

Conversations with

Emery Philbrook

An Oral History of Matinicus Island, Maine

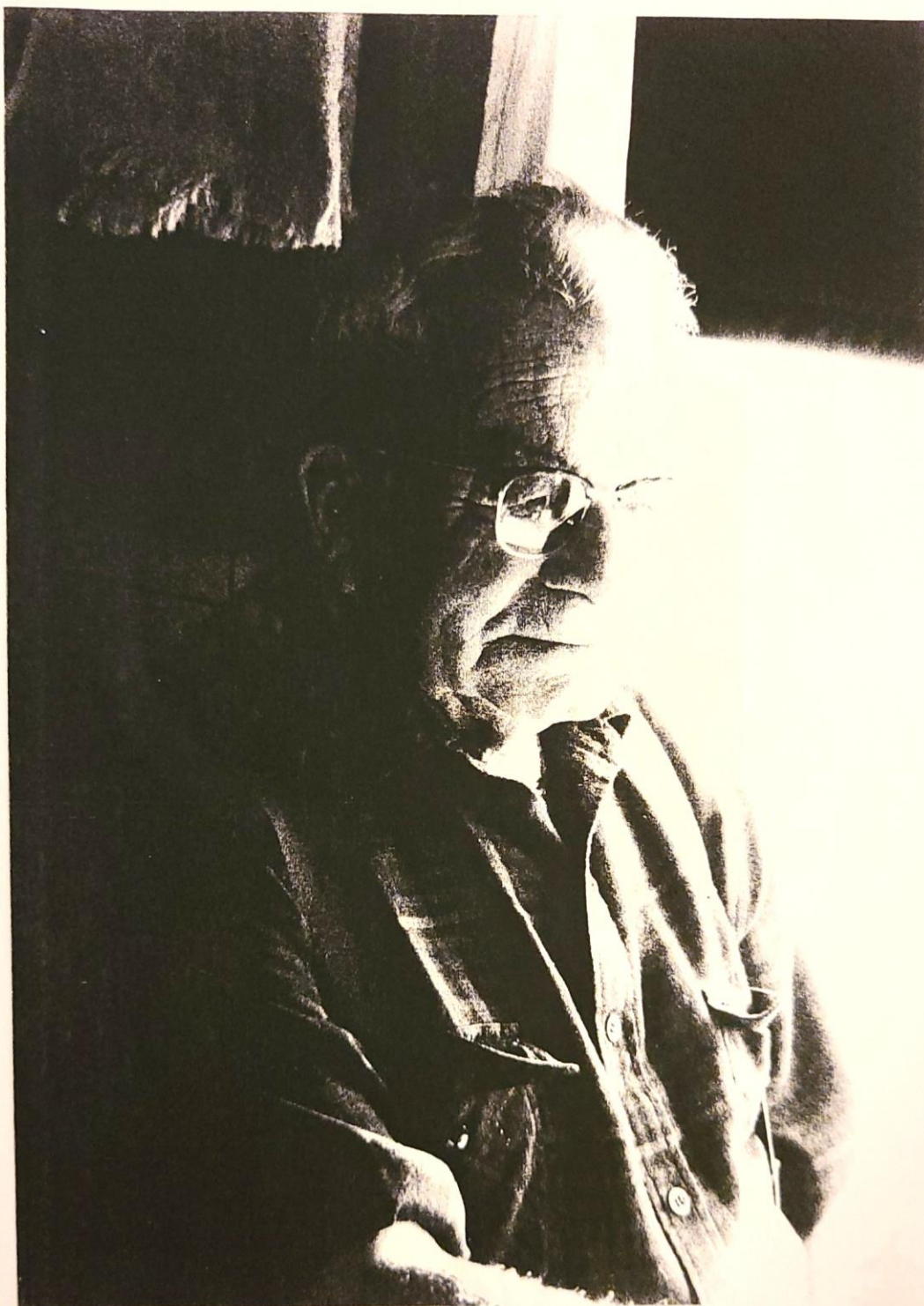
Interlocutors

Emery Philbrook

Peter Wentz

Elsbeth Russell

Christopher Russell



Emery A. Philbrook

