

Interview with Alex Spencer of St. Michaels, 3/3/88. Present were R. Dodds.

Topics discussed included recollections of St. Michaels: people, places and events. Alex Spencer was born in 1912 and first came to St. Michaels for school. Alex had a good memory for businesses and people in town.

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Spencer:

...But they lived shortly after my father was on the railroad, and he stopped, because of being away from home so much. He went to farming, and we lived ... well, one time we lived in Royal Oak, and another time we at Doncaster. That's where everything went. When we came; when we came, sent away to school. In those days there were little country schools. There was one in Kirkham, and one ... [?1..., and I guess there wasn't any between Easton and St. Michaels. They had a regular 7th grade diploma. Farm kids, or whoever, were not required to go after 7th grade. Most farm kids, that was it, you know? There was no transportation furnished. But the year I graduated from Royal Oak School in 7th grade they put school busses on. We lived at Doncaster, which was only three miles from Easton, and, of course it was probably 8 or 9 miles because we didn't have the new bridge, had to go around. But anyway, there were so many kids going to Easton that they started to segregate, and sent 'em to St. Michaels. And believe it or not, born and raised, I never been in St. Michaels before the first day of school.

Dodds:

When were you born.

Spencer:

1912, April 1912.

Dodds:

And then you came to school down here.

Spencer:

Came to school, went to high school.

Dodds:

The old high school.

Spencer:

Ya. Well, It wasn't that one, even. It was the one down by the Green.

Dodds:

By the square, ya.

Spencer:

Ya. While I was going to high school I worked at the A&P store in Easton. Then got a job down here, while I was still working at the

A&P store, in the Summer months. I worked in a drugstore here a couple nights a week, while going to school. That first summer I stopped working in the A&P store and worked in the drug store full-time.

Dodds:

What drug store was that?

Spencer:

It's no longer here. It was called St. Michaels Pharmacy, and it was owned by Harry Liebowitz, who was a father, had a dry goods and notions store. Melvin was the brother. He still lives here. He's not very active.

Dodds:

Melvin Liebowitz? Ya. One of them was a photographer, wasn't he? 'Cause I saw some picturers that I thought a Liebowitz had taken.

Spencer:

It could have been Harry who was the druggist. He left. He was not married so he was in the draft in World War Two. I don't think Mel would have ever taken pictures, but Harry could have very well. He was an educated boy, very polished.

Dodds:

Where was the drugstore?

Spencer:

It was right where the Christmas Tree, or whatever they call that store, is.

Dodds:

The Christmas Shop?

Spencer:

Ya. There's an alley between the ACME, there's where it was. And he did a ... there was plenty of business for two drugstores here. Had been before, and there were since. There were a lot of these boarding houses. There was Pasadena at Royal Oak. There was Oakwood Park Inn at Church Neck; Cockey's at Claiborne, and Edmonds at ... is it below Bozman? Stella Bridge's was down there.

Dodds:

In Bozman?

Spencer:

Ya. And I'm sure there was another.

Dodds:

Was there any in St. Michaels?

Spencer:

Not that type, really. There was a hotel here, an old hotel.

Dodds:

Ya, that's the Hotel Chelsea.

Spencer:

Chelsea, Ya.

Dodds:

I've got that a 1927 fire that burned it.

Spencer:

And then Elmer's Mother ran a boarding house, Elmer Parsons. And then there was another old lady that had a boarding house here. Her husband had died, and she had a number of children, and she ran a boarding house. The house was originally; the one she had when I was there, and then later she had another one in town. It was right where, the lady that has the old brick hotel built that complex behind her there. If you turn down beside the Maryland National Bank, going down towards the water, it would be off to your right, right behind the old hotel. The Maryland National Bank is on one corner, and this....

Dodds:

Ok. Did that house burn down? Is that the one I'm thinking of? At one time the Benson family owned it.

Spencer:

I don't remember it burning. I think they tore it down. It laid idle there for a while, I know, and maybe they did have a fire.

Dodds:

I think I know the boarding house you're talking about.

Spencer:

That was a right good size building.

Dodds:

I have never seen a picture of the Hotel Chelsea. Was it a brick building?

Spencer:

No, it was frame. It was German siding, and was a building that would have been the same type of building that the gingerbread house is on the corner. It was somewhat like that. It was three.

Dodds:

A three story house?

Spencer:

Ya. And it had a little store attached, and that in later years it; I don't know what it was originally; I don't think it was ever their office; I think their office was; I think their office was in the room to the left when you went in; it was when I knew it; and this little store was to the right facing it; and right after the Prohibition, when beer came back, my brother had a little beer parlor in there; and did very well making money. It was a hellish job. I remember getting people out of there at night. He'd want to go home.

Dodds:

Want to close down the bar?

Spencer:

But, they were primarily local yokels, or guests at the hotel.

Dodds:

That hotel burned, didn't it?

Spencer:

Yes.

Dodds:

Do you remember when that was?

Spencer:

No. I don't think it was being used at that time. Harold Dawson had a real estate office at one time in there. I'm reasonably sure it was before World War Two.

Dodds:

Oh, is it that long?

Spencer:

Ya, I think it was.

Dodds:

That was the only hotel in St. Michaels that I know of.

Spencer:

Ya, that's the only one I know of. I've heard that building, where they have the shop in now called the Brick Hotel, and I guess originally that might have been one.

Dodds:

Ya, I think many many years....

Spencer:

That was an old building.

Dodds:

There have been a lot of changes on the road, as you know better than anybody. I was looking, we do have some photos of the buildings along here. That bank, St. Michaels Bank, for instance; there was a nice three-story building there.

Spencer:

The County Trust Company was also three story.

