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**Transcript of DARE Interview (1968): Leipsic, Delaware; Primary Informant
DE004 (Tape 0234-S1)**

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INTRODUCTION: The following was recorded from Dictionary of American Regional English, tape zero two three four, side one.

FIELDWORKER: This is a recording of Sam [beep] made May twentieth, nineteen sixty-eight in Leipsic, Delaware, by [beep].

5 INFORMANT: Proceeded to insist that she take the thing out and put it in her car. While getting the job done, well I got that wall.

FIELDWORKER: I'm not insisting that you say anything controversial, let me tell you.

INFORMANT: Oh, I'm not, I wouldn't say anything controversial.

10 FIELDWORKER: How do you go about, oh, normal days, catching clams, scooping up clams, whatever you do?

INFORMANT: A normal day, well, number one, we get up around four o'clock in the morning, and we go about ten mile to Port Mahon where our boat is moored, and we, our crew gathers and we leave the, the dock around sunup, and we proceed to the oyster or the clam beds and start our operation.

15 AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (xx)

INFORMANT: We do what?

FIELDWORKER: What kind of boat do you have? What size is it?

INFORMANT: Seventy foot long. From seventy to seventy-five foot long with a diesel power.

FIELDWORKER: Uh-huh. And how big of a crew does it take to run it?

20 INFORMANT: Well, now we have three men aboard now, six in the middle of the day. And we clam until four o'clock, then we proceed to come in and, and uh, put our clams on the truck and that winds up the day.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (xx)

INFORMANT: Now, ha-, has that thing been on?

25 FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: Well play it over now. [laughter]

FIELDWORKER: Oh how deep—

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (That's all I can think of at the moment.)

FIELDWORKER: How deep of water are these clams normally caught in?

30 INFORMANT: Well, anywhere from twelve to thirty-five feet.

FIELDWORKER: Uh-huh, and what do you use to get down to them, to get them back up?

INFORMANT: Well we have, uh, heavy dredges, it's, it's hauled off from the side, one on each, from each side of the boat with the high-powered pumps to pump the water down through the, the bottom of the dredges to, to wash the silt and the mud out of the dredge bags to, to uh,
35 (the way) I would ex-explain that w-w-we, the, the water pressure, the water pressure, uh, washes the mud from the dredges to make room for the clams so the clams will stay in the bag of the dredge.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm. What are these bags like? What are they made of?

INFORMANT: Mm, steel, hooks and rings. Everything is steel. They weigh about, 'bout three
40 hundred pound apiece, each one of them. And we wind the dredges in about every eight, five to eight minutes to have the crew to dump the clams on the deck and then heave the dredge back overboard. And while we're dragging the dredge, the crew picks the clams up and puts them in b-bags or baskets. To be bagged for the truck, h-, ready for the truck when we get in.

FIELDWORKER: Do they sort them according to size?

45 INFORMANT: Sometimes. (Bla-), in the winter we sort them, and uh, this time of the year we don't. They all go t-, uh, to one bar, that's Campbell Soup, a company in Camden, New Jersey. They buy I will say eighty per cent of the clams caught {on the shore.

FIELDWORKER: I see}. Oh, how about the clams that I see just sold alongside the road by uh, people in small pickup trucks and so forth? Who catches them?

50 INFORMANT: Oh, th-they're caught bo-, by different, smaller operators, th-they're, they're, they're caught by oy-, tongs, oyster tongs in the two lower bays. And uh, it's a much s-smaller operation than what we do in the bay, {Delaware Bay.

FIELDWORKER: I see}. These clams that you catch, you say you don't sort them according to size.

55 INFORMANT: No.

FIELDWORKER: But uh, you don't take the very small ones. How big do they have to be before they're...

INFORMANT: Well, a-anything over, uh, inch and a half is, is large enough f-for market.

FIELDWORKER: I see.

60 INFORMANT: Now, w-we uh, we pick out a few of the small ones for our own consumption.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: But the bulk of the clams they go in market as they're taken up.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: When you, when there is a demand there for them, you—

INFORMANT: I told him in the mi-, wintertime, we do sort them.

65 FIELDWORKER: And {the reason—

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: Into} three grades and (what are they)?

INFORMANT: Well they're the, they're the littlenecks, the cherrystones, and the chowder clams. And also those clams are not the surf clams that catch on the, in the ocean. They're, th- these are the regular quahog clams.

70 FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm. And what's the difference between the quahog and the surf clam?

INFORMANT: Surf clam is a soft-shell clam, and s-, with a different shape than, than a quahog clam.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: Quahog is a, is a hard shell clam.

75 AUXILIARY INFORMANT: The price (xx).

INFORMANT: The price is 'round three dollars and a quarter bushel for the chowder clams.

