should I be asking.

JRS: (Laughter). I've been fairly loquacious. About 1931, Pete Culler (ph) started building a couple of boats---replicas of Joshua Fulcrum Spray (ph) and they were quite identical. They were genuine replicas of Spray (ph) which was sort of a nuisance because the damn boat went (unintelligible). I cruised on the damn thing with Pete on one occasion for a week or so. But he built those boats...two of them...two replicas of Spray in the Conley Yard before we got a hold of them and on the maiden voyage one of them went aground north of Bermuda. If you remember the configuration...well 10 miles out north of Bermuda of the islands of the Bermudas, there are coral reefs and some people occasionally sneak through there, but it is pretty dangerous and she was lost. I don't know whether the people aboard were lost or not, but the boat was demolished and Pete cruised around and chartered that thing I think for quite a while. I don't know whatever happened to him. I lost touch with Pete. You know the name Pete Colin (ph).

PL: Absolutely. So he had an association with that same boatyard.

JRS: Yeah, the Conley Yard before everything disappeared, I think they had a fire before we took over.

PL: Do you know how long he was there?

JRS: How long...

PL: How long Pete Colin was associated with them.

JRS: I have no idea. He wasn't really associated with them. He was just building a boat on that yard as far as I know.

PL: I see, okay.

JRS: I lost touch with Pete. We were casual friends. He was a little older than I, quite a bit older than I was. But, in recent years, on Marsh Harbor I saw this big old chunky schooner and I said, "Who designed this thing?" Pete Colin did. That was interesting.

She was a (unintelligible) cement thing (laughter). Oh lord. It's been an interesting life.

PL: Once you got out of the yard in '52 did you continue to have any activities in boatyards.

JRS: No, not at all. I did practically no sailing from about then. Well, I wound up in Texas a few years later and I was ashore there for a whole period of time until my first wife died in '81 and then shortly after that, my son-in-law said, "I need some help. We could navigate a boat from Rhode Island down to Tortola," and I said, "Yes," and I got back to sea and then Janey and I were married shortly after that and we chartered a boat in Tortola on our wedding trip and we were living in Colorado and for 10 years about, we chartered once or twice a year on the Chesapeake and the Pacific Northwest and down the Virgin Islands. In recent years, I've been doing a bit of sailing, a bit of old man cruising and a couple of years ago, I took a boat down to Nassau for a friend of mine and I felt so good at sea level, I hadn't realized how badly I'd been feeling up in the mountains. We lived at 8,500 feet and shortly after that, my doctor handed me an oxygen bottle and said 1 liter while you're walking around the house, 1 liter while you're asleep and 3 while you're walking around the house and that didn't sound like any fun at all, so I came down to North Carolina and decided I felt better and I'm doing fine without oxygen now at sea level. So, we bought a little house in Washington, North Carolina, and we bought a little boat...a Pearson 323, and this is the third Chesapeake cruise that Janey and I had and we're spending about six weeks...

INTERVIEW ENDS HERE