Dodds:

Where was that?

Spencer:

That was where the bar is now. Its where the restaurant is on one side, and the bar is on the other.

Dodds:

Carpenter Street.

Spencer:

That was a three-story building, and the bank was on the first floor, and the telephone company was on the second. They had their switchboard there.

Dodds:

I've had people tell me that they used to call the switchboard to find out what was playing in the theatre across the road.

Spencer:

Oh, ya. It was a very folksy kind of a thing. I remember working in the drug store, and you'd call and ask 'em various things; where somebody lived, or if they were home....

Dodds:

I guess at that time everybody knew each other, and the operator knew....

Spencer:

Ya, and I know that they would be very helpful, and it seemed to be a part of their job. Now today with the new law they say "I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to give that information out."

Dodds:

Or you speak to a computer, ya. I noticed too, Alex, down from the bank there was a blacksmith's shop. Was that operating down here on Church Road?

Spencer:

Ya, I knew when that operated. There was also one on Front Street, and its where the ACME parking lot is now. That was a big old

building there, before the citizens got together and bought that, and tore that down, and made a store for the ACME. That was, a man owned the building and rented it by the name of Radcliffe, and he was an undertaker, and they had a livery stable there, and kept horses there, and rented them, and a blacksmith. Also in recent years Joe Hunt had the one that would be right next door to the little building the church is talking about tearing down.

Dodds:

Ya. That's indicated on here.

Spencer:

After I left the drugstore I went to work for W.A. Jess [?] and Sons, who had a lumber yard here. And Mr. Hunt used to make rake ... he made the head of the rake. And he also made the little tool that you put in a brace that would turn out a little gizmo that would act as a pin for the shaft. Now they have somebody, I think down in Crisfield, that makes a brass one. In those days they were made on dogwood. He'd turn the thing in this brace 'till it was the size of your little finger, and maybe that long. It would go through, and he would saw a slit in the middle of it, and he would drive a little wedge. And the other end of it, it would be about that big around, so it wouldn't go through. And I knew so much of that, that I went to work for Jess and Sons, and we sold rake shaft lumber. We used to get a car every year from Georgia five quarter by twelve wide, and anything from 25 feet to 40 feet.

Dodds:

What kind of lumber were you buying?

Spencer:

It was Georgia Pine. You could cut those things out, they wouldn't be any bigger than that, and they wouldn't break, even 40 feet long. And old Mr. Hunt was a nice old fella. I was very fond of him. And we had a sawmill, too. And he'd say "Boys, if you run across any dogwood, be sure to bring it, too. That wouldn't be any trouble, we'd always be tearing down dogwood trees, or cutting them so the truck could get in the woods. And they'd not be bigger around, and it seemed that, most trees have to get some size before they have any real value, but these dogwoods were just as strong. And we sold 'em the lumber to make the rake shafts. he made the heads to go on them, and the pins for them. He did other things.

Dodds:

He could do wheelwright type of work?

Spencer:

By the time I knew him there wasn't too much of that left, he did. There were a few people on a farm who kept a horse that they came to town, or bring wood or something. And he would probably put

shoes on those, and it seems to me that he used to make some metal arm things, like for a fence, or a gate, or something like that. He went there every day, and for many years did something. He had the old-time Fords that you crank by hand, you know, you never had anything mechanical.

Dodds:

When did he stop working?

Spencer:

We went to the business in about 1940, and I think he was still there then. See, once or twice we had him make something for the fireplace, or something. I was only in the service for one or two years, and most of that time overseas, and a lot of those old fellas died while I was away. It was only two years, but they were old enough to die, so they did. Helen Spencer, my brother's wife, and Callaway Spencer's wife were his granddaughters.

Dodds:

Where was the lumber business located?

Spencer:

It was on the corner of Railroad Avenue. Lee Reese had a filling station right on the corner, but this was right behind that, and from that all the way to the street; what was that street that runs behind the supermarket?

Dodds:

Freemont.

Spencer:

Freemont; it ran all the way to Freemont Street, and part of the old building is still there. Some carpenter rents it, and his office was there, and it was a two story building. The sheds were there, and some small machines, a planer. Going on out railroad Avenue, off to your left where Melvin Liebowitz, and I don't know who else lives, he owned all that land out there. It must have been maybe 10 acres, and we had a sawmill out there. And we had a very large closed shed, and open sheds that we used to put green lumber in that the air would dry. He came here from Virginia after they cut out all the timber where he lived, the Rappahannock River. Then he came here, and he, I guess before that he asked Adkins to come here. And they didn't have a place in Easton. And they were Salisbury. They furnished most of the doors and windows, and they'd get the other right out of the woods. A number of sawmills would bring 'em back. He built a big old boat called West Coast. And he had scows. And if you were going to build a house, he'd put the whole kit and caboodle on this boat and one or two scows, and take it to you, and unload at your farm, and then you'd have the house built. Then later the carpenters here were just tradesmen. They had

never had educated themselves on how to figure a job, or estimate it. They'd just come in and build you a house or a barn. So, it was the beginning of having these new people come in. They'd want more sophisticated houses, and they'd at least want to have at least some rough idea of what it was going to cost. So, Mr. Jesse[?] was there. He had gone to the University of Missouri, and he was an educated man. He would do contract work. And the way he did it and kept his faith with the carpenters, he'd figure on a job, and tell the customer what it was going to cost, and he'd have these carpenters work for him. depending on the size of the job there would be 7 or 8 or more. Each Saturday, and they worked saturday mornings, he'd pay them their wages. It was kind of standard. When I was working there before '40, the best of 'em would be 50 cents, and it would go all the way down to a quarter. And with the understanding that we'd charge all of their labors to the job as though it was going to be on a materials cost plus basis. Then we'd charge all of the materials on the job, and when we finished up, if there was anything left over, we'd divide it up with the carpenters. So, it worked like a dilly. We built the Stevensville School, the Easton Armory; we built Hugh Henry's house, which at that time was one of the nicest houses in the county. We built the house that Judge North now lives in. We built that for Mr. Quillins[?]. And we built a number of just small houses; another three or four little houses that look almost alike, we built those. The house Dodson Taylor lived in, we built that.

