

Interview with Mr. Wayman Sinclair of Easton (820-2233), formerly of Tilghman Island. Mr. Sinclair started working for the Tilghman Packing Co. in 1935 on the cannery line. He stayed with the company until it closed in the 1970s, eventually winding up in the Maintenance Dept. The company made much of their own machinery and had a well equipped machine shop. Topics discussed included the history of the company and its different operations. 7/17/89

Present were: R. Dodds and Joe Liener

Interview Log

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Unidentified Speaker (Speaker)
Interviewer: Unidentified (Q.)
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Wayman Sinclair

BEGIN SIDE A

Q.: Because you know the local history of the company, Tilghman Packing Company. I think Dr. Clagett (phonetic) was the last one. He was in here a few months ago, tell him I said hello, and told me definitely give you a call because he's a good source. Joe has helped me off and on with trying to get more history on the old packing company, and we've talked to quite a few people here and there about the Valliant Company down in Bellevue, and Harrison and Jarboe, Mr. Jarboe, and some of the other companies, but we've yet to tackle the Tilghman Packing Company. It's the largest one of the --

W.S.: I've got a lot of years in there, 40 of them.

Q.: When did you start with the company?

W.S.: In 1935.

Q.: '35? What did you start as?

W.S.: Working on the line in the plant. It was a canning plant at that time.

Q.: Yeah. That plant was big, I know, and we'll get into it in a little bit, but some of it was out on the island.

W.S.: Yeah, that was crab picking and oyster shucking out on the island. And later on, we used to cut fish in the spring. And then in 50's, we got into frozen -- that was where all the frozen seafood was.

Q.: On the island or --

W.S.: On the island. And that's where they were. The whole thing was a frozen food operation when we went out of business on that island.

Q.: What year was it that they went out of business?

W.S.: '75.

Q.: '75, yeah.

W.S.: Started in 1897.

Q.: Yeah, I was doing some research over the weekend just to -- because we've got some articles, I'm sure you've seen them, that have been published on the company, but we've never actually talked, or at least I haven't ever talked to somebody who's had a long experience with the company. I know -- is it George Harrison who died?

W.S.: Yes, George T. Harrison.

Q.: Unfortunately, we never got a chance to talk to him.

SPEAKER: Now he wasn't any relation to John B. Harrison.

Q.: Right, different Harrisons.

SPEAKER: Except by marriage.

Q.: That's right. But he was the last owner, the last surviving owner, wasn't he, George --

W.S.: No, no. It was sold a couple times.

Q.: Was it? When --

W.S.: Dates get me. I think it was somewhere around 1963, he sold it to a fellow named Richard Natt (phonetic). He kept it for three years, and then he sold it to the -- Mott Company (phonetic). And then they had it for about three years, I guess. And the American -- American Tobacco Company, bought the whole Mott Company, which included us. And they had it until December 5, and then (INAUDIBLE).

Q.: So did you work for the company until '75?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

Q.: So that was about 40 years, you said?

W.S.: Yeah, two weeks short. I was head of maintenance at the time that they closed it down.

Q.: So you worked yourself up in the company.

W.S.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Charlie Fairbanks went later on as an agent for them, didn't he?

W.S.: He was a salesman. He went with the company, American -- he moved to New Jersey with them. He stayed up there two or three years, and finally he come back. He was working for the trucking firm over in Federalsburg. But Tom Fluharty (phonetic), he was general manager there. I think he worked for -- it was the Day Shore Foods (phonetic), I don't know what it is now, I think it's a different name.

Q.: Yeah, I've heard the name.

W.S.: He lives in Easton. And he was my boss -- when they closed her down. He could give you some information. He went there right out of school.

Q.: Well, you started in '35.

W.S.: '35.

Q.: You are born on Tilghman Island and raised on Tilghman Island?

W.S.: Well, yes, might as well say. I was born in McDaniel, but I moved to Tilghman when I was a year old.

Q.: Oh, yeah. Almost a native.

W.S.: And I lived there up until this past winter.

Q.: How did you get tied in with the company? Why did you decide to start there?

W.S.: Well, times were tight back then.

Q.: Middle of the Depression, yeah.

W.S.: That's right. And I was around the plant as a kid. And Charlie, you know, our mother worked there. And I tried working on the water and just couldn't make it. So Mr. Harrison -- not Mr. George Harrison, this is Mr. Nicholas, his name was, Harrison, he was operating the canning end of it. And he asked me if I would come in and work in the plant. And I come in and started, I think it was 25 cents an hour, which was big money to me. (Laughter). And I stayed there, worked my way up to the head of maintenance.

Q.: You started in the canning end too?

SPEAKER: No.

Q.: What did you do first? You said you were in the line.

SPEAKER: I was on the line. Well, it was a belt coming down when I had the ears of corn sticking out the ends that had (INAUDIBLE) chopping it up. Whole bunch of us at the time. That's how I started.

Q.: But that wasn't a year-round operation, was it, though? Just in the summer?

