

Interview with Miss Estelle Wright (RD #2, Choptank, Preston, MD. 673-7355). Present were R. Dodds and Barbara Johnson. Subjects discussed included steamboat travel from Choptank, especially on the MFNNrE WHEELER and other activities in the town in the early 20th century. Miss Wright, aged 97, has spent all but her first two years in the same house in Choptank.

See also Memories of Choptank 1679- 1930

Voices From the Land, Mary A. Fleetwood ! * : k7 , C Z F5&

Interview with **Miss** Estelle Wright. Present were Richard Dodds and Barbara Johnson.

Wright:
...But you can ask questions too.

Dodds: Ok.

Wright:
Ok. By golly. (laughs)

Dodds:
I tried to do a little bit of homework before I came. We don't have your, the book that was written on the Choptank, but I have a xerox copy of most of it.

Wright:
Well now, you don't need that.

Dodds:
Pardon?

Wright:
You don't need that.

Dodds:
No, we don't have a copy of the original, but someone loaned us a copy, and I copied the pages.

Wright:
A copy for me?

Dodds:
No, I copied the pages, someone loaned us the original and I looked at it before I came here, so I could find out a little more about.... I see you, you have a picture of you in here, isn't it?

Wright:
That looks like mine.

Dodds:
That's your house there.

Wright:
Ya.

Dodds:
Ya.

Wright:
Good.

Dodds:
Your father had built this house.

Wright:
That is right.

Dodds:
Beautiful house.

Wright:
My father built this house in the... in the 1890, in the 80s. In the late 80s. And he built the houses, most of them, that are here in the village.

Dodds:
Did he? There are some nice houses here; some beautiful. Well, I'll tell you what I'm doing, first. I've been trying to get some research, and some information to do an article on the Wheeler Line out of Hillsboro. And that's when I went to Preston one day, to look in the News and Farmer newspaper, because I'd Heard about that

Wright:
Well I don't have a newspaper, but I have the name of the fella that wrote the newspaper, about the story, the Minnie Wheeler, and I'm the only person living that was here when the Minnie Wheeler was. And it was the first boat that used to ply from Baltimore to here. And it would go to Windy Hill. That's the mile from here, the station here. The captain was Wheeler, Captain Wheeler, and that's why the boat, it was named for his daughter, Minnie. I got that much. Well we had 3 wharves, for a number of years. Then later we had a B.C. and A. Line, and a Maryland Steamboat Company wharf, that was three. So, I've got a good picture, I wish it was the Minnie Wheeler, but it is a grand picture of the other boats. And I had a mess of stuff ready to tell him, but I don't know what it was, so you ask him.

Johnson:
She seems to have forgot what she put in her letter.

Dodds:
That's alright. Well I'll ask some questions, then. You're the first person that I've talked to who has actually ridden on the Minnie Wheeler.

Wright:
I have ridden on the Minnie Wheeler plenty of times; go to

Baltimore, Come back here. And um ... what is all that stuff I had in mind? alright. And the Captain, Ross, was just a boy, and he went to work. And he went to work on the boat. And he stayed on it just as long as we had a Minnie Wheeler. And he was a fine person. In fact, in a way, he was in our family. Married a little relative of ours. And then he wrote this story, and called it the "Minnie Wheeler Boyfriend." he did do that. But this tells all about one night the boat sank, and so what, and so what. You can read that.

Dodds:

What book is this we're looking at?

Wright:

This is a little one. This is a friend's book.

Dodds:

Footner's, Rivers of the Eastern Shore.

Wright:

Have you seen that?

Dodds:

Yes I have. It's a good book.

Wright:

And what else. I had a lot of stuff here.

Dodds:

That's what, of course, the article looked like. I just copied it.

Wright:

Now that's, I believe, that's the very one that a girl here drew. Just free handed.

Dodds:

Is that right?

Wright:

But that's the Minnie Wheeler. Exactly.