Dodds:

Any shops or businesses?

Spencer:

Well, we.... I don't remember building any new ones, but there were always these old buildings that were right on the ground. There was always a lot of repair. He was an unusual fella. Rough old character, he swore by note. I remember I was working for him when Stewart across the river has these castles, you've probably seen them, well, he came here. He was sort of a mystery man. He had a gate keeper, and you couldn't get in there, and big old wolf dogs, and what not. But he wanted to have a water supply. I think it was a water supply. In those days you didn't want to use the well that he had. Anyway, he ordered this big tank, a tremendous tank. It was as big as a boxcar. It was actually longer than a boxcar. And he had it come to Easton, and then proceeded to get somebody to bring it out. He should have worked that out before he ordered that thing. So, nobody would touch it. You couldn't get it through the streets, and it wouldn't turn, and so he was running frantic ads every week in the newspaper, And so one day Mr. Tessie says "Let's go up and look at that thing. So, we rode up there. I had a little pickup. Every two or three years he'd buy me a pickup, and I'd use it ... I'd do service jobs with it. So, we went up, and he said "We can move that. It won't cost us much," either. So he said "Lets go

down the road." So, we went down to Newcomb. He said "If we get the railroad to bring the thing down here, let's park it on that bridge for an hour. I'll take the West Coast." It's an old big tow boat. So, we had to look it over real good first, and then go to Baltimore, and buy a lot of plugs to plug up... there were a lot of holes in it, but they were threaded holes. Said "we wont get 'em to bring it down here until we get the plugs up." There were some as big as probably three inches. We got these plugs, and we put 'em in her. I forgot the price he quoted, but it probably was \$1500. It wasn't very much. But at any rate, we wanted to be sure we had insurance coverage. Unless he tipped his hand as to how he was going to do it, he couldn't get insurance coverage. Out of desperation Steward let him do it. So, he just brought her down, and we put these plugs into her, and she floated just as high....

Dodds:

Is that right?

Spencer:

We did pull the thing off, and towed it over there, and the bargain was that we would just put it there in the field where the hole was. And we got it over, and Mr. Tessie said "If you loan us that tractor while we're here, we'll put it in that hole." So they did. They had a tractor. He just put a rope around, just to turn it like a wheel. And then we had some ropes that went around it, and just lowered it in the hole. But, any rate, the man didn't want to pay us. He said "You did it too damn easy, and charged me too much." Then he said "There wasn't anybody else here knew how to do it, easy or otherwise. You're gonna pay, or we're gonna sue you." So, he paid, but he really didn't want to. He was like that. He was really quite a.... Should have been an engineer. I don't now what his courses were in college, but he knew what he was doing.

Dodds:

You mentioned the trains a couple of times. By the time that you remember the trains, was it just freight only service, or was there some passenger trains?

Spencer:

No, they still had, in the summertime they'd run some excursions, like to Ocean City. Churches would take Sunday School classes and go down there. And they still have a round table at Claiborne; not after I was married, but while I was going to school here. They had a roundhouse down there.

Dodds:

Do you remember that roundhouse?

Spencer:

Ya. They still supply the whole village with water. I think that

when the railroad was taken up here, they bought the water works, but until that time, which was only 5-6 years ago, they had to pay the railroad for the water there. Then I went to be examined, but I didn't go from here. I went from Easton. They were still running what they call a Toonerville. It looked like a streetcar, and it had a big diesel engine in the body of it. Right in where you rode you saw this big.

Dodds:

From St. Michaels?

Spencer:

They did. When I went in the service, at that time, I believe it stopped running. They might have still been running. They carried the mail, you see, and when I left here to go in the service, they still might have been running mail, but we had to take it at a certain time to meet the army regulations, and we'd pick it up in Easton. So, it stopped maybe sometime in the early 40s. So, that was a Toonerville, and it just primarily carried the mail. And then they still had the freight train, and as a matter of fact, when this college opened up here, we got the last carload of anything that came into St. Michaels. We had a carload of furniture come for us.

Dodds:

Is that right? when was that?

Spencer:

I would guess it was 12 years ago. I don't think its been longer than that. And then, Mr. Quillan, who had the flour mill here, You know a flour mill and poultry feed, he had the grain come in on it. I guess he had a car or two of soybeans come in every week come in on it.

Dodds:

The freight depot, was that up when....

Spencer:

Ya, right where they had the depot, and....

Dodds:

Was that where they had the passenger depot, also?

Spencer:

Ya. It seems to me that the old building caught fire. They had one at McDaniel, too, and they moved that building up here and used it after the fire.

Dodds:

Is that right? I didn't know that.

Spencer:

Of course in those days they had express. They shipped almost all of the oysters and seafood out by railway express.

Dodds:

What happened to the train station after it came from McDaniel? Was that torn down?

Spencer:

Well, it was there for a long time. It seems to me that someone bought that and made a house out of it. I believe it might have been Ellwood Harrison. It didn't burn. The original one burned partially, and they moved that one up here. 'Course down at Tilghman Island, George Harrison had packing houses. They put up oysters and crabs, and peas, tomatoes, and corn. And at Sherwood, Harris and Jarboe, Sherwood and McDaniel, they had a factory; they put up tomatoes. During World War Two they were the largest canner of tomatoes, this side of the Rocky Mountains.