FIELDWORKER: Mm. And how many bushels can you get in a day at best?

INFORMANT: Well, anywhere from thirty to a hundred bushel a day. Just according to how lucky you are, uh, finding the clams.

80 FIELDWORKER: Uh-huh.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: And the cherrystones and the (littlenecks)?

INFORMANT: [cough] And the cherrystone we, we're lucky to get about twelve, ten or twelve bushel of those, and the, uh, littlenecks, we, we're lucky to get six to eight bushel of those.

FIELDWORKER: Which brings a higher price?

85 INFORMANT: The littlenecks.

FIELDWORKER: Littlenecks.

INFORMANT: I-it la-, in the winter, once, last winter, they brought nineteen dollars a bushel, right on the (boat's deck).

FIELDWORKER: I see, and how big are they?

90 INFORMANT: About as big as a silver dollar. A little larger. [cough]

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (Then you bring in the cocktail clams.)

FIELDWORKER: Oh... you dredge up other things besides, uh, clams in your dredges.

INFORMANT: No, not any, no seafood.

FIELDWORKER: No seafood.

95 INFORMANT: Now, we- we- we- we'll, uh, we dredge up old relics once in a while when we hit an old wreck that's been in, in the bay about a couple hundred years.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

100 INFORMANT: J-Jimmy has three lead bars that was up home now that was, two bars that he dredged up. That was, has, what, Napoleon's coat of arms stamped on it and the name of a s-, I don't know what the name represents.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: And the pewter (xx).

INFORMANT: Well that's a pewter cups {(xx) in those old ships.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: And the cannonball} the cannon {ball.

105 INFORMANT: And} he did dredge up a, a, probably a dozen cannonb-, iron cannonballs here two or three years ago.

FIELDWORKER: And how far out were those?

INFORMANT: They were about, oh, five miles, from sh-shore. Lost in the Delaware Bay in the capes, and this happened to be one of them that uh, one of the locations where it was lost. Probably two hundred years ago.

110 FIELDWORKER: Are ships pretty safe in the bay now?

INFORMANT: Pretty much. They have uh, uh, instruments now that they can operate by, where back in the early days they didn't.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm. I noticed in the newspaper too that they've got more, uh, protection around the, the points of the bay and so forth.

115 INFORMANT: Well there are buoys and, and uh, range lights and markers to, to run by.

FIELDWORKER: What's a range light?

INFORMANT: It's just two lights that's in the mouth of the harbor, that you get them in f-, right focus to, to in the harbor to stay in the deep water.

FIELDWORKER: Mm, you have instruments to, to uh, get them in range perfectly?

120 INFORMANT: No, we, we, we know by experience t-, how to, where to run to get there, in the proper position.

FIELDWORKER: I see. Have you ever fished for other kinds of seafood besides clams?

INFORMANT: Clams and oysters and mussels and crabs. That's about covers the, the dredge boat operation.

125 FIELDWORKER: I see. What kind of crabs would they catch here?

INFORMANT: The blue-claw crab.

FIELDWORKER: Blue-claw.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (Hard to get) in the winter, (see)?

130 INFORMANT: Well we have an oyster industry in this community, mostly in Delaware Bay, uh, the past few years, I'll say fifteen years ago, was worth probably six to eight million dollars in nineteen fifty-five, and they were, uh, parasite came in the, in the bay and killed ninety-nine percent of them.

FIELDWORKER: What was this parasite?

135 INFORMANT: Well, the biologists, scientists came up with MSX. They don't know what it is or neither do we, but that is the name they gave it, MSX.

FIELDWORKER: What did it do to the oysters?

INFORMANT: We don't know that, just, they just died.

FIELDWORKER: They just die.

140 INFORMANT: And we lost our whole business, the whole industry was, been outta, out of, uh, breaking down for the past ten years just on account of that.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: How, how many—

INFORMANT: There were fifteen to eighteen boats that, uh, participated in the oyster industry.

FIELDWORKER: Did they use the same kind of boats for oysters as they did for clams?

INFORMANT: Same kind of boat and same kind of dredges, only some's heavier than others.

145 And we employed probably on the, when we're going at full capacity, we employed around five hundred people in the industry. And today, twenty-five will count all that's in it.

FIELDWORKER: Are oysters found in the same kind of place that clams are?

INFORMANT: Yes, it's th-they grow in, eh, in both, in the same place, but it's not very profitable to plant oysters where clams are growing.

150 FIELDWORKER: Why's that?

INFORMANT: Clams will (xx) the oyster grounds and kill, kill the oysters.

FIELDWORKER: Oh. I've noticed oysters down in Florida and in Louisiana, in really shallow water. Do they ever grow them in shallow water here?

INFORMANT: Not too, not too much, no.