SPEAKER: Corn and tomatoes was summer, and wintertime, we went on -- well, we had a wood and coal business there at the canning plant. We sold wood and coal and delivered to people. And then they had the oyster shucking business down on the island, and the days we weren't delivering wood and coal, we were working, you know, packing.

Q.: Packing. So you kind of moved around there most of the year.

SPEAKER: Oh, yes.

Q.: What were you doing down in the packing end?

SPEAKER: You mean the oysters?

Q.: Yeah.

W.S.: Working, putting them in cans.

Q.: Canning. Do you like that better than the canning side?

W.S.: No.

Q.: I didn't think so.

W.S.: Well, I just moved around different places. I drove a truck for them for three years. And when they first started in frozen food, and I went back and delivered the frozen products direct to the stores. Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Wilmington.

Q.: Did a lot of driving.

W.S.: Yeah. And as soon as they found somebody to take my place, I wanted to get off the truck, so I went back into the -- we had a big change-up, and that's what we wanted to do. And I got in there.

Q.: Yeah, it was interesting to read that they made a lot of their own machinery.

W.S.: They did. During the war, you couldn't buy equipment that you wanted, so we built a lot of it our self. In fact, we've got patents on a lot of it

SPEAKER: That was in the old building that was back toward the town here.

W.S.: Go around to the ice plant.

SPEAKER: Yeah, going back to the ice plant.

W.S.: Well the packing company in '27, that was when I was a kid, they built that ice plant and the electric plant combined, and they furnished electric to McDaniel.

Q.: Seems like the company kind of was like a big brother down there, supplied a lot of different things.

W.S.: They did. And they were in the process of running a cable across the Eastern Bay and running the electric in island.

Q.: Is that right?

W.S.: But they changed their mind, and they sold it to, used to be Eastern Shore Public Service, you know.

Q.: What was the most profitable part of the business? Do you know?

W.S.: That's hard to say, there were so many.

Q.: I know there were so many different areas. I was running down the list of things they were doing in some of these articles. First it's the crab meat and three or four different kinds of fish they were processing.

SPEAKER: Don't forget the -- crab.

W.S.: Yeah, they were involved with Wider Foods (phonetic). That was in Chestertown, and their main office was in New York.

Q.: Apparently, they sold them a lot of the pickled herring.

W.S.: Used to send a crew right down here in the spring to prepare these fish.

Q.: Was that their own, Wider Foods own crew?

W.S.: Yeah. Along with our crew. We used to work together. But they would pick out the fish that they wanted, put them in these casks, you know, and they would cure them so many hours in this cask, and then they were taking out of the big casks and putting in a regular fish barrel and sent to the plant in Chestertown to be (indiscernible), and put them in the jars.

SPEAKER: Later on, they put them up in small cans down here.

W.S.: Well, we put them up in small cans at the same time, canned herring.

SPEAKER: That's the ones that are individually wrapped and put in parchment.

W.S.: Tall cans.

SPEAKER: Yeah, you have some out here in the lighthouse.

W.S.: Yeah, we did that.

SPEAKER: I got just about the last case they had down there.

W.S.: Did you?

SPEAKER: Yeah.

W.S.: Then we used to can the herring roe.

SPEAKER: Herring roe. But that Bob crab (phonetic) business, that was something that was never anywhere else.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: What's Bob crab?

SPEAKER: He can tell you, he can tell you.

W.S.: They used to take the top shell off, and they would clean all the (INAUDIBLE) out of them, and then they have a special solution that they would dip them in.

SPEAKER: That was hot too, wasn't it?

W.S.: Yeah. Then they'd have this red pepper they would sprinkle them in. And they'd wrap each one individual with the claws on it, in parchment paper, rubber band around it and put it on refrigeration.

SPEAKER: Put them in a big barrel.

Q.: Is that right? Yeah, I never heard of that.

SPEAKER: Oh, my, they were something. He'll agree with me on that.

W.S.: Right. They did that stuff for years. They were doing that before I was (INAUDIBLE).

SPEAKER: Were they?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). I never did know that that mixture was.

Q.: Is that right?

W.S.: Red pepper --

SPEAKER: Uncle George kind of kept that quiet.

W.S.: But I wasn't in on that end of it much. That's the reason I didn't know. I was in the canning plant most of the time.

SPEAKER: Those Bob Crab cost about, I'd say 10 times the price of an ordinary crab when you bought it.

Q.: Is that right?

SPEAKER: Of course, all the big ones are picked out just for that. And if there was any claws missing, they added claws in when they wrapped it up.

Q.: Labor intensive too, isn't it?

SPEAKER: Yeah.

Q.: We were reading, they never had any kind of machine to pick crabs, did they, the company? They never came up with any?

W.S.: Yes, we built one.

Q.: Oh, you did?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). But it wasn't our patent. The New Channel Corporation (phonetic) in Georgia, they had one. And Mr. Harrison wanted one for us, and they were so busy, they couldn't make one for us, so they let us have the blueprints, and we made our own with the blueprints, and had an operation for that. But you could only use that meat for mixing with crab cakes or something because it was too --

SPEAKER: It was all torn up.