Dodds:

They were a big business.

Spencer:

Phillips were big at Cambridge, but they were scattered all over. They, I think, developed the C-ration, made most of them for the army.

Dodds:

Down here were St. Michaels' own seafood industries. I'm sure you've been down there when the Point when the industries were still going strong, and St. Michaels Packing Company, and....

Spencer:

I don't believe that the St. Michaels packing Company ever did much with anything but tomatoes. Then they rented, and later sold, part of their plant, if not plant, land, to Harris and Jarboe. My wife's brother was the owner of that firm. And they processed the crab, and the oyster business. and then there was the George R. Caulk and Sons, which was over on the wharf though, where you now have a building, too. That's where their plant was. And they put up tomatoes. Then later they went out of that business and made cinder blocks there.

Dodds:

Ya, that's right.

Spencer:

And then, later Ed Morris, and Bivalve, big packers down in Salisbury, they bought that plant and went back in the oyster business again there. Van Lennup, and myself talked to Morris. I

was on the Utility commission. We knew that the old power plant was going to be available, and so we talked Morris into selling his plant there. There was Coulbourne and Jewett. They were black people they had a big plant. I remember being a kid in the 10th or 11th grade. We took a trip to Annapolis, and one of the places we visited was, of course we visited the State house, had a big Western Union. We went into this and they asked if we knew Coulbourne and Jewett. They were these two black men who had this seafood plant. Said they were one of their largest customers. They sent oysters all over the country, and did a lot of it by telegram, I guess before the telephone was so popular. They were there for a long time. I remember I went in the service two or three days before Thanksgiving, and the day before I went in there were two things happened, one....

End of Side One.

Spencer:

...The building burned, and then also, two or three days before I was hooking up a big old coal burning stove for Coulbourne and Jewett. It took a lot of heat to heat those old houses. They were just old things. And, of course, those oysters, they didn't want it too hot where they were. So, I was hooking up this stove, and, I can't remember his first name, Edwin Sperry's dad was putting out oysters there late in the afternoon, dropped dead in his boat. had a heart attack. I don't think I'd ever seen anyone.... I was right there. But, at any rate, they were big oyster packers.

Dodds:

Didn't old man Coulbourne live down in the house, down here where the gift shop....

Spencer:

Ya. And Jewett lived in, even bigger than that, a big house that they tore down only a few years ago.

Dodds:

I remember that.

Spencer:

Real big house.

Dodds:

My understanding was that on this street were a lot of packers, not packers, but workers living.

Spencer:
Ya, that's right.

Dodds:
Because there used to be a lot of houses up and down this road that have now disappeared, and someone told me that a lot of the people who lived down here worked on Navy Point.

Spencer:
Ya, but there was also a double-decker house, could have been fifty people living in it, right down on Navy Point.

Dodds:
Ya. We have some old slides of it. It had a little balcony on it if I am correct.

Spencer:
Ya, that's right.

Dodds:
And that was used to house the workers.

Spencer:
Ya. I remember a few years ago, one of those early storms, maybe Hazel, tore this little Honeymoon Bridge out. Some people didn't want it put back, but it had ben there so many years that the law mandated that they couldn't do away with it.

Dodds:
And they had to put it back. Were you here in 1933?

Spencer:
Ya, I was here. I came here in 1928. I transported each day by school bus back home. I think I was married in 1935, and I set up a residence here then. I've never lived anywhere else since then.

Dodds:
That was quite a storm.

Spencer:
Ya. I remember that firehouse was flooded. They had to take the engines up to high ground. Then in the W.P.A. days they put that bulkhead across Muskrat Park, and filled that in, and it has never been as bad since. Where the Longfellow is now there used to be a big house, and that was...

Dodds:
Fairview?

Spencer:

Ya, Fairview. Originally old Mr. Caulk owned it. George R. Caulk. But then Ed Buck who, when I first came here, lived where old Mrs. Shultz lives. That would be if you were going to the Town Dock restaurant, it would be the place on your right. The house is narrow....

Dodds:

Ya, I know the house.

Spencer:

And he lived there. They were wealthy people. I never knew him to do any work. His wife's people owned the Sterling Motor Company of Buffalo. It was a big engine company.

Dodds:

Ya.

Spencer:

So, his brother lived in California, and was associated in some way with the movie making business. And Buck knew that they were going to come here and make this picture. So, he bought that old place for \$5-6,000 for it. Then he rented it to the movie people, and got enough to pay for it, and fix it up. He moved in there and sold his old place, where he lived when he first moved here during the Depression years. Ed Buck was on the draft board. That was the only thing I ever knew him to do.

Dodds:

Fairview was a beautiful house.

Spencer:

Yes.

Dodds:

Because it has a windmill on the grounds. Beautiful gardens apparently.

Spencer:

Oh, yes. I remember there was boxwood almost as high as the ceiling on either side of the walk from the road on in. The guy who was renting it, he just bastardized the whole thing; put parking lots where the boxwood used to be. There were no gardens anywhere around here, that I know of, that were like that.

Dodds:

That was called Longwalk then. There was a packing plant down there, was there, when you were a kid?

Spencer:

No. There was that old shed that the restaurant is in. part of that was always there. I don't recall it ever having a packing plant. They'd rent it for about three dollars a day to unload or load. We used to get brick from Virginia, brought in on old schooners. We'd unload those there.

Dodds:

This was many years ago, but E.H. Burrows Oyster and Crab House is indicated on here. That was back in 1907.

Spencer:

I knew the Burrows, Mr. Terrance Burrows.

Dodds:

You knew Terrance Burrows?