155 AUXILIARY INFORMANT: Well you experimented with that one time.

INFORMANT: We, yeah, we've experimented in the shallow water but our, all of our shallow water is closed by the Board of Health. It's water is polluted.

FIELDWORKER: Oh I see.

INFORMANT: And, we just don't have any operation at all in shallow water.

160 FIELDWORKER: I see.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: When you had those beds growing in the shallow water, then what happened to them? At first they started to grow but then the {{(tide)—

INFORMANT: Storm, the storm, storm washed them ashore.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: And then they, uh, they were exposed to the sun (xx).

165 INFORMANT: They was just an experiment, that was what that was.

FIELDWORKER: You plant the oysters, then, here.

INFORMANT: Mm-hmm. We, we plant them on the ground, now the young oysters they strike on the upper part of the bay, what we call the state beds. And then we, we take them off the state beds and plant them down on our privately owned grounds.

170 FIELDWORKER: I see.

INFORMANT: Then they s-, we, we, they stay there for about two years, and then they're marketable.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm. And how big are they when they're marketable?

INFORMANT: Mm, two to three and a half inches.

175 FIELDWORKER: Do you do anything to, uh, protect the oysters or feed them or anything—

INFORMANT: No, no.

FIELDWORKER: —during that time, or do you just put them somewhere to grow?

INFORMANT: We have, we have a watchboat out there that patrols the bay at all times.

FIELDWORKER: Oh, to keep other people from—

180 INFORMANT: Keep other people from poaching.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: Well, explain the, the rate that you pay the state your license.

INFORMANT: Well, in regard to s-, compensation to the state, we pay a boat license of three dollars a gross ton, we pay a tax per bushel on oysters, ten cents per bushel after we catch them and then ten more cents per bushel as we catch them again for, and send them into the market. Then we pay to lease the grounds from the state, at a rate of seventy-five cents per
185 acre. So that is the revenue that we pay into the s-state for the, the, the, the privilege of catching the oysters off the state beds.

FIELDWORKER: And with that money they cultivate more young oysters, is that right?

INFORMANT: With that money they pay the, the operation of the office and, and they have,
190 uh, given us money a, a couple times to rehabilitate the oyster beds through planting shells.

FIELDWORKER: I see.

INFORMANT: Then there's a federal fund was up three years ago that we participate in that. We matched, uh, so much money, state funds to so much money federal funds to re-, help rehabilitate the oysters.

195 AUXILIARY INFORMANT: How many shells did you plant?

INFORMANT: We planted three hundred and twenty thousand bushel in nineteen six, sixty-six, nineteen sixty-six.

FIELDWORKER: How are those shells planted?

INFORMANT: Ah—

200 FIELDWORKER: You take them out—

INFORMANT: They're take, they're, they're taken up out of the upper part of Chesapeake Bay with the large dredges, and they're washed and put on top, o-on lighters or some people call them 'scows' of around fifteen thousand to twenty-five thousand bushel each, and they're,

205 they're towed into this bay with tugboats and they're washed overboard by high powered hoses.

FIELDWORKER: I see.

INFORMANT: And the areas where we designate for them to be planted.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm. Well what's the difference between a lighter or a scow and a barge?

INFORMANT: Nothing.

210 FIELDWORKER: Same.

INFORMANT: They're just the same, same—

FIELDWORKER: OK. Oh, now the, uh, small clam, uh, what would you call him, clam catcher, clammer?

INFORMANT: Clammer.

215 FIELDWORKER: Clammer.

INFORMANT: Well the, the, they catch, they catch those with tongs and they catch those mostly for the, the, the, the uh— I don't know how I want to explain it—the restaurants and such places as that. And, and they're served on a half shell or they're st-, or steamed, there are quite a few of them steamed clams.

220 FIELDWORKER: How long are these tongs?

INFORMANT: Oh, anywhere from twelve to eighteen foot long.

FIELDWORKER: And, uh, how are they built at the end do they have—

INFORMANT: Well, they're built like a pair of pinchers and they're worked manually and they, they'll work them and, and dig them out of, out of the bottom and bring them up and, and—

225 AUXILIARY INFORMANT: The length of the sails.

INFORMANT: —and put them in their, i-in their boat.

FIELDWORKER: How, how many bushels could a man get in a day, in a good day, with tongs?

INFORMANT: They're only allowed a thousand a day, a thousand clams a day.

FIELDWORKER: Thousand clams. And how many clams in a bushel?

230 INFORMANT: Those clams are about three, around four hundred, t-three and four hundred.

FIELDWORKER: So that would be about three bushels a day.

INFORMANT: Yeah.