W.S.: So that was kind of beat up a little bit.

Q.: How did the machine work, all right though?

W.S.: It went through a thing like a hammer mill, setting up on top a tank. And it had these fingers that went around and had a grate for the bottom of it like. And you could put a different size grate for whatever, it was a different size one for claws than it was for the bodies of the crab. And you could beat this thing, crab, all to pieces with claws, and throw it down into this tank of brine water. And you had to have that salinity just right so the meat would float and the bones would sink. And the meat would flow up onto a perforated stainless steel belt, and the bones would sink, some out the other end on a conveyor belt. And then it would go down this belt, and it would go under a spread of water to wash it off, try to get the brine out of it. And then further down on the end, we had a vacuum machine underneath sucking the water

out of it. And it went on into the cans. We didn't use that for anything, only for our crab cakes.

Q.: It's amazing. I was reading how mechanized this company was. There was a lot of machinery in this.

SPEAKER: Had a good big machine shop there.

Q.: Yes.

W.S.: We had, at one time, I guess about eight mechanics working in that machine shop. Had our own carpenters, our own electricians. It was a big operation.

Q.: I was reading about the fish filleting machine that you had there.

W.S.: Yeah. We built a lot of (INAUDIBLE).

Q.: Sounded like a pretty dangerous type of equipment to be around.

W.S.: Well, not really. Everything as far as the knives and stuff, it was all concealed in guards and whatnot. That fish would go through, zip, like that, and the backbone would be out and a filet on each side, just as fast as they could drop them in there.

Q.: So there were obviously more fish than doing it by hand.

W.S.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: They didn't even have to touch the fish.

W.S.: We had a whole row of those machines. I guess it was 10 or 15 of them. And they were bevel machines, two head on each one. Just as fast as they could drop in the machinery.

Q.: Must've been a busy place in the spring.

W.S.: Oh, it was. Sure it was. Sometimes we worked right around the clock. Didn't get home or something to eat.

Q.: I noticed too that you -- we talked about roe. They processed herring roe, mackerel roe and shad roe.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: I think it was pretty -- roe was pretty -- what's the word --

SPEAKER: Each kind of roe is a different category. Your shad roe, that would all separate, the herring roe wouldn't separate, was in the way.

Q.: Was it all canned?

W.S.: Oh, yes. We took the shad roe in a can with a (indiscernible) shape, like a sardine can. That can would just hold one set of roe, and we canned (indiscernible) we could get them. And one line just on that. And that was a pretty expensive item.

SPEAKER: Shad roe was about the most expensive of the three.

W.S.: That's right, it was.

Q.: Do you ever get tired of eating fish?

W.S.: I got so I wouldn't even eat fish.

Q.: I guess you see a lot of it go through there.

W.S.: Yeah, we canned tuna though for a long while.

Q.: Where did the tuna come from?

W.S.: We got it out of-- up and down the coast.

SPEAKER: According to where the school of fish came in, that was where we'd more or less unload it.

W.S.: When we first started, we used to get the raw tuna right in there, but you had to pre-cook it. Some of those fish, I've seen them come in so big we had to use a wrecker to unload them, just one fish, they would be so large. Cut him up with a chainsaw and put him on pallets, and we had a big steel cooker about the size of this room, I guess. We put them on pallets, stack them in there and turn the steam on for so many hours, and take them out of there and put them -- they'd run these chunks of meat through a machine that formed it the size of the can and cut it off. But later on, we got away from that, and we cut the frozen filets all to fit the size of the can. All we did was just put that frozen block right in the can and send it through the line. And we did that for a few years.

Q.: When you were working there, did you notice that the numbers of fish were getting less and less, or was that having an impact on, like for instance, going to tuna?

W.S.: Not really. Not until later years. And we didn't get many fish in (INAUDIBLE) at all. It all come in frozen bulk from Alaska and different places. When we stopped the operation, we were putting up what they call a seafood cake. And they were selling it to schools and different states for their lunch program. And we made three different sizes. And they said that we couldn't keep up with the operation, and we moved that whole operation up in (indiscernible) New Jersey. I don't know

what happened, but they wouldn't put us -- (indiscernible) that we could produce. That's when they closed her down. We couldn't fill the orders.

SPEAKER: So must've had a pretty good product, big demand for it.

W.S.: It was a good product, that seafood combination. Shrimp, crabmeat, flounder, I don't know, five or six different seafoods mixed in. And it was really good. It had to be good for the (INAUDIBLE) each state had their own rules and regulations to go by and standards.

SPEAKER: Charlie Fairbanks could probably give you an idea of the demand for that, couldn't he?

W.S.: Yeah, well Charlie or Don Fluharty either one. Don was in all of this mixing of the stuff. In fact, a lot of these recipes was his own idea. And he lived with it from the ground up. And I didn't know too much about that end of it, the recipes and whatnot.

SPEAKER: Do you suppose he would be willing to talk about that or anything?