Spencer:

Sure did. Terrance was a gentleman and a scholar, a fine person. He came back after the war and bought that old place, and lived there. Fixed it up.

Dodds:

You're talking about Fairview?

Spencer:

Yes. I remember his dad. He was a real character. You wouldn't have thought that he could be any relation to Terrance. He was a short little fellow. He had a bakery shop, and I guess lived in it. It was just up the street here. He must have been right next door to the gingerbread house, or somewhere thereabouts. When I worked in the drugstore, me and him would get drunk. He loved his whiskey. I think he'd drink anything; alcohol out of a radiator. He was a right good baker. He would bake all these pies and buns and whatnot. He would have these two market baskets. He was short, so they would almost drag the ground. He would go down to these oyster houses, and sell them to them at lunchtime. I remember this one night. He'd come over to the drugstore and buy, I don't remember what it was, some kind of tonic, but it had a lot of alcohol in it. We'd sell it to anybody who wanted to pay for it, but we knew the old man was a rummy, and tried not to sell him anything. So, he came in there. It was before the movie let out. We'd sell until the movie let out. The old man came in there about 9:30-10:00, and he was all bloody. He had black hair. he was an old man, but his hair was real black. It looked like the blood had dried some. He said that his wife had hit him on the head with a bottle, and his head was killing him, and he wanted to get some Bromo Seltzer and some of this tonic. So, the druggist had gone into the movie. He used to always sit on the back row, in case I needed him. So, I ran in to the theatre. "Old man burrows, looks like he's got a cracked skull, or something." He rushed over. We had a little sink in the back. We

put him under that. It was catsup. She hadn't broken any bottle. He had put it on there, to try to get ... (laughs). But that was Terrance's father, and Mr. Burrows was a fine person. He was a self-made man. He was Captain on big ships. Right in the beginning of the war, he was nearly killed. He told me about it. I think he was on a Standard Oil boat. A lot of these boats, if they caught them at sea, they'd want them to turn around and return to a neutral port. Well, this ship, he was going to take it wherever it was supposed to go. I forgot what his crew was; Foreign or something. This one guy took one of these hookbill knives and cut him really seriously. It was near some base. They sent out a chopper, and got him and took him to shore. He lived, but he had a terrible scar.

Dodds:

You mentioned a number of times about the theatre. I'm sure you've seen many a film in the theatre. Was that another business before it became a theatre, or was it built as a theatre? Was it built of brick?

Spencer:

It was sand block, before the cinder block. I would have to think that it was built to be a theatre. I can remember being in school here. I came here about 1928 to come to school. We used to go there and see shows, like puppet shows. They always had movies there. They were old silent movies. Then the talkies came out. That was about when they took that picture here, because they had a very good sound system here, as a result of taking the picture here. The story, is I understand it was that they paid for the system so that they could review each day's production. I remember that they probably charged 50 cents each day to watch a re-run, or pay 30 cents to watch the wild west, or something. So, they did very well while they were making this picture.

Dodds:

Where the ACME is now, obviously you had the movie theatre on the corner.

Spencer:

Every inch of the land the ACME is on now, it covered that...

Dodds:

On that side.

Spencer:

Ya. It was right on the street there.

Dodds:

You had the theatre, and then right next to that you had a house, rather several houses.

Spencer:

I think the next one to it was probably old P.W. Harrison, and then next to that was a store. He made home-made ice cream, and sodas, and whatnot.

Dodds:

Popular place for young boys. And according to this there was a larger building next to that with a bowling alley in the back.

Spencer:

Ya. When I first came here there was a bowling alley there. Then when Federalsburg put a button plant there during the depression, and they had a lot of people go there to go to work in that. Then they moved that bowling alley over there. Joe Caulk owned it. They moved it over there, and set it up to Federalsburg, but they still had the pool room there. Ralph Greenleaf, who was a champion of the United States at pool, he used to come. He had a place at Bozman. He had a Japanese wife. She'd try to keep him sober enough to go to the meets, but it was a job doing it. He could play pool when he was sober enough to go do it. It was fun to go watch him. He could shoot all day long and never miss.

Dodds:

Next to the one place with the bowling alley is a place that I think looks like a garage. We were talking about it earlier. You said it had a livery in the back too.

Spencer:

Ya, and after that Max Lambdon had an automobile sales agency there. Sold Model-T Fords.

Dodds:

Ok. That is the area where ACME used to have....

Spencer:

Ya. There's another house in there besides P.W.'s house. I can't remember whose that was. When we put in the ACME, the ACME didn't take up much more room than where the theatre was. One of those houses, P.W.'s, was all tied in with the store, and it was torn down. But then the next house was moved out Railroad Avenue, and I think its the house that they've stuccoed and put some brick....

Dodds:

Oh, on the right-hand side?

Spencer:

Ya. We didn't have much money to build this building with, and I was on the building plan. Howard Healey, we had made arrangements; between the stock we sold and the money we could borrow we had \$48,000. So, Healey said "I'll build it for that." He said that he

might move one or two of those places, but he only moved the one.

Dodds:

The one on Railroad Avenue.

Spencer:

Ya. The theatre had a balcony in it, and it had a wood floor in it. he salvaged the floor. I often think about that when it snows. It breaking through that old worn floor, that probably wasn't too sound to begin with. That's what he did. He needed a deck for the roof to go on, and he used that old floor.

Dodds:

What'd the local people think about that movie house disappearing?

