

Interview with Mr. Otis Turner of Bellevue, MD, 12/18/87
Present were R. Dodds and J. Liener. Mr. Turner has been
a waterman all his life and at the age of eighteen was a
schooner captain onboard the Stephen A. Douglass belonging
to Wm. H. Valliant Co. of Bellevue, . MD. His family were
also captains of their schooners S.J. Delan and Thomas H.
Jones. During the Spring Capt. Turner went up to New
Jersey and worked on the Delaware River boats carrying seed
oysters.

see also oral history files 1-28, 2-4

Interview with Mr. Otis Turner 12/18/87. Present were Mr. Turner, Richard Dodds, and Josef Liener.

Dodds:
Where'd you load wheat?

Turner:
We'd load off a scow up one of these creeks, or a wharf, or up Broad Creek.

Liener:
You could drive right out with a horse and wagon.

Turner:
Ya, and get everybody loading.

Dodds:
It amazed me, how far up you can get in some of these creeks.

Liener:
You go up on high weater.

Turner:
Let me tell you, some of these creeks had more water in them then than they do now.

Liener:
Sure.

Dodds:
Ya.

Turner:
You take Harris Creek; I was tonging up there the other day. I asked those boys, they didn't know; three white boys. I said "Do you boys know where you're tonging at?" And they said "No, where?" I said "You're ... [?] ... now. I said ... [?] ... I said "what?" I said "Sure." I said "You notice you go up Harris Creek, you may have to go way over there to the right, go up." We used to go right up by that ... [?] That's where I was at. The stream done closed up. Man that was a long while ago.

Liener:
Now, look at Sharp's Island. Its gone.

Turner:
An old colored fella told me once ... [?] The Valliant's used to have a big hotel. This Valliant down here. His father had a big

hotel on ... [?] ... , and then they had a bridge, but from Black Walnut over on Avalon Island. That's what he told me. And I said "What's you say?" I thought he meant.... He said "No, I'm talking about Ross's Island. There's a man down here named Stewart, was the master. And he said ...[?]....

Dodds:

So, you never got much time when you were in Baltimore to do much.

Turner:

What's you mean?

Dodds:

When you were in Baltimore, sailed in there.

Turner:

Ya, had plenty of time there. Sometimes I had to wait for things.

Dodds:

Oh, did you? Had a little time to get into the city.

Turner:

Ya, I spent a lot of my young days there in Baltimore City.

Dodds:

Must have been a busy place down there by the harbor, with the steamboats ... dredge boats ... cargo...

Turner:

Sailboats, all kinds four mast, five mast schooners. The Hamlin, the W.T. Paul[?]. One time I wanted to go on Jenny Flood Fraizer.

Liener:

Ya, and the old Flood Saloon.

Turner:

I went down in the cabin. Captain had a compass, he just laid in his bed and looked at the compass. And had a self-player piano on. I don't know how many decks she had on her.

Liener:

I think three, wasn't it?

Turner:

Ya, three decks. She had.... I don't know how many jibs she had. ...Four masts. She had a foremast about 60 or 70 feet. ...50 foot boom.

Dodds:

Big boat.

Turner:

She'd unload half a dock. She'd go from there to Buenos Aires, bringing coal from Buenos Aires South America. Leave there to go to Chile. Load a salt peter take to Hong Kong, China.

Dodds:

So you did have the opportunity to go deep water.

Turner:

I would have, but the old man wouldn't let me go. He wanted me to ... [?] What do you call the people on board the boat. But I wanted it, but he was "No, I don't think so." Said he's going around the Horn, he told me. Man, oh man, he was something, that old Captain. He was a Norwegian Captain, though.

Dodds:

Do you like your life on the water?

Turner:

Oh, I love water.

Dodds:

Never regretted it?

Turner:

That's all I got. Well, I got 6 boys and a girl. One boy he ... [?].... Up there in New Haven. Another boy got down here to Saudi Arabia. He was a Colonel in the Air Force. They sent him over there and start training them Saudi Arabians. He's still over there. I got another boy, the Engineer, He put in the Rapid Transit System in Atlanta.

Dodds:

You've done well.