Dodds:

We have a model of her at the museum, on loan to us from the descendants of Minnie Wheeler. And, apparently, this model was made by Captain Ross.

Wright:

Captain Ross.

Dodds:

Do you know anything about a model he made?

Wright:
You mean a boat?

Dodds:
Ya.

Wright:
I don't know. Just a minute.

Dodds:
He apparently made this model and gave it to Minnie Wheeler when she was still alive.

Wright:
I took the names of all the other boats we had. I got a picture of 'em. A friend of mine wrote this book and I gave her, this is my... I might be a little pokie but...

Dodds:
You said in your letter that you're 97.

Wright:
Ya, that's right.

Dodds:
Well you're doing pretty good for 97. I'll tell ya.

Wright:
Ya, I'm making out pretty good. Now this is what our conversation.... And now isn't that good? That's the Avon.

Dodds:
Ya, the Avalon.

Wright:
The Avalon. But I wanted to find out about George. This tells me that when I came here, and all that. Did you ever ride on a steamer sir? Well you're not interested in that.

Dodds:
Well we have this book in the library. Its a nice book. I was curious as to how you.... Tell me a little bit about the rides on the Minnie Wheeler. Do you remember much about your trips on the Minnie Wheeler?

Wright:
Oh I used to love to go up to Baltimore.

Dodds:
How old were you then?

Wright:

Just a kid. And my mother and dad shopped a lot in Baltimore. But that was the only boat that we could go on, but she could really ride the waves. We were out one night in a storm, but she'd just like, y'know...

Dodds:

...Rode it well.

Wright:

But then the Chesapeake would build. About the same size as Minnie, but along time. But when you do this, I don't know where you're gonna put all this, but don't put its from Preston. This is coming from Choptank. You know why? I'm not jealous. But seeing as it happened down, a lot of things, there are some historical things that happened. But, it's always Preston Merlin, well I've always lived in south Denton since I was two years old, and I want us to get the credit.

Dodds:

Ok. I know, you mentioned in your letter about that.

Wright:

Oh did I?

Dodds:

Yes. Make sure its Choptank, not Preston.

Wright:

And I felt sure you would. Now you'll have to ask me some things, 'cause I don't....

Dodds:

Well do you remember about the boats? The boat trips. Do you remember about the food?

Wright:

Oh, the food was good. It always was. And my dad, he was friends of a lot of people, but he and the Captain, Captain Perry, He married my father's cousin, and we would eat on the boat. It was good food.

Dodds:

Did he ever take you up to the pilot house?

Wright:

Oh, we were all over the house. Out on deck and all about.

Dodds:

I'm curious as to what they loaded, or unloaded here at Choptank.

Wright:

Well, then I think they took wheat, and of course, not things like tomatoes, and things like that, but the farmers used it to ship theirs from here. Minnie Wheeler.

Dodds:

Any cattle or livestock?

Wright:

I believe they took cattle.

Dodds:

A lot of people remember about the cattle, because they remember the noise, and the smell, of the cattle and sheep, and so on.

Wright:

I was on the boat one night when one of these other boats, and they had a bull on board. And I went upstairs to my room and locked the door. He was very bully, y' know. And I said, boy I hope he don't break loose and come upstairs.

Dodds:

It sounds as though you enjoyed your trips.

Wright:

We did. We always did.

Dodds:

How often did you go to Baltimore?

Wright:

Well, my mother and dad shopped there. We didn't go every week, but every once in a while they'd go to Baltimore. And when I was 7 years old they took me and they had this eye operated on, and I remember all about that. And we went on the Minnie Wheeler. Good old Minnie.

Dodds:

I know. She seems to be a boat that a lot of people have very nice memories of. Do you.... Of course Captain Wheeler died in 1899, so you probably wouldn't remember Captain Wheeler, would you?

Wright:

Captain Wheeler. I remember. It was in the 30s. A long way back.

Dodds:

Ya. Well, Captain Cochrane.