Spencer:

Well, it disappeared long before that happened. I mean it was no longer operating. It was still operating during the war. With the newsreels and whatnot, they did OK. Then after the war, I believe the Fire department first took it over, and ran it as a community thing. They tried to have movies there, but it didn't amount to anything. Then a group bought it called the West Hall Improvement Association. They tried to do something with it, I can't remember what. Then a group got together: Dr. Hudson was one, Mr. Quillan was one, and I was one. We sold some stock, and borrowed some money, and got the first store built, which was less than half the size, but the same depth, but not width. We later had to buy more land. Then we put the addition on.

Dodds:

So, the first store occupied just about where the old movie theatre was.

Spencer:

Ya. just about that. Then where the B.W. Harrison ice cream Parlor was is where the parking was. Then later they used that to add on, to buy some more land.

Dodds:

Wasn't the pavement a lot wider when you first got here?

Spencer:

Ya, Much wider.

Dodds:

When did they stop widening the road?

Spencer:

I think they were cut down in two stages. One not too many years ago, and the first time maybe before World War Two. It was mainly

the cars were getting bigger, and they were parking parallel on each side, and they weren't wide enough for trucks. The first time they were the widest on the right. I'm not sure they ever took any of f the left side. On the right they took of f at least twice. I think the first time might have been about the time of the War, but a little before. Since that it hasn't been all that many years.

Dodds:

Were there brick pavements at that time/

Spencer:

No. There were some, but none in the business section was.

Dodds:

People don't believe, too, that there used to be traffic lights in St. Michaels.

Spencer:

Oh, Ya. There definitely were. I believe there were two or three. There was one at Railroad Avenue, and there was one on the school street. That would be Chestnut, I guess. There by the little market. I was thinking there was three, but if there was, I've forgotten where it was. But, these people, I don't know why they didn't call the ferry, but they'd call the drugstore, asking if I would mind calling the ferry and telling them that they would be a few minutes late. They said they were leaving now, and they'd be there in a half hour, from Salisbury. It took an hour and a half to two hours in that day.

Dodds:

So there were people making mad dashes trying to get to the ferry coming through Sty. Michaels.

Spencer:

Ya. And, of course, in the summertime was a busy time, and Christmas even. I guess the cars would be backed up all the way from Claiborne to St. Michaels. I know I certainly would see them half way.

Dodds:

Different place when the ferry was running.

Spencer:

And they were still running the shuttle ferry during the war. As a matter of fact, the day the war ended in Europe, my wife was on the shuttle ferry going to Romancoke. The manager, B. Frank Sherman, he was on the boat. I guess he was up in the pilot house. He got the word the war ended, and he knew my wife. When she went to get off the boat he saw her and told her.

Dodds:

I'll bet your wife was happy about that. Down by the old Masonic Hall they used to have a muskrat....

Spencer:

They used to call that the Rat Den. The old school was right across from that. That was Mr. Ernest Burns. His family is still here, some of them. Eddie Burns is the youngest. He used to live on their farm down by Bozman. Dorothy Burns, who is Arnold Gardner's wife, lives here. He was supposed to be the largest dealer in muskrat furs in the country.

Dodds:

Is that right? He stored them in that building, didn't he?

Spencer:

Yes.

Dodds:

Did you ever go inside there?

Spencer:

Ya, when I often would go to the door, and they'd be sorting them, or packing them to ship. There was a story that went around one time. The railroad express was here at the time. This particular time, this fellow who is now dead, there were a lot of people who thought he was dishonest, he was working for Burns. He would take these furs out to the express, after the last express went. The agent would be there until about 5:00, and he would express these things out, and arrange to steal them back (laughter). I don't think that Burns was in on it. It was just somebody that worked for him. At any rate, he bought a lot of fur. He also went in the poultry business later, and he got big in that.

Dodds:

There used to be a brick yard here. Was that still going strong when you came here?

Spencer:

Not too much. i don't know that I ever did see the thing run. I understand that they fired the thing with wood, and that was the reason that the brick was so soft. I don't know whether that's so or not. There were brick out there. If you were building a house you would buy those bricks, and then face them with harder brick that you could buy in Easton. Then you would use these, they would call them Simon brick, you'd use them to back up.... I remember the holes in the ground where they got the clay. As a matter of fact, the town used that to dump their trash in. Some of those holes must have been 10 feet deep, and they did it for years. I remember my wife's mother; I built those three or four little houses out there

for my wife's mother and father who rented them. And we had trouble. there was rats and whatnot, and finally made them stop using that dump. But they just took all their garbage and trash and dumped them in that hole, and that would be less than a block from Railroad Avenue.

Dodds:

Do you remember the Floatinc7 Theatre?

Spencer:

Oh, ya. Many times I've been there. Ya, I knew Milt Seemer. Milt was a Captain. He was a strange fellow. Mrs. Howard, whose husband had been a ship Captain, and I don't know whether it was her family or his that had money, but Milt was their Chauffeur. They had a nice big yacht, and they'd take the yacht to Florida every Winter. But, at any rate, she was much older than he was, and she'd treat him like a member of the family, and he could talk her into anything. He was the one that talked her into buying that theatre. The people that owned it, they knew that the end was in sight, but they bought it and did run it for several years. Then I don't know whether they owned it or not when it caught fire and burned most of the top off it. Then the government used as a barge to take lumber up and down when they were building for World War Two. It came here. I guess it came to Easton, and St. Michaels, and Chestertown. When they did the Narrows over at Tilghman, dredged those out, she could go through there. That let her pick up another show stop or two.

Dodds:

Where did she usually tie up here in St. Michaels?

Spencer:

Long Wharf.

Dodds:

Do you remember any of the boatbuilders?

Spencer:

Oh, ya. I knew the very best one in the county, and maybe in his lifetime he might have been the best on the Shore; old Captain John B. Harrison. I was very fond of him. He was a great fellow. I knew Captain Denny Harrison. I knew....