W.S.: I think he would, yes. He's a nice guy. He went right in there right out of high school. Well, he went to business school first, and come right back in there. And he was in that end of it. A lot of these recipes was his own idea.

SPEAKER: So there'd be another lead for you, Richard.

Q.: Yeah.

W.S.: I can't tell you much about that end of it because my job was keeping the machinery running.

Q.: That's quite a job by the sound of it. You had the one figure I read, company had 400 employees at one time?

W.S.: At one time, yes, we did. Different seasons. When all the plants were running, yeah, they had --

Q.: Were most of these people local Tilghman Islanders, or do they come from farther a field?

SPEAKER: No, they used to have a bus that used to bring them all up around Easton, that area.

Q.: Is that right? Did any of them, did they have any housing for shuckers or --

W.S.: Oh, yes. We used to get -- used to get them from all down around Florida, migrant workers, you know. There used to be a crew

coming in from Florida every year. They would go out in the field to pick the corn. And then we had a bunch that come in couple years from the Bahamas, somewhere down in that area. A lot of them stayed here. One or two of them, in fact, they're still here in this area.

Q.: How about the race? Were they sort of half and half black, half white, or was it mostly black as far as the workers there?

W.S.: I would say about even.

Q.: About even.

SPEAKER: They even had a little church down there on the island for a while, didn't they?

W.S.: That's right. Back in the ice plant where the living quarters were. Back when I helped build that church.

SPEAKER: There you are, Richard.

Q.: That's it there.

W.S.: Yeah, that used to be the (INAUDIBLE).

SPEAKER: Right off the end of the street.

W.S.: And then right over here, it was an old shell road which was covered with water. Ordinary tide, it was two feet deep. And that's where they build the new (indiscernible) on the old shell road, and I helped build that. This over here was Ann Faulkner.

SPEAKER: Yeah, Faulkner's place.

W.S.: And right back here was a fellow named Row (phonetic). He had an oyster shucking and crab picking house. James Row.

Q.: You've got a fax, James Row Oyster House. What happened to the wooden bridge?

W.S.: Well, it kept going out when they had bad storms, you know. This was built here originally for the steamboats used to come in out on the end of the pier. And then later years, they put boards running lengthwise so cars could run on. And I was working over here in '33 when that hurricane come through, I was working for Fuller (phonetic) at that time. And the storm tore this wharf all up. Only way they could get out here was by boat. And they rebuilt it.

SPEAKER: That's when the CCC bunch helped on some of that, wasn't it?

W.S.: Yes, they did. It was the WPA project too, combined with -
- I guess the county and the companies that were on this island. I guess
the state must've had something to it, I don't know.

SPEAKER: The one that you see is part of the roadbed now.

W.S.: That's what the argument is about that now. I haven't
talked to any of them. I've been reading it in the paper. But I helped
build a causeway.

Q.: When was that done, the causeway?

W.S.: I would say around '39, '40, that winter.

SPEAKER: In the late 30's.

W.S.: And the packing companies men, which I was one of, along
with the WPA project workers, we put that causeway in there. And then
they had a --

SPEAKER: On this side.

W.S.: Then a wood digger come in there and they dug out and
filled in this dike at the -- at the roadway. And Mr. Harrison had boat
strips, used to run them out to the water. That was all on the north side
of the causeway.

SPEAKER: Yeah. Crabbers kept their boats in there because it was
protected, see, from the southerly.

Q.: I've got a note here that the tracks ran across the old
wooden causeway. Running alongside, they used to have a cart on rails
they used to bring stuff back and forth. Was that still, was that
operating when you were there, or was that long gone by then?

W.S.: No, that was all -- from where this little store is there
on out was the steamboat wharf, and that's what you're talking about.

Q.: No, along this wooden bridge going out, I have a note here
that says "Previously there used to be a railway track running along the
right-hand side of the causeway. The small cart was pushed by hand to
take freight to and from the island."

W.S.: No, that was for the steamboat line.

Q.: Yeah, I guess that was probably a long (INAUDIBLE).

W.S.: I remember they used to have the track that the handcarts
used to push them there, but not on this part, the cart from the store on
out.

SPEAKER: See the steamboat wharf was way on out beyond what you see now.

Q.: So in other words, on the other side of the island, it was just another --

W.S.: Yeah, this wharf here, it went right on out. I guess it went out there 100 yards.

SPEAKER: Easy that far. There was old pilings out there that I can remember.

W.S.: And they had the freight houses and everything. And all that went down in the '33 storm. And the boat's stopped coming in.

Q.: When I was reading these articles, I read a little mention of boats that are owned by the company. Do you recall what, if any, boats were owned by the company, names of them?

W.S.: Yeah. They owned the big power boat, which was called the Two Mays.

Q.: Two Mays?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

Q.: Was she a buy boat?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah. They had that built. The captain that run it hauled freight for a lot of different companies besides the packing company. And they used to have -- mostly when I was there, they used to hire a lot of boats to do the work, local watermen. And then they have these goverment barges called a scowl boat (phonetic) you may have seen. They bought one of those from a fellow from Deal's Island, captain. And he used to put a lot of freight and what not on that boat.