Wright:

Captain Cochrane; that was later. But Captain Perry, Henry Perry,

was the first captain. And now George, He went there, but he was just barely big enough, I mean old enough to get out, but he worked with it as long as there as there was a Minnie Wheeler. And we just called him George and the Minnie Wheeler. And then he was the one that wrote the story, and called it "Minnie Wheeler's Boyfriend."

Dodds:

Do you remember much about Captain Perry?

Wright:

Do I remember much? He was a nice person, a rather good-size man, and he had a daughter and a son. I think he just had the two. And this, I took that. I saw that and took it. I remember, when you mentioned about it, I thought, now I think in our talk in this book, I've got the Minnie Wheeler. I do have. So you have a picture of her.

Dodds:

Yes, we have a couple pictures of her. We have this model. That, according to some other people I've spoken to, was made by Captain Ross.

Wright:

He made that. I didn't have that down, but he did. He was smart. And he was a fine person. And his wife, in the letter, she wasn't from Denton (?). She was from good old Choptank. 'Course you see that I like Choptank.

Dodds:

I can see that. You're the oldest resident here in Choptank, I believe.

Wright:

That's right. And I had five brothers and two sisters, and I'm the only one left.

Dodds:

Well, Choptank must have been sort of a busy place at one time.

Wright:

Everybody that ever lived here liked Choptank. She hadn't lived here long, but she says she really likes it.

Johnson:

Tell 'em about the factories that were down there.

Dodds:

I understand that your family was quite involved in many of the businesses, here in town.

Wright:

My dad was a builder. He could do anything. He was a builder; was a farmer. He had a canning factory, a suit factory, a milling. . . a planing.... They trucked the logs for the sites for Bentonville (?). So it's been standing a while, too. And, of course, dad worked and search a lot, the ministers would.... So, I had a good childhood. I really did. I mean I had a good home. But I bet you 4 dollars that I think of something.

Johnson:

Did your father ship anything out on the Minnie Wheeler? To Baltimore.

Wright:

Oh. I can't tell you that, but he then had a planing mill. He may have, but he had a big sailboat, that he'd sail to Baltimore. And get freight, and sail it on something. So, I don't know about that. But he may have canned goods...

Dodds:

...Shipped on...

Wright:

...I think yes.

Dodds:

Your family had your own wharf, own pier...

Wright:

What?

Johnson:

Your family had their own pier, where they had their own boats tied up, and they owned that section, like for the cannery and all...

Wright:

No. No. Now that was a little later when my dad had a couple. . . a yacht with a cover, and another.... But he used his big boat then to haul tomatoes, but they used this pier, the BC&A.

Dodds:

The BC&A, un-hunh. Miss Wright, do you remember who the ... who were the agents here for the steamship company?

Wright:

Yes I do. Mr. Spence. John Spence. S-P-E-N-C-E.

Dodds:

He handled all the companies, or just Wheeler Line? Do you

Remember?

Wright:

Well as far as I remember, Mr. Spence was the wharf tender, the only one I remember. And he was a long time, so he had the Wheeler was off here, and the BC&A, and the Maryland.

Dodds:

How long were those piers?

Wright:

Oh, I don't know. They had rails. This one didn't, first times. You'd walk out as far as from here to, you came from around the other way, from around the store?, 'bout half way from here to the store. And then they built rails on them, on the other ones, which made it more safe. We used to go crabbin' here on that one.

Dodds:

Do you remember a lot of wagons and horses?

Wright:

Oh yes. My daddy had a double team of horses, and all the farmers would come in big wagons, and bring this and take that. And I'm sure wheat, and I think canned goods were the main thing. That they used, and that they shipped there. But we'd get to go to Baltimore on the good old Minnie Wheeler. I really did like it.

Dodds:

It sounds like you did. What of day time did she leave?