235 FIELDWORKER: Well I'm learning a lot. Oh. Could you run through some of the, uh, some of the fish that are, uh, prevalent here? We've got some of them on the questionnaire, but I'd like to have some of them on the {tape.

INFORMANT: Well}, as far as fish is concerned, our, our, our main sport fish today is trout. For hook-and-line fishing is trout. Some, some call it weakfish and uh, they're quite a few rock that's caught by hook and line in the bay and river.

FIELDWORKER: Yeah.

240 INFORMANT: And the lower part of the bay, there's, there's, uh, there've been some mackerel caught this, early this spring.

FIELDWORKER: Oh.

AUXILIARY INFORMANT: (And then) the shad.

INFORMANT: And there's quite a f-, in the spring there's a quite a few shad caught by gill net.

245 FIELDWORKER: They uh, they run up these creeks and rivers to spawn, don't they?

INFORMANT: Mm-hmm.

FIELDWORKER: Oh, do people fish for those with hook and line ever?

INFORMANT: Not shad.

FIELDWORKER: Not shad.

250 INFORMANT: Now, I've been told that, that they uh, have at the head of these streams where they go to spawn that you can catch them on hook and line. But we've never, down this part of the bay, we never have.

FIELDWORKER: Well, I've read of that and I snagged one the other day. It didn't hit the fly, you know, but I snagged it—

255 INFORMANT: You did?

FIELDWORKER: —right close to the tale end. It fought like crazy and I was wishing that I {(xx)—

INFORMANT: Then there's a carp} fish that's in this bay, in this, these l-, r-, streams, rivers, that's been quite prevalent for the past a good many years, but th-they're not a, I've been told you can catch those with a hook and line. {If you use a certain kind of bait.

260 FIELDWORKER: (xx)}. Did they ever use them for anything?

INFORMANT: Yes sir, they're, uh, they're edible, what the, the Jewish people mostly eats the carp. The olden days, the Rabbi had to, must kill the fish before they could eat it.

265 FIELDWORKER: Yes. Well a carp stays alive a good long time, so he can get a chance at it.
[laugh] And they won't eat catfish, which stay alive longer than any other because they don't
have scales.

INFORMANT: That's right. The story of Arthur the Rat. [laugh] Once upon a time there was a
young rat who couldn't make up his mind. Whenever the other rats asked him if he'd like to
come out hunting with them, he would answer in a hoarse voice, "I don't know," and when they
s-, and when they said, "Would you rather stay inside?" he wouldn't say yes, or no either. He'd
270 always shirk making a choice. One fine day his aunt Josephine said to him, "Now look here. No
one will ever care for you if you carry on like this. You have no more mind of your own than a
greasy old blade of grass." The young rat coughed and looked wise, as usual, but said nothing.
"You don't think so?" said his aunt, stamping with her foot, for she couldn't bear to see the
young rat so cold-blooded. "I don't know," was all he ever answered, and then he'd walk off to
275 think for an hour or more whether he would stay in the hole or in the ground or go out into the
loft. One night the rats heard a loud noise in the loft. It was a very dreary old place. The roof let
the rain come washing in, the beams and rafters had all rotted through, so that the whole thing
was quite unsafe. At last one of the joists gave way and the beams fell with one edge on the
floor. The walls shook, the cupola fell off, and all the rats' hair stood on end with fear and
280 horror. "This won't do," said their leader. "We can't stay cooped up here any longer." So they
sent out scouts to search for a new home. A little later on that evening the scouts came back
and said they had found an old-fashioned horse barn where there would be room and board for
all of them. The leader gave the order at once, "Company f-fall in," and the rats crawled out of
their holes right away and stood on the floor in a long line. Just then the old rat caught sight of
285 young Arthur. That was the name of the shirker. He wasn't in the line, and he wasn't exactly
outside it. He stood just by it. "Come on, get in line," growled the old rat coar-coar-coarsely. "Of
course you're coming too" "I don't know," said Arthur calmly. "Why the idea of it! You don't
think it's safe here anymore, do you?" "I'm not certain," said Arthur, undaunted. "The roof may
f-, may not fall down yet." "Well," said the old rat, "we can't wait for you to join us." Then he
290 turned to the others and shouted, "Right about face, march!" and the long line marched out of
the barn while the young rat watched them. "I think I'll go tomorrow," he said to himself, "but
then again, perhaps I won't. It's so nice and snug here. I guess I'll go back to my hole under the
log for a while just to make up my mind." But during the night, there was a big crash. Down
came beams, rafters, joists—the whole business. Next morning—it was a foggy day—some men
295 came to look over the damage. It seemed odd to them that the old building was not haunted by
rats. But at last one of them happened to have moved a board, and he caught sight of young
rat, quite dead, half in, in, half out of his hole. Thus the shirker got his due, and there was no
mourning for him.