Q.: Is that like a landing craft?

W.S.: Similar, only she would -- just like a big power boat only she was a scowl boat.

SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) handed.

W.S.: Yes -- big decent engine on there. And he used to run them all up and down the coast. Every now and then he'd bring a load of oysters, something to us.

(SIDE B)

Q.: So the company didn't have too many boats. They relied on the watermen to bring in most of the fish.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: You probably remember some pretty sizable vessels coming up in the spring, dredge boats and so on.

W.S.: Yeah. Well, out here is Delaware Harbor out in this section. And all of the dredge boats would run -- they'd have a stake or something, a piling out there. And when the '33 hurricane come in, tore a lot -- they stopped that.

Q.: Where did they tie up when they came to unload at the company?

W.S.: Right to the plant here.

SPEAKER: Right alongside.

Q.: On this side.

SPEAKER: This is an old picture. They could come right up in back of here. There's one boat laying there now.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: That's kind of an aerial shot of it.

SPEAKER: There's part of the old steamboat wharf going right out there.

Q.: That's after the new causeway.

W.S.: Yeah, this is the causeway. That's the old piling to the old wharf used to go out.

Q.: So this is where they come up alongside here?

W.S.: Along here and here.

Q.: How were they unloaded? Did they have a --

SPEAKER: There was a couple stiff legs there, didn't they?

W.S.: Yeah. A pole here with a boom on it with an electric winch.

Q.: Oh, it had an electric winch.

W.S.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: That's how they kept count of, for instance, the oysters. That's how they kept count of them because they could measure them as they took them off, see, right in the

buckets. The crabs, they generally bought them by the week. And you come in, and you had a big barrel in your boat. They'd lift the whole barrel up and set it right on the scales, empty it out and then weigh the barrel.

Q.: Is that right?

W.S.: That's right. We tore this building all down and put a big cement block building up. That was the frozen food plant.

Q.: When was that?

W.S.: That would've been -- '51, '52, something like that. This is a fish cutting building right here -- fish in this building.

SPEAKER Then later on, piled up a lot of coal out there too, didn't they?

W.S.: No, not here. Coal was piled up -- there used to be oyster shells all piled up out here.

Q.: Something I was interested to read is what they did with the herring scales.

SPEAKER: Oh, that was made into imitation pearls.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: Yeah, essence of herring scales they called it. I never heard of that.

W.S.: Didn't you?

Q.: No.

W.S.: Man used to come in from Newark, New Jersey named Dr. Shiffer (phonetic). He had a laboratory up there -- I went up there several times. And that was quite an operation to get this essence from the scales. You may have seen when we'd unload a load of herring, the water was in the bottom of the boat and the stuff was just glistening. And they'd run all this water and what not through a center -- and pull all the solids out of them. When they got done with it, it was just like a paste. And he'd take it up to his laboratory up there in Newark, New Jersey, and he'd mix whatever he would mix into it to make a paint -- he wouldn't tell nobody what he would mix into it. And he would sell it to a lot of these people that had these little trinket shops in Ocean City and different places, you know, and they would paint it on the different seashells, and it would look like pearl. And that was expensive stuff

Q.: I guess it's one use of fish scales.

W.S.: Yeah.

Q.: The company seemed very -- they seemed to use just about all the product one way or another.

W.S.: Yes, yes.

Q.: They also mentioned in one of the articles about the waste products from the fish were hydrated.

W.S.: Yeah. We went up on the Narrows where Tilghman is now, that was our fish hydrating plant. And we built that and a lot of the equipment that was in it. And we used to grind these fish up, send them through a dryer, extracted oil out of them, and then they'd go through a grinder into fishmeal. And we'd also do that with the (INAUDIBLE).

SPEAKER: What was left over from them.

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

Q.: Why did they site the dehydrating plant up by the Narrows instead of somewhere down here? Because don't they have to truck all the waste products down there?

W.S.: No, they didn't. Well, yes, they used to truck them up there. I don't know really why they ever put it up there. We used to get a lot of Menhaden at one time from the pound netters. They used to bring them right into the plant right there on the Narrows, which was one reason to put it up there.

Q.: Oh, okay.

W.S.: But that was built on a marsh. It wasn't anything but marsh.

SPEAKER: Yeah, that was all mud.

W.S.: And it wasn't -- would support a building. We took this, we was in the wheat business at that time, used to buy a lot of this what they call the slab wood from the mills, you know, after they sawed the boards. And we put a layer of it down this way and another layer down that way right on that marsh. They'd put cinders and shells and cinders on top of that. That's what we built the plant on. And you can go down there today and dig down there and hit the slab wood, and it's just as white as dust. It didn't rot.

SPEAKER: It was all submerged down in the mud. Long as it stays that way. But bring it out, and it don't take long to go.

Q.: I guess you might want to site it away from everything else because of the smell from this.