Wright:

I got to tell you the good joke about the boats. Well this was a little later, I was a little older. But they would come from Baltimore and be here in the morning about 8 or 9. And the kids would, when the boats was coming, everybody would go to the wharf, y' know. It's not every one, but that was a treat. Then she'd go back in the afternoon 'bout 1:30. Now this was a little later, but still it was a stunt. I told 'em, they think I was a mean 'un in school, I wasn't, but I had fun. One day, I was older, I was about 10 or 12, and we were having school, and my teacher was going to Baltimore that day, and of course, when she was going, she'd let us out early. So, something came to me, I was just sitting at school and I said mmmm (imitating a steamboat?). And one boy said "Why Miss Susan, the quarter whistle's blowin'." Well it would blow at Windy Hill, and she would have time then to excuse us and go to the wharf. And that day the boat didn't leave until 4:00. So, we got out of school (laughter). But they think that is the funniest thing. I got to tell that with it.

Johnson:

She went up here to the little red school.

Dodds:

Ya, I passed it on the way up.

Wright:

But the Minnie Wheeler was over here on the other side of town.

Dodds:

Down a little bit further.

Wright:

This was the BC&A, and then the Maryland. There were three of 'em. And then two boats would come after we did get the others, two boats would come from Baltimore every day. The Minnie Wheeler one day, and some other boat then, until we got the Chesapeake. Now what happened to the Minnie wheeler?

Dodds:

Minnie Wheeler, she was sold in 1916.

Wright:

But, this tells that she sank one day, and I got that in here.

Dodds:

I don't have any information on that. Can you recall when? where?

Wright:

I don't know when, but it's in this book. I don't know why.

Dodds:

Maybe it was after she had left the company. She was sold in 1916 by the BC&A, and then she went up to Baltimore, to Sparrow's Point Bethlehem Steel.

Wright:

Well that's where she was, up there, when that happened.

Dodds:

Ok. When she sank. But she was used as, like, an accommodation ship for workers. And, I believe, in the late 1930s she was towed away and scrapped. But she continued to run until 1916.

Wright:

But this was in the early 30s...

Dodds:

...when she sank.

Wright:
Un-huh.

Dodds:
I'm sure you're right.

Wright:
But I remember it just as well as if it was today.

Dodds:
You have a good memory.

Wright:
Well, fair. And I've lived here for ... don't tell me ...95 years. I taught school in Delaware, for 30 years. But this was my home. It's always been my home.

Dodds:
And its a beautiful home.

Wright:
It needs some fix'in, but isn't gonna' get it. I need some fixin' too (laughter).

Dodds:
Well, I have some more questions for you that I prepared before I came. One of the things that we've never been able to discover so far; did the Minnie Wheeler stop at Easton, or Easton Point?

Wright:
It did. yes it did. It went clear up the county. And it stopped at Easton Point, and up in Caroline County.

Dodds:
Up to Hillsboro, right. But all these schedules I've seen of her in the newspapers don't mention Easton Point.

Wright:
But it did.

Dodds:
But it did? Were you on board the boat when she stopped at Easton Point, do you remember?

Wright:
Oh, I've been there plenty of times.

Dodds:
On the Minnie Wheeler?

Wright:

Easton Point, yes man. Because, as I say, I was a kid when I went with l em. That was ... I was about 7. And I'm nearly sure it went there. I can't say positively. but I've ridden on her plenty of times. When I was little and growin' up.

Dodds:

I've talked to other people about this, and some steamship historians, and no one's been able to figure out whether Minn.e Wheeler stopped at Easton Point or not.

Wright:

It stopped at Easton Point. And it went up ... well it went up to Cambridge, then it used to go clear up the county. It went, and when they made these bigger boats, but in the mean time they put a railroad bridge across the Choptank River. And they didn't make it big enough. So, the big boats couldn't get through. So they had to stop going up the river. They said that there was about just one inch. Well that's not enough to go through. But they got through, but then they stopped at Windy Hill. But I've been on 'em when they been to Easton Point.