Turner:

I got another boy. He's an accountant for the government. He owns a home out there on South River. Then I got another boy.... I spent all my money educating children. So, I ain't got no money, but....

Dodds:

You've done well for your family.

Turner:

I put 'em out in the world so they could have something to fend for themselves. So, I don't feel bad about that.

Dodds:

Did any of them want to follow the water, like you?

Turner:

No, boys they all got big jobs.

Dodds:

They planning to come back here for Christmas?

Turner:

Sometimes they come home. I don't know if that boy be home from Saudi Arabia or not. Sometimes he does, sometimes he don't. He was making a ton of money over in Saudi Arabia. I don't know whether he still is. Maurice called me from Atlanta, said Gene got another job. Someone said he was making at one time \$106 an hour over there.

Interruption in Tape. No further recording on cassette. Recording resumes on side 1 of second cassette.

Dodds:

Which one?

Turner:

Steven A. Douglas.

Dodds:

Steven A. Douglas?

Turner:

And another boat he had Thomas A. Jones. My brother, he was Captain. She was a big 200-ton boat. And my brother used to be Captain of the S.J. Delan.

Dodds:

Ya, that's the one we were talking about.

Turner:

S.J. Delan, and he used to go all over the place in her; run oysters to Crisfield. I used to oyster and fish. I was telling you that last night coming from St. Michaels. I can recall, he was talking about a sea tragedy, with all this modern equipment; and why did they have it? He said "Back in them olden days they didn't have it." I remember my father running oysters from Crisfield. That's a job I just liked. I really did. He was a tough old man. When you got them oysters.... Crisfield was a whole lot tougher than down here. Take a little out of this oyster house. Take a

little out of that. Get all loaded. Get ready. When he got all loaded, northwest, or wherever it was at, put her right on up the Bay. And he would put ... [?] ... on a boat. He would holler "Hey barge, you asleep?" See any lights? If he see those gleaming lights coming up the Bay, he wouldn't attempt to cross that big boat, that outside boat. He would go about. The wing was fair, he would try to keep in line, but above it. But if he was tacking up that Bay, no he wouldn't. He'd go back. He wouldn't try to pick up another light. He said as long as you see one light on a boat, you're out of danger. When you see two lights, that boat's bearing down on you. He wouldn't attempt it. He said that there was so much stuff, systems nowadays that he wonders why the boats run together out to sea. I can recall that bridge down there ...ta...

Dodds:

Oh, down Tampa.

Turner:

Tampa Bridge. And I said I do give credit to this bridge up here. They make them boats lay outside. They don't let l em attempt to come up here on their equipment, until they can see how to come through there. Now on a foggy morning coming through the Tampa Bay Buoy.... I can tell about the experience I had on.... That's affright.... When it come right down to a pinpoint, that's a lot of people down in that Bay, Tampa Bay that morning. That ship was faulty. What is a bridge to a big ship? That ship, she just take the bridge, just mow it down, keep going, but that ain't the point. There are a lot of people down. Now she's planning on that equipment. There's equipment that might have pointed her out. I remember one time ... [?] ... type of equipment like.... I'm not... [?] ... I'm a Captain. I first went ...I put 51 ... [?] ... up on Delaware Bay.

Dodds:

Up on the Delaware?

Turner:

I never.... Now all....

Interruption in tape.

Turner:

We were working there, and I kept telling the old gentleman, we had a white old gent, a nice old fella, he lived up in Jersey somewhere, he come back in, and he coming down there. Well I would take notice of a lot of things he did. I didn't say nothing. I