W.S.: Oh, we got a lot of flack up there. (Laughter). People would raise a time if the wind was blowing towards town. Oh, my. It was pretty rough.

SPEAKER: The currents through the Narrows carried a lot of that stuff out too.

W.S.: What would run over -- well, they stopped us. They wouldn't let us put any of the drains overboard for anything. Mr. Harrison said well, I'm not putting anything back I didn't take out, it's the same thing. And you'd fish around there, I'm telling you, you could go there, throw a line over and catch the biggest fish and crabs. But they claimed it was polluting the water, but it weren't hurting the fish.

SPEAKER: A lot of oysters grew in that Nanows too.

W.S.: That's right.

Q.: A lot better than the stuff they were throwing over in Baltimore, I'm sure.

SPEAKER: Well, that's a different type of stuff. This stuff was biodegradable. That up there is all metal.

W.S.: It was so many fish and whatnot around there eating it by the time it hit the water (laughter). This is our fish cutting operation.

Q.: Yeah, that's quite an operation. They're cutting by hand though, right?

W.S.: Or they just -- when they first come in, they cut the heads and they took the guts out and everything, and the roe.

Q.: And then they went to the filleting.

W.S.: And we built all that machinery, the table, conveyor belt coming by all the time. This is one of the filleting machines right here.

SPEAKER: There they are heisting it right out, a bucketful.

W.S.: These fellows are all dead now.

Q.: This is -- another article on the company, another view of the island.

W.S.: This is from the canning plant.

Q.: Is this all the canning plant here?

W.S.: That's the canning plant. This is the machine shop back here.

SPEAKER: Right out back of her.

W.S.: Come right on around here, and this is the old ice plant. This was living quarters.

Q.: Was that for workers from outside the area?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

SPEAKER: Barracks.

W.S.: A lot of them lived there year-round.

SPEAKER: They just burnt up one of these places. There's part of the old causeway going out. There's some more of the steamboat wharf out here.

W.S.: Does it say what year that picture was taken?

Q.: No, it doesn't. This was probably around '51.

W.S.: Yeah, I would say.

SPEAKER: Is there a date on there?

Q.: Yeah, it's '51 on the bottom. This is some more of your equipment, I guess, that you had there.

W.S.: When the fish come in that were dumped, this was a washer, and it was a big reel that went on like that. And we tunneled these fish all in the water -- took a lot of the scales and stuff off.

SPEAKER: And had another one that was alongside of the pier there to wash the crab shells for deviled crabs too.

W.S.: That's right. That was similar to that -- overboard.

SPEAKER: Yeah, it was over in the water.

Q.: Oh, okay.

W.S.: Well, they stopped us from that. The (indiscernible) wouldn't let them use that shell anymore.

Q.: Is that right?

SPEAKER: To devil crab in. So they went to cardboard.

Q.: There's a couple more. There's the same picture there.

W.S.: This is the crab steamer.

SPEAKER: They just lifted a --

Q.: That's a big steamer too.

SPEAKER: Yeah, a big steamer.

W.S.: It held two of these big crates, we call them.

SPEAKER: Yeah, crate.

W.S.: And it had the bottom that you could trip it and it would fall out. This was stainless steel platform, they shoveled them up in baskets and took them to the pickers.

SPEAKER: That's where they're thawing out now. See it?

W.S.: This is the crabmeat, packing it by hand. After you get it in the can, they'd put it on this table.

Q.: Did the company use tokens, like many companies did, for keeping track?

W.S.: No. They did years ago in the canning plant, but --

Q.: How did they keep track of like crab pickers and oyster shuckers as far as how much they produced? Do you remember?

W.S.: Well, the oyster shuckers, they shucked them into a bucket. And when they get that full, they'd carry it up and dump it on the skimmer, and they were measured right there, and they were by the gallon, and they would have a tally board there, and the man --

Q.: Oh, okay, just tallied them up.

W.S.: Tallied them up. And the crab picking was done by the pound. But every so often, they'd go up and each one individually would be weighed and counted up.

Q.: Same thing with tally boards.

W.S.: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Had three different kind of crabmeats there to pick out, right?

W.S.: That's me right there.

Q.: Oh, is that you?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). I was coming off the end of the closing machine. And that was one of the bosses right there. And he made out he was closing the kettle up.

Q.: So you remember when they took those photographs that day.

W.S.: Yeah.

Q.: I think that was -- these photos were taken by, what's his name --

W.S.: Holiday?

Q.: Holiday.

SPEAKER: Bob Holiday when he was down there.

W.S.: He's a nice guy. He took a lot of the pictures. But we weren't in operation that day. That was just posed, set up. (Laughter).

SPEAKER: There's some of the women.

W.S.: Yeah, that's when they started into the frozen food end of it. That was the first operation that they had.

SPEAKER: You know this fellow here?

W.S.: That was a machine that we patent -- got a patent on it.