Dodds:

Do you, you must have probably ridden on some other boats, besides the Minnie Wheeler.

Wright:

Oh, I've got a string of 'em here.

Dodds:

You've got a string of 'em?

Wright:

Yes sir. We had the Talbot,, the Avalon, Minnie Wheeler, Cambridge, Joppa.

Dodds:

Joppa, right.

Wright:

And what was that other little one like...

Dodds:

Like the Minnie Wheeler?

Johnson:

The Avalon?

Wright:

The Chesapeake. The Cambridge, the Joppa, the Minnie Wheeler, the

Chesapeake, the Avalon, and the Talbot; boats all of them.

Dodds:

Stopped here. Did you ride on all of those boats? At one time?

Wright:

Yes.

Dodds:

Did you?

Wright:

We always went to Baltimore on a boat.

Dodds:

But you still liked the Minnie Wheeler.

Wright:

I still like the Minnie Wheeler.

Dodds:

Did you take a cabin when you went aboard these boats?

Wright:

Oh, yes. Now that's the time I went and ran into the cabin. I went to Baltimore alone that time. It was the little bull then. That's when I went in my cabin and locked the door. And you know, they had cabins, single or double; you know, they opened right into the next cabin. But they were nice boats. And oh, I used to go on one, the Claiborne, over from Claiborne, over that way, too. I was on that the day the Allentown blew up. [Note: no known Claiborne as a steamer in the U.S.]

Dodds:

Oh, were you?

Wright:

It was straight up from us we were some distance. But this awful noise came, and I was out on deck. And went up, and we wondered what in the world when we got to Baltimore. That's what had happened. We rode right over where it had happened.

Dodds:

Is that right. Ammunition ship.

Wright:

How many years?

Dodds:

Ammunition. She was loading ammunition.

Wright: Oh.

Dodds:

You mentioned, speaking of explosions, in the book, the boiler explosion here down in 1898.

Wright:

Here? Well that was straight down the street. And that's when my uncle was scalded pretty bad. And one died. and I don't know why I saw the whole thing, but I was about 8 years old when I saw that. I was out on the front steps. I heard this noise and looked down, and it was right ... and I saw that. The tank it went out and went in the boiler. Whatever it was it landed in the river. 'Course they never bothered to ... never took it out. It sat there.

Dodds:

Ya, and I think I remember reading that the Minnie wheeler was on the way up when that happened. And they saw it from the boat.

Wright:

Not very far.

Dodds:

That must have been a big excitement for the town, when that happened.

Wright:

It was. 'Course it's just a little village. But, people like it. I like it anyhow. But I just remember those things, so...

Dodds:

Well, something like that it probably sticks in your memory for a long time, I'd imagine.

Wright:

I also remember that time when I went to get my glasses. As I said I was seven. I never had been to Baltimore before then. So, when we got to Baltimore, you know how the trolley cars are, were going to go over to the street, Broad, not Broad, but what is it, down by the river? The big... its a wide street.

Dodds:

Pratt?

Wright:

Pratt. I don't know where it was but we got out then, we were waiting, and 'course me, I let go of mom's hand and ran over. And then, mom couldn't see me, you see the car was passing. Mom said "Don't ever do that again, it's dangerous." Well, I didn't know it was dangerous, dummy (laughter).

Dodds:

It must have been quite something going to a big city like Baltimore, from a town like Choptank.

Wright:

Well you see, I just wasn't thinking. I just wanted to get on the other side, so that's the way you get there. She'll tell you I'm nuts (laughter).

Johnson:

No, You're not.

Wright:

I like to think of those things, too. It seems to me that there was something that I wanted to be sure and tell you but I don't know what. But I think it was about Jordy [Georgie?], building.

Dodds:

A model?

Wright:

Because he was always doing something. And as I say, he was just a good person. And everybody liked George.

Dodds:

Why did he move up to Philadelphia?