Dodds:

Denny Harrison had a little business....

Spencer:

A little business right down the street where they're remodeling that old house that's falling down.

Dodds:

Which street is that? Is that Chestnut?

Spencer:

It's Chestnut, I guess. But, anyhow, there's where he built boats. He lived down in one of these places where now they have board [sic] and breakfasts, or something, next to the St. Michaels Inn. And he might have lived in that house. It was one of those little brick houses there. Then there was Chad Jones. He had where the hotel is now. He had a boatyard there, and later Ned Boshell ran it, but Ned didn't build boats, but Chad Jones built boats.

Dodds:

Well, Ned Boshell's yard was the same spot where Chad Jones had his.

Spencer:

Ya, after Chad died.

Dodds:

Were the Kirbys still....

Spencer:

No. I remember they had a boat underway there, a big boat like a tugboat or something. I can just barely remember about that. And I remember Mr. Jesse told me about, that they went broke building this boat. There was a lot of big oak around here. Oak in those days didn't have much value. They'd come down here and get the knees, and whatnot. I think they said there were Indians that they used to end down here to look at a tree and tell how to saw it up. They were building this big tug boat, and went broke. And whoever was having it built had to come here and pay of f people, and hauled the thing to Baltimore, and had it finished. And I guess that was the last one. I remember them talking about it, but I don't remember actually seeing it.

End of Side 2 of Cassette. Begin Side 1 of Second Cassette.

Spencer:

George Tar's Dad, I don't think he owned the business, but he sort of ran it for whoever did own it, and they didn't build anything. They just did minor repairs, and they'd haul boats and paint them. And then they'd let people go inside this floating dock and paint their boats from the waterline up. Then a man from over around Chestertown, Queenstown, I believe, He bought the yard from old H.P. Brown, who had come here during the Depression, bought the

hotel. He was a ... we used to call him Hot Howard. But, at any rate, he owned that property. He owned a lot of those down by Hell's Crossing, and all. And he sold it to this man from Queenstown. He brought a fellow by the name of Ray Turner, who lived there where the Dupont's have it now. It's over thee to the right of the boat yard. They built a few boats, some yachts, and maybe small yachts, or something, and did some repair. This man, whose name I don't remember, he was in the yacht circle, and he'd bring bigger boats in here that needed hauling, and repair, and whatnot. During the beginning of the war, the government was building a lot of things, and they gave him a job to build a lot of survey skiffs. They were just a big awkward-looking rowboat. He built two or three dozen of those. Then when I came back he had gone, and Ray then owned it. Ray ran it and he lived there in that little house.

Dodds:

Ray who?

Spencer:

Ray Turner.

Dodds:

Ray Turner.

Spencer:

Ray drank a lot, and his wife was a school teacher. and I guess they made as much as they needed to from her income, but I don't remember that ever amounting to very much.

Dodds:

Was Robert Lambdon building when you first....

Spencer:

Ya. He was living here, and living out where Doc Swan's office is, I believe. It was right along there, anyway. He built a log canoe or two in my time, I remember. John B. Harrison built a number of them. When I was with Jesse and Son, it was an education to know old John B. If there was ever a guy; if you ever heard the expression "doing it the hard way" he certainly did it that way. He had a little shop on a place called Devil's Island. It had a rickety crooked walkway. Each time the winter would come and take half of it up. He'd go find it. It would drift ashore, and he'd put it back. We used to deliver lumber there. He used to build big boats there. He used to put it on a little scow and pole it out there, or walk it. We had three or four colored fellows working there, and they used to cuss old John B. He'd get this lumber, and you'd try to put as much as you could, because you didn't want to make any more trips than you had to, and the wind would be blowing. But, he was a fine gentleman, and an excellent mechanic. Just no power tools. I remember he built this big boat going to Nassau. He

planked it lengthwise, and used Georgia pine, 5/4 by 12, and he used Georgia pine keelson and sister keelson, and we furnished them. He did it for a Doctor who was from Florida. He was supposed to have this boat built to bring fruit from Nassau, or someplace. He was an asshole. Probably read too many books or something. Anyway, he wanted to put teak wood on the decks of this boat. Well, it was a power boat. It had one big engine in it. It was a Gray engine, and it set off to one side of the big engine, and it had a bicycle-type sprocket and chain. And if the big engine broke down, you took it out of gear and this turned the same wheel, but it went at a slower speed. Anyway, he wanted this teak wood, and I could remember John B. telling him.... When John B. got to figuring on a job, or need somebody, he'd call me and want to know how much oak we had was dry, and so forth. John B., he was tall, raw-boned, and he had fingers and hands bigger than my hands. I remember him saying "Doctor, Its going to make that boat dead in the water to put all that heavy lumber on it. You might want to put a combing around it, but you don't want to put all that teak on that boat." And the Doc said that no, he'd talked to a Naval Architect. So, we ordered that teak, and we ordered it in New York, but couldn't find anyone who knew much about New York that would rip it and dress it. It was so hard that they complained that it would tear their planers up. So we finally found someone in Philadelphia that we did business with on a regular basis to dress it, and rip it. So, we sent it there, and had it all ripped up and dressed the way we wanted it. And I remember it was heavy. A 2" by 10", 10' long, you'd have to take two men. It was just like iron. So, anyway, we took it there, and John he kept at it, and every time he'd see this Doctor, he'd mention it. So, finally the Doc began to investigate. And so, one day he said "Well, Captain John, You talked me out of it. I'm sure its going to be too heavy. Its going to make her come down at the nose." So, he said "That's the best thing you ever did, is not use that stuff." So, at the end, h wanted to take it of f the bill. And old John B. said "You ordered it. I tried to talk you out of it. You're going to pay for it. These people ordered it for you, and they ordered it from me, and my reputation is at stake here. And I'm not going to drive another Jesus nail in this thing until you pay for that lumber" (laughs). So, he paid for it. But he's just a splendid old man, and I bet he never signed his name to a contract. He was high class.