Q.: That was the canning --

W.S.: That was the canning plant. We had -- these cans was all in these big crates like you seen over here on this picture right here. That's what they used to put them in, they'd put three of them in these kettles, close them up and cook them. And then they come out of there, they went into a big -- they were lowered down into a big tank of water, the water was flowing to it all the time. And the conveyor, it was real slow, I guess about 50 feet long, and when it got to the other end, it come up on a platform, and they had a hoist back there that hooked onto the crate, and they dumped the whole thing into another tank. Cans all loose. It was (INAUDIBLE) coming up out of that bringing these cans up, draining the water off of them. On this back end here, they were coming down this machine, and each one of those cans, they would straighten their self out and be in rows like that. Cans would be end to end, five different rows, and they'd come down this belt, and it was kind of a two-step belt where they got down maybe 10 feet, they would come off the end like that and stand up on another belt. And when they got down here, they would all come out and come around here like a straight line, see, like this. And they'd turn over and roll down this shoot and go into the (INAUDIBLE) machine. And we built two of those machines, and got patents on them for our own use. And then the A.K. Rodman's Company (phonetic) in Baltimore took over the manufacturing of them. And every time they sold one, one of our men would have to go and set it up in the plant. That's another Fluharty that run that machine shop. He's Don's uncle, and he's still living. He's the man, you may have heard of him, making these oyster tong pullers.

Q.: I've heard of them. I didn't know he was the one that had that.

W.S.: He's the one that invented that.

Q.: What's his name?

W.S.: Jim Fluharty. Charles Albert is his name, but he always goes by Jim. And he's the one that is the brains behind making all this stuff Him, his brother and myself together. And we made, I guess the first breeding machine that was in existence, as far as I know.

SPEAKER: That's for the fish cakes.

W.S.: Yeah, and anything that had breeding, oysters or crab cakes and whatnot. And we made the first one, had it in our plant and used it, and then the A.K. Rodman's Company, they took it over and manufactured it. And every time that they would' sell one, our man would have to go and set it up. That was the deal they had with Mr. Harrison. As far as I know, still today, they're using that same principle that we started out with in the breeding machine. Before our plant closed, couple years before it closed, we bought two, the -- breeders, and that same basic principle was there.

Q.: Well you were obviously with the company when they won the Army Navy E award during the war.

W.S.: It was an A award.

Q.: A award?

W.S.: Yeah. I guess that was back in '43.

Q.: Yeah.

W.S.: Something like that. They had a lot of pictures of that. I don't know whether you have it or not.

Q.: No, we don't have too many. I'm sure they may have some up in Easton though.

W.S.: Have you checked with the historical --

Q.: No, I have a vague idea of what they have up there. I'm sure they may have some of the -- I just was reading about the award.

W.S.: I don't know whether Mr. Harrison's son has any of those pictures or not. He had a pile of them, Mr. Harrison.

Q.: Jack, Jack Harrison?

W.S.: Yeah.

Q.: I think he may still have some, what I hear anyway. Were you doing a lot of government contract work then?

W.S.: The government was taking practically everything we could put in a can or a box.

Q.: Is that right? Must've been pretty busy.

W.S.: We were. Year-round, hard as we could go.

Q.: When they came down, did you do a little ceremony that day when they presented it?

W.S.: Yeah. I have seen that picture. I'm always sorry I didn't make a collection of those pictures. But I didn't do it.

SPEAKER: That often happens after the event.

- W.S.: Yeah, well you know, hindsight always better than foresight. At that time, we had just built this big shed out here, and it was larger than the picture actually shows. And that's where they had all the ceremony, under that shed.

SPEAKER: Run the flag up on a pole, did you?

W.S.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah, this was our -- this was the office right here, this building. And we had a big flag pole up here. We'd slide that flag with an American flag every day. And they had like a hedge out front.

SPEAKER: Turn around like.

W.S.: Well, yeah, alongside that office it was a big flowerbed like, and this hedge was planted, and they took a trim and it was "welcome".

SPEAKER: It's all gone.

Q.: Oh. I know it looks pretty barren and desolate down there, at least when I was down there last.

SPEAKER: They're tearing it up now.

W.S.: In fact, at one time, the packing company owned all the land this side of the highway clear on down to Fairbanks, all that farmland, all those farms. There was another operation, we had maintained all of the farm equipment and whatnot -- broke down, and we had to go out in the field and get it, fix it and all that stuff.

Q.: Is that where most of the corn came from that you were canning from Tilghman Island or was it further afield?

W.S.: No, a lot of it were, but we got it from all over, as far away as --

SPEAKER: Wherever they could lay their hands on it.

W.S.: Virginia. Tomatoes, we'd start getting them when they'd first start in Virginia, and we'd get them, they would truck them in. And as the seasons progressed, right on up to the State of New York. I guess we were the largest tomato canning outfit in the country at one time.

SPEAKER: Until Cambridge broke out there.

W.S.: Well, yeah. Cambridge kind of died down when we were kind of coming up, you know.

SPEAKER: Phillips Packing Company?

W.S.: Yeah, Phillips Packing, yeah.

Q.: Well, did you enjoy your 40 years there, looking back on it?