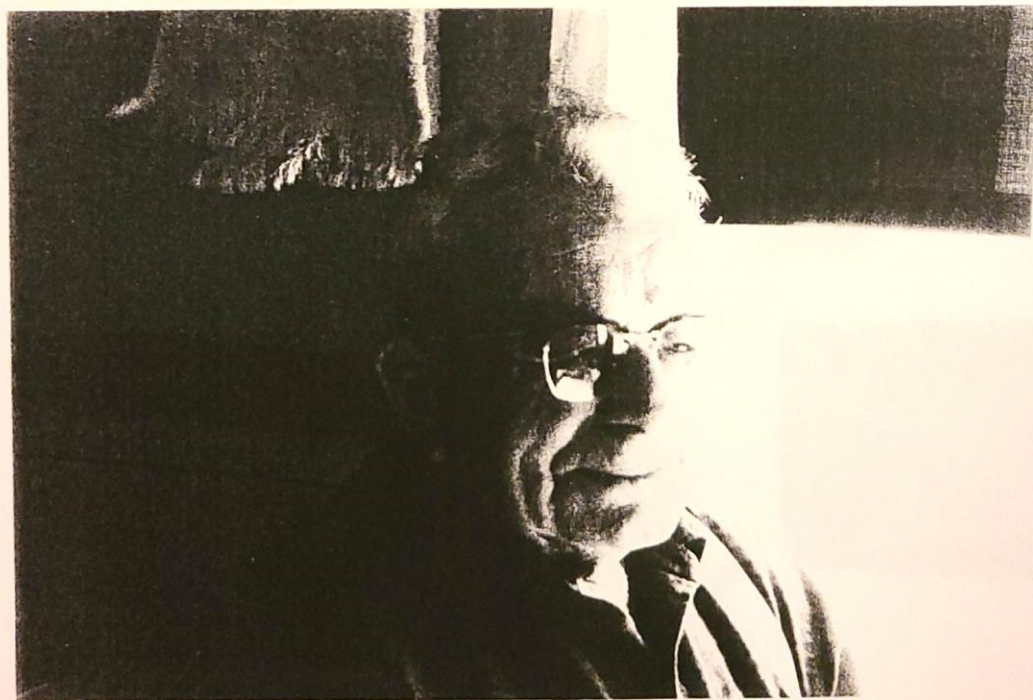
1914 - 2002

It is a bright fall day and
We are approaching Emery's house on Harbor Point Road

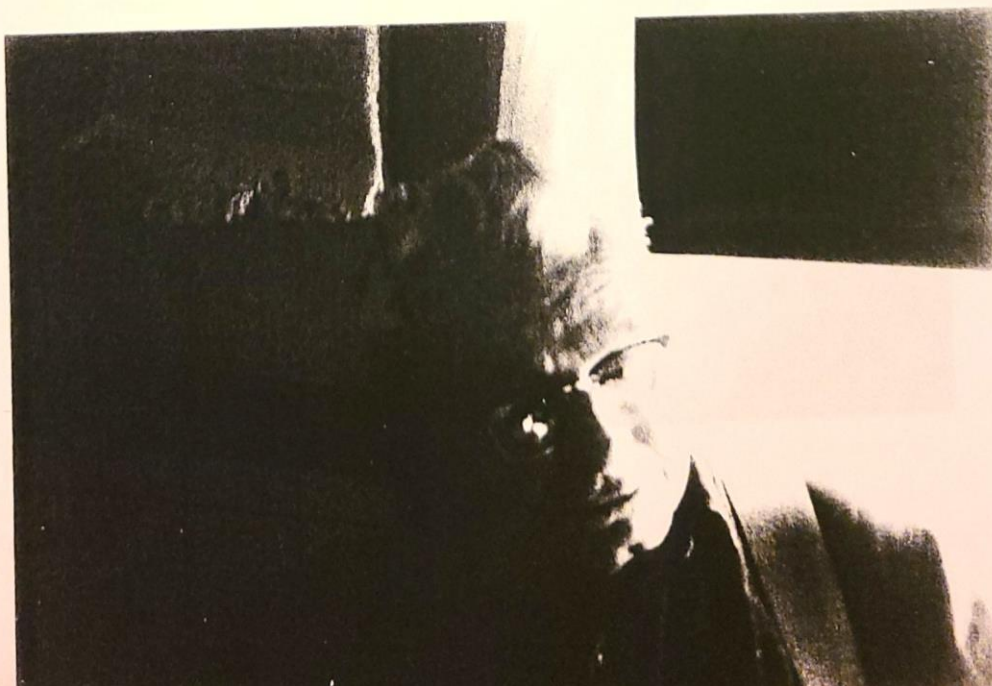
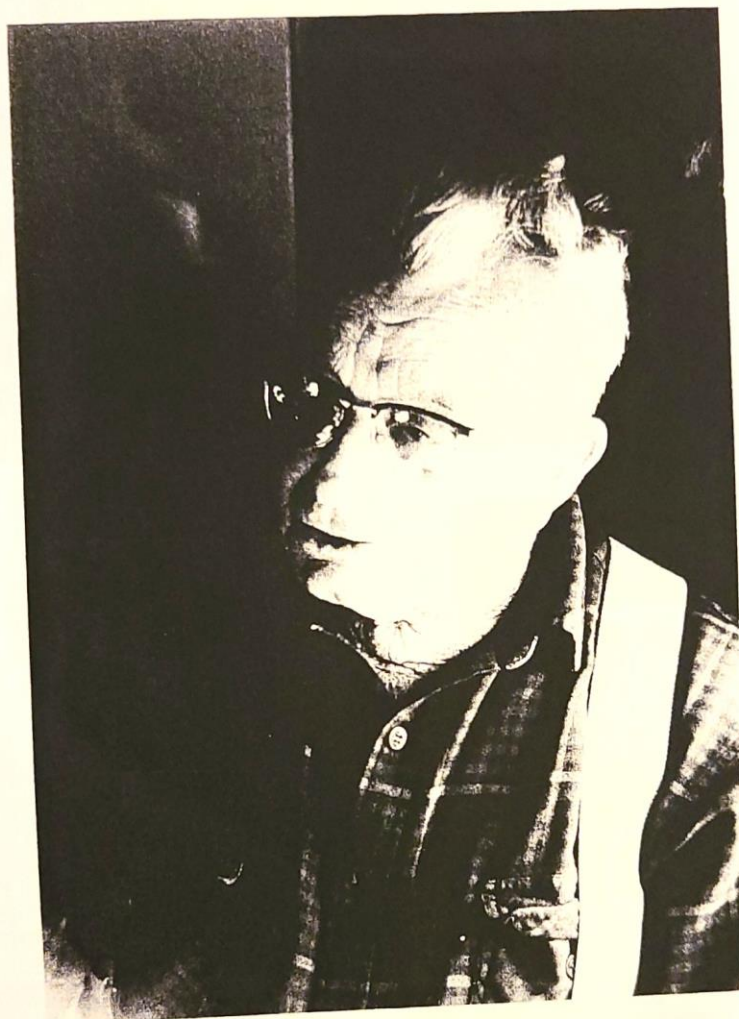