Dodds:

Did you know where Robert Lambdon built his boats here?

Spencer:

It seemed to me that ...I thought he built them out in the back yard. Its what most people did. A lot of them didn't have boatyards. I suspect there's somebody around here that remembers that better than I do.

Dodds:

I was just curious.

Spencer:

I think that most of them would build a boat in the backyard, in the wintertime, or when they were not busy doing what they normally did.

Dodds:

Well, it sounds like you have a fund of information there Alex.

Spencer:

Well, I learned a lot working for Mr. Jesse. The Adams Floating Theatre, that thing had 18 by 18 inch keel on it. It was sort of a flat-bottomed scow, but you had to have a keel and a sister keel to support that weight. And it became rotten, and they took it over to Crockett's Boat Yard to have a new one put in it. And there weren't a lot of woods even in those days. And now there are almost none where you can go out and find...it was probably 40 feet long or longer. It was oak. It had to be 18" by 18" squared up. And Mr. Jesse, he knew where everything like that was. He knew the lumber business. The fellow that bought the farm where right now Black and Decker is, there was, and still is a woods there to the left of it going out towards route 50. Fellow by the name of Jeff Freeland, who worked for the millwork people, bought that farm and that wood had smooth-bark pines in it as big as a rain barrel. They were old growth. So, Jeff didn't want to sell him one, but he sort of had some leverage on him. Jeff did our millwork, and we bought our doors and windows from him. So, Jeff finally consented to let us have that tree. we paid for it, but not that much. We had a heck of a job getting it out of the woods. It weighed tons, that tree did. We had a sawmill that would cut up to 40 feet, since we often cut keels, and we had an extension on it. So, we cut that thing out, and took it to Crockett's, and they put it in that boat. They put it in green, but that's what they did most of the time in those days. The keels would always be green, and they'd treat them, and if they had time, they'd put them in a marsh over the winter, and let salt cure them. But this one didn't have time. They put it in there just as we cut it. A lot of it was heart. That was, I guess, the biggest piece of lumber we ever cut.

Dodds:

That was a big boat. Did you still use those lumber carts with the great big wheels?

Spencer:

Ya. We, to get that piece out, used probably two or three. We got one end of it up on the bed of the truck, and lashed it there. Then we used two carts. We didn't have a set. There was an old set there, but they set there and rotted. We borrowed them from

somebody. I think it was old man Sam Arland had some of them. I remember Frank Rittenhouse had a small sawmill, and he used oxen.

Dodds:

Ya. That was quite common. Did you know anything about the house that the church is considering knocking down?

Spencer:

I guess I was the one that got the thing started. George Redmond said that it was built in the 30s. I knew better than that. The first person I told was Mr. Maxwell. I was out there at the time. Had an old car out there I was working on, and he was helping me, and I mentioned it to him, And told him it was an old house. Old Mr. Charlie Marshal lived in it when I was working in the lumber yard. He was a carpenter, so you knew all the Carpenters. That was in the 30s. And I think I've read in the bulletins they put out on it, that he bought it about 1910. I knew he lived there, and I knew from time to time he remodeled it, and added to it, and whatnot.

Dodds:

So, it was Charlie Marshal who converted it into what it looks like today.

Spencer:

Ya. Over the period of some years. He was a big powerful man. He was a crude old fellow, really. He was a strange individual. He could do more work than most two men, and yet, if you brag on him, as I remember one man did, About how much he was doing, he'd be just as disturbed with you and just as infuriated if you had complained about him. I remember out where Pat Morris lives. I built that house, and there's a little one-car garage there. It was a nice little garage. It had cypress weatherboarding. It had factory-made doors, and two windows in it. And the old man did that garage on a contract for \$25.00, including all the labor. Hung the two doors, and the weatherboard, and it had a wood shingle roof. He was ... but crazy. I remember he used to oyster in the wintertime. He was powerful and hardworking man. And any man who could work real hard, oysters were 35 cents per bushel, could make more money than by working by hand. Old Mr. Mansfield had been postmaster under some republican president. I guess when Roosevelt went in, he went out, because he was republican. So, they appointed him a Fisheries Inspector. He was real tall and skinny, a nice old gentleman. He'd go down to the wharf. They didn't have police boats back in those days. He's just see them when they'd bring the oysters in. And he'd look at them, and if there was a certain percent of them small, you had to throw them over. So, this particular day Mr. Mansfield said "Mr. Marshal, they're just too small, so I'm going to have to ask you to throw them overboard. I'm going to have to go with you to see that you do it." So, old man Marshal just blew up like a frog. And they went on out. He had a fast boat. He had a fantail boat he

built, with some kind of big automobile engine. So, they got out of the harbor, and Mr. Mansfield said "This is alright, you can just throw them overboard here." He said "No, Goddammit, this isn't where I caught them, this is not where I'm going to throw them overboard." So he took them over to the mouth of the Wye. I don't know if he caught them there or not. So, Mr. Mansfield said that he was just like crazy, shoveling those oysters over. And he finally got the last one, and he said "Now I've thrown these oysters overboard. You've discharged your duties, and I'm going home, and you get the hell overboard" (laughter). It was on the flats, and the old man was tall.

Dodds:

Is that right? Did he make him go overboard?

Spencer:

Ya, and if it hadn't been for a lot of people, he'd spent some time in jail over that. The old man walked ashore.

Dodds:

That's funny. I loved that. Well, I've got to go down the street....

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