notice a man when he does things. He was coming down. he was holding the boat down. That was alright. We was going to the planting ground. You know, in Jersey they have plowed planting ground. Captain was in it. Got up that morning. had to take the drudges in by hand. No winder. Wouldn't pull. So the other fella, he'd gone down. I say "Captain show us, we been running on up to pick up those stakes." He said "What do you mean?" I said "You know we got to run on up there and pick up some of them stakes." He said "I'm taking the right course, you set up a ...[?]. And I said "Where's it at? where's the can I set to track the compass off of? And I said "There it is." I said "I know what your problem is. The way you been counted, I can't check her out and go the other way. I'll check her out it is pin point. Whatever the course is; time her put her there. That's how simple I do it. Everybody has a way of doing it. I'm condemning the way you did it. There's a right way and a wrong way, in anything you're gonna do. So, he went on, and got down there on that mark. So, I says "Captain Joe let's just take this step. You just sit on down here south east or south. How about putting some west into it?" He said "What's you mean?" I said "Turn her on west, due west. Let's sail that for a while." He was steering the boat, and I was standing by the rail. Next thing you know up come stakes. Up come stakes. And I knew, and I finally picked up. I said "Now let her go down to any course you want." Then we went down there, and we found it there. In a pea soup fog. There was the man, laying there crossways in the ground. Ok. So, after he got there he know where the stakes all around be planted. He got ready to go into the river, And I said "Captain Joe, seems like me and you got it tied up in your head this morning." I said "Listen, I been coming up here a good many springs, and the course in from Egg Island, Bar buoy, to the mouth of the river, is a north east by east course, all I ever needed. He said "Boy you take the boat, I'm tired of you nagging at me. I said "Ok, I'll take it. We got half way in, two thirds of the way in, and the fog lifted, and there was East Point light there, and there was my follow point right to the river.

Liener:

You was running a southwest line, wasn't you?

Turner:

That's right. No what we was planting at was to the southwest line. We went below that to come in from Maurice River. So, we come into the Maurice River. And Honey, he said "I've been coming in here ... [?] " I don't know how you been coming. I only ... [?] ... from Egg Island Bar Buoy to the mouth of Maurice River. Was a northeast by east course. That's all I ever knew.

Dodds:

Joe knows that area very well. He's from New Jersey.

Turner:

He must know it too. I hear him talking about a southwest line. Southwest line is there at False Egg Island.

Liener:

That's right.

Turner:

It all runs off. That's the southwest line that they have by the plant. By....

Liener:

Over there at Maurice River Cove.

Turner:

Ya. Come up to Maurice River Cove. Ya, I see he's from that area.

Dodds:

Ya, he knows that area.

Turner:

Have you been Captaining boats down there too?

Liener:

No, I just knocked around a little bit. Did you dredge up there in the Delaware very many years?

Turner:

The Delaware Bay?

Liener:

Ya.

Turner:

Well as far as that's concerned, I dredged from the ... 'Course you weren't allowed across the southwest line, because that was the planting line, but all up on the new beds, up on Bennie's...

Liener:

Up on Bennie's and Arnold Point?

Turner:

Arnold Point filled up. Going up toward Mad Horse.

Liener:

Ya, Mad Horse Creek, and Stove Creek.

Turner:

Stove Creek. That's where the.... It used to be a great fishing area at one time. You know, I always started higher. Lotta fellas,

like today, run boats for buoys, you know, put buoys overboard. I wasn't taught that a way. Always taught to tong oysters by landmarks. I remember one time my nephew, and we was tonging up by the shore here, and it was a little slim place just about from here to that house. I guess it run up there about a mile. Fella would hit some of it now and then. But the only thing I had was a mark on Ross Island buoy, up on a clump of trees. And boy every time we went out there.... So, we go out there, and catch our limit. Get out there, and they'd be out there, boy as big as you want. And he said "Uncle Otis how?" And I said "Never mind, this will be on the oysters." And there found that one fella come 'round one morning, come to throwing buoys. White boys come down from Cambridge that got 'em. Buy we came back and gathered up all the buoys off that place. It wasn't much wider than here to that white house. It ran up there two miles. Just oysters in a strip. My father taught me that when you toss a buoy overboard, that everybody gonna. When you got your landmark, nobody but you.

Dodds:

Nobody else knows.

Turner:

That's true, too. One time I was tonging oysters in St. Michaels, out in the Miles River, and was on a hill out there. I had a brick in the boat. Had a whole lot of white things on it, like barnacles, it had on it. My buddy came over and said...[?].... And I said "Let's don't argue about it. I'm going to throw a brick overboard, and I guarantee we'll catch it during the day." The fourth lick, he caught it.

Transcription Terminated Due to Co prehension Difficulties.