W.S.: Well, yes, I had a lot of good memories, a lot of sad ones too. Never made much money. When that closed, I come here to work St. Michaels with the town, maintenance in their shop. I was here nine years until I had to have open heart surgery in '84, and I had to quit work. I haven't worked since, only light jobs. But I loved it here. I loved it better than I did Tilghman. I could settle right down here in this town and stay here forever.

Q.: Is that right? But why -- you went up to Easton though.

W.S.: Well, our daughter and her husband, they wanted us to come up. They built on to their house, and live with them. It's not in Easton, it's about four miles between Easton and Cordova. It's nice. But I just love the Town of St. Michaels.

Q.: Well, we're glad you can come down here today. I appreciate passing on the information.

W.S.: It was my pleasure. And I hope that I have enlightened you on some of the things.

Q.: You have. There's a lot of things you can't read about, you only hear about but you never read about.

SPEAKER: This is the best part of it. You don't have that kind of information in the papers or magazines or anything.

W.S.: Like a fellow from the Star Democrat come after the plant closed down. He called me on down and asked if he could come interview

me. I says yes, you can come. So he come down, sit there and talked. When he got ready to leave, I said I'm going to warn you. If you've added on to anything that I have said here, I'm coming after you. Because I don't like that stuff, you know. He didn't -- I know some of them do, add things haven't said.

SPEAKER: They're notoriously known for that trick, all the way through.

W.S.: But it was quite an operation.

Q.: A busy place at one time.

W.S.: It sure was.

SPEAKER: Yeah, a whole lot more than ever meets the eye.

Q.: Yeah. This company really did have a lot of different operations going on.

W.S.: They did.

Q.: I don't think most of these packing companies had such a wide range of interests.

SPEAKER: Diversified.

Q.: As diversified as they were, yeah.

W.S.: But as Mr. Harrison used to say, we save everything from the fish, including the (indiscernible) --

SPEAKER: Like the pigs.

W.S.: And we did. He's a nice little fellow, he was. I remember the man that started that company, as a child, I remember. They were old men at that time, but Mr. Covington.

SPEAKER: Captain Till (phonetic).

W.S.: Captain Till, Captain Till's father is the one I'm talking about. He's the one that had that store there. He built that store. And Mr. Harrison's father, Captain Skinner --

SPEAKER: Skinner Harrison.

W.S.: They were smart old men back there. I hand it to them. Mr. Nick Harrison, which was a nephew. George was his nephew. He's the one that had this canning plant. That was individual operation. They were separated, even though they -- the company got in pretty bad shape right as World War II started. That's when they incorporated, all in one. And I guess the war come along, saved them because they started taking everything we could put in a can, you know.

SPEAKER: That saved a lot of people on Tilghman too.

W.S.: That's right. But I seen this big warehouse, tomatoes lay in there from one season to the next, and not a case of them go out. And then when the war broke loose, and everything just cleaned right out of there and you couldn't can it fast enough. And that's when they incorporated and had it all one operation.

SPEAKER: That's what helped a lot of these canning places down here.

W.S.: That's right. And then after the war was over, unless they could diversify into something else, you know, went out of business. And that's when this company started getting in different things.

SPEAKER: Is that an end to Devil's Island right there?

W.S.: That's it. That was another one of the Harrison's, Mr. John D. Harrison. And when I was a kid, he had a tomato canning plant out there.

SPEAKER: Made tomato puree.

W.S.: And a crab picking operation. In the spring, he caught such herring up there.

SPEAKER: They had 21 pound nets one time.

W.S.: And then he got into the boat building end of it, and he let the rest of it go.

SPEAKER: We had one of these fish boats out here in the shed, one of the first ones that they built when they were hauling fish.

W.S.: And this company had five pound net outfits.

Q.: They did?

W.S.: Yeah, on the western shore. And they used to hire men (INAUDIBLE).

Q.: So the company actually owned the nets?

W.S.: The company did, yes. They had -- one of their operations was-

SPEAKER: Flag Pond, in there too.

W.S.: Yes. And then they fished those nets and they'd bring the herring over here to the packing company every day. So it was quite an operation.

SPEAKER: They were situated in a darn good spot to begin with.

W.S.: But then they got so they had to truck everything in.

SPEAKER: That changed the picture.

Q.: Yeah. Good drive from Tilghman to Baltimore.

W.S.: The (indiscernible) we got in, everything come in truck. We had 17 trucks of our own at that time, at this particular time. Used to haul stuff, you know. Other trucks used to come in.

Q.: Yeah, a busy place.

SPEAKER: Fluharty's operation on the south end of the Avalon there wasn't no small operation either, was it?

W.S.: Not Fluharty, it was Faulkner.

SPEAKER: Faulkner, I meant.

W.S.: No, that wasn't. They used to can tomatoes.

SPEAKER: They owned some big boats too.

Q.: Was Tilghman Packing Company the last company to operate on Avalon?

W.S.: Yeah.

Q.: They were the last ones.

W.S.: They bought all this, the whole thing.

(End of interview.)