Wright:

Well, when they were married.... I don't know that. Because his wife was a girl that my aunt and uncle had raised, because her mother and father were dead. So, I don't know, but they did move to Philadelphia. But, I saw him once after that. And he lived right down the street from me. My dad built the house he lived in.

Dodds;

Is that right? Is the house still there?

Wright:

Yes. Its next to... it isn't next to the church, but the next one. Its sort of a lower house, but its on down the street. And it isn't next to the church, there's one between that. They may have taken it away, but there's a church, and they made it into a home. And the one on this side, and the one on this side. and tell you the truth, I don't know whether they've torn that ...I don't think so. I think its still there. Sort of a low house.

Dodds:

I'll have a look at it on my way out. When Captain Ross wrote for the newspaper, he got a lot of information from the log books on the Minnie wheeler. Do you know what's happened to those log books?

I've been trying to find out.

Wright:

No. but I saw in here something about Captain ... what was that? I read that this morning. Something happened to the Minnie Wheeler, and a lawyer went, and when he went, he asked them if they had a log, and they didn't.

Dodds:

Ya. And then, of course then they started keeping log books after that. Apparently when the company was sold, when Captain Wheeler died, that's when the log books were given to Captain Ross. But I've been trying to find out what's happened to them since. But I haven't been able to yet.

Wright:

But Captain Perry, what was the first Captain, and he lived right out here on a farm. He was a nice person. Boy, that's been a day.

Dodds:

Do you remember being up in the wheel house with Captain Perry?

Wright:

Oh, yes. They'd let you....

End of Side 1

Wright:

...First when I was up I said "how does that go?" I was talking to the Captain. And Captain Clarkham was one of our Captains. And he says "you wanna drive?", and I says "sure!" So, I got in and I even came 'round this point.

Dodds:

Is that right?

Wright:

He told me just how to do it, just where to turn, and that's why, I guess, I was nosy. But I'm glad, because I remember those things.

Dodds:

You have a good memory. That was many years ago. How big was the steering wheel?

Wright:

It was big enough. It was pretty good size.

Dodds:

About as big as you were back then wasn't it?

Wright:

And then the Cambridge... no I didn't drive that, Captain Clark did and Captain Ross. Well he was a mate, but they called him Captain. Well now, what is the difference? The mate's the next to the Captain, isn't he?

Dodds:

Right.

Wright:

But, he was just a good person to have around. But, these nurses that stay with me.... I fell, about three weeks ago. That's why she is here. And I have another one. The Doctor told me that I couldn't stay here by myself. Go, of course, I had to give up that. But, we kid and carry on....

Dodds:

That's good.

Wright:

No, she's a nice person.

Dodds:

Keeping an eye on you.

Wright:

And she was looking. I said I looked about the letter, and I know it wasn't mailed, but it's not so, it was mailed. And if you can read it, you're lucky.

Dodds:

Your hand writing is better than mine. I'll go over it to see if there was anything that you mentioned here.... You mentioned it here in your letter, that at some point the Minnie Wheeler only went as far as Windy Hill. She stopped going up at the way.

Wright:

Well, that was after the bridge. I can't remember. I think that maybe we didn't have the Minnie Wheeler then, because when they built, they brought new boats, 2 or 3 different kinds; big ones. But, I know after that, she didn't go up. But she could get through, and she went clear up to Denton. And I think she parked at Denton.

Dodds:

When was the railroad bridge built, do you remember?

Wright:

No, I don't remember that year. I remember it was built, but I don't remember what year. But, that was what stopped the bigger boats. They went to Denton and laid in Denton. But, after that I don't know.... I know they got through it once, but I don't know if they ever tried it again. It was just too close for comfort. They were nice boats, too. Well, what ever happened to Captain Wheeler?

Dodds:

He died in 1899. He was still fairly young.

Wright:

Well. I was only 9 years old.

Dodds:

Were you? He died, and 'course, the company, the Wheeler Company was never incorporated. So, when he died, the company just died with him. And then the BC&A Line...

Telephone rings. interruption in tape.

Dodds:

You were saying about the BC&A line. We just mentioned the BC&A Line. And when he died, his three ships....

Wright:

Oh, that's right. And it did, that's true.

Dodds:

and the ships were sold to the BC&A Line. The Minnie Wheeler, the Chesapeake, and the Easton.

Wright:

Was the Chesapeake just the size of the Minnie Wheeler?

Dodds:

About similar size, ya.

Wright:

They were very slender boats, but they were comfortable. First time I ever went on ... as you go up the stairs there's a mirror. I said "mom, there's a girl exactly like me." (laughter) Oh boy, I guess I was a case.

Dodds:

Do you remember any thing else about the inside?

Wright:

It was fixed up real nice. It was comfortable. It had... It might have been the Minnie, with a red carpet. and there was carpet on the step as you went up. I remember that. I thought, my that's pretty carpet. But when I told mama about that other... it might have been the wheeler, I don't know.

Dodds:

What about the dining room?

Wright:

The dining room was very nice, clean ... white table cloths.

Dodds:

...silver...

Wright:

Ya. And you could eat with the Captain if you wanted to.

Dodds:

Sounds nice.

Wright:

It was nice.

Dodds:

Waiters ... Did you have waiters?

Wright:

Oh, yes.

Dodds:

Do you remember any of the food they served on board?

Wright:

Not especially. I just remember they had good food.

Dodds:

I think that back when the Wheeler Line was operating, the fare from Hillsboro to Baltimore was only 50 cents.

Wright:

I know. It, the fare wasn't much.

Dodds:

Pretty cheap then. I think the meals were extra, but they were only...

Wright:

But, of course, in my day they had the canning factory up later years, and the boat still stopped at his wharf. He had a wharf there. And, I was thinking about the food. I think I went to Baltimore from there once. I'm not sure. Boy, I wouldn't want to go to Baltimore now.

Dodds:
Not like it used to be.

Wright:
But, anyhow, I've been.

Dodds:
You've been the nice way, instead of driving in all the traffic. Instead you went by steamboat and got there a little bit quicker.

Wright
But, everybody traveled in the steamers. My dad, he bought cans in Baltimore, and I'm not sure they brought some, but I know, they used to take their sailboat, and sail to Baltimore and get loaded.

Dodds:
Do you remember the name of the boat?

Wright:
No, I don't. He built a boat, and it was named Leon. That's my youngest brother. And it was a yellow up by the top, but we used to ride in it. And go to Cambridge shopping, if we wanted to. That was later, but we did go up to Denton in it, too, one time.

Dodds:
I thought that maybe your father's boat may have been named after you.

Wright:
No, he didn't name it after me.

Dodds:
Like the Minnie Wheeler. Like the Minnie Wheeler was named after Captain Wheeler's daughter. But, I don't know why, but the name of Minnie Wheeler, I always liked that story. It was a true story, but I always liked it. But the other boats were nice. All of them were nice steamboats.

Dodds:
I haven't been able to find, so far, a picture of Minnie Wheeler, the lady. Have you ever seen a picture of her?

Wright:
No. Only that little one in there looks just like, the drawing,

looks just like the girl did it for here. She did it one time. But, I don't think she did that one.

Dodds:

You don't think so?

Wright:

Well, she drew them both. Boy oh boy, that looks just like the old man. You know when I was a kid, I asked how a steamboat could go all over the place and not sink, But if I jumped overboard I would sink. (laughter) I like the water good enough, but I like it where it is.

Dodds:

You don't like to be in it, particularly, do you?

Wright:

Well, I could swim. Everybody could swim. But I used to swim where I could touch the bottom. So, I wasn't a good swimmer. But, my brother he would dive like.... I think I was a little afraid of it.

Dodds:

With the school so close to the water, I notice, you must have been able to see everything that was going on.

Wright:

You could see the water. I guess I was a busybody. After all, that's the way you learn. And I learned a plenty. And I could've learned a lot more if I had sense enough. Oh boy. And then this is the book that a friend of mine, she came down and talked with me one time...

Dodds:

It's a nice book.

Wright:

You have a book like that.

Dodds:

It's a nice book, ya.

Wright:

I thought of another boat name, besides that, and I can't think of it, but you notice that I got Minnie Wheeler marked first.

Dodds:

Well let me see what else I....

Wright:

Talbot, Avalon, Minnie Wheeler, Cambridge....

Dodds:
How 'bout the Calvert?

Wright:
And the Easton.

Dodds:
And the Easton. Now that was an old one, an old Wheeler Line ship.
Ya, she was an old Wheeler Line ship.

Wright:
Now are you going to write a book?

Dodds:
I'm likely to write an article for the museum. Because, on the Wheeler Line, because that line, as you know, was the only steamboat line based here on the Eastern Shore. All the others, operated out of Baltimore, but the Wheeler line operated out of Hillsboro. And not much has been written on the Wheeler Line, so I thought I'd like to do an article. And I've been speaking to people, and getting some information. I don't know if you know a Mr. Milton Beaven of Hillsboro.

Wright:
No.

Dodds:
He's like you, probably one of the oldest residents of Hillsboro. And he has quite, he remembers quite a .information...and some photographs.

Wright:
I told her, I suspect you already had all this.

Dodds:
I had some of this, but what I didn't ... I never, As I mentioned when I first came, never spoke to somebody who has actually ridden on the Minnie Wheeler. And there aren't many people around who did do that.

Wright:
We used to ride on it.

Dodds:
So that's good in itself. Plus I didn't know that much about Captain Ross. I didn't know that he lived here in Choptank.

Wright:

Ya. They lived right down the street from me. And they had two girls. I don't know whether they had a boy or not. Then they went to Philadelphia after that. I don't know why they went to Philadelphia, but that's what they did.

Dodds:

I was reading in the book about some other captains that lived here. Ben Thomas.

Wright:

Captain who?

Dodds:

Captain Thomas. Ben Thomas.

Wright:

Oh, Thomas. Captain Thomas.

Dodds:

Edward Welford.

Wright:

Woolworth.

Dodds:

Captain Welford.

Wright:

Welford. I remember him.

Dodds:

And you mentioned Captain Cochrane.

Wright:

Oh, ya, I remember Captain Cochrane. He was a nice person.

Dodds:

So, you had quite a few captains living here in Choptank.

Wright:

We sure did. Oh, there was a Captain Morgan over here, and a Captain Dunham. Now, Captain Dunham, that's been a long time ago, because he lived in the house clear down to the river on the left, that's the first they put in Choptank. And he was Captain Dunham. And Captain Stafford. We had a lot of 'em.

Dodds:

Ya. You did for a small town. You had a lot of captains. I believe one of your relatives was a captain. Do you have a Captain Wright?

Wright:
Captain Wright, Leon.

Dodds:
Leon. Right. Now he was with the Maryland Company, I believe.
Maryland Steamboat Company?

Wright:
Ya.

Dodds:
Ya.

Wright:
And I might have had more, 'cause I've got a lot of relatives. The
Wrights are spread everywhere.

Dodds:
Looking in this book, they seem to be spread all over Choptank.

Wright:
Well they're all over. California, Texas, I've got relatives up
north where it's chilly, in Honolulu.

Dodds:
Wow they're all over the place.

Wright:
Where is that up north that's real chilly?

Johnson:
Poland. Up in Poland. Canada. Poland.

Wright:
Not Canada, but the one there. Oregon, Canada, I don't know. It's
up that way. But, they're all over.

Dodds:
Ya. They really got around. Are there many Wrights left in
Choptank? You're the only one left?

Wright:
Only guy.

Dodds:
Well, Miss Wright is there anything else that you can think of that
might help me?

End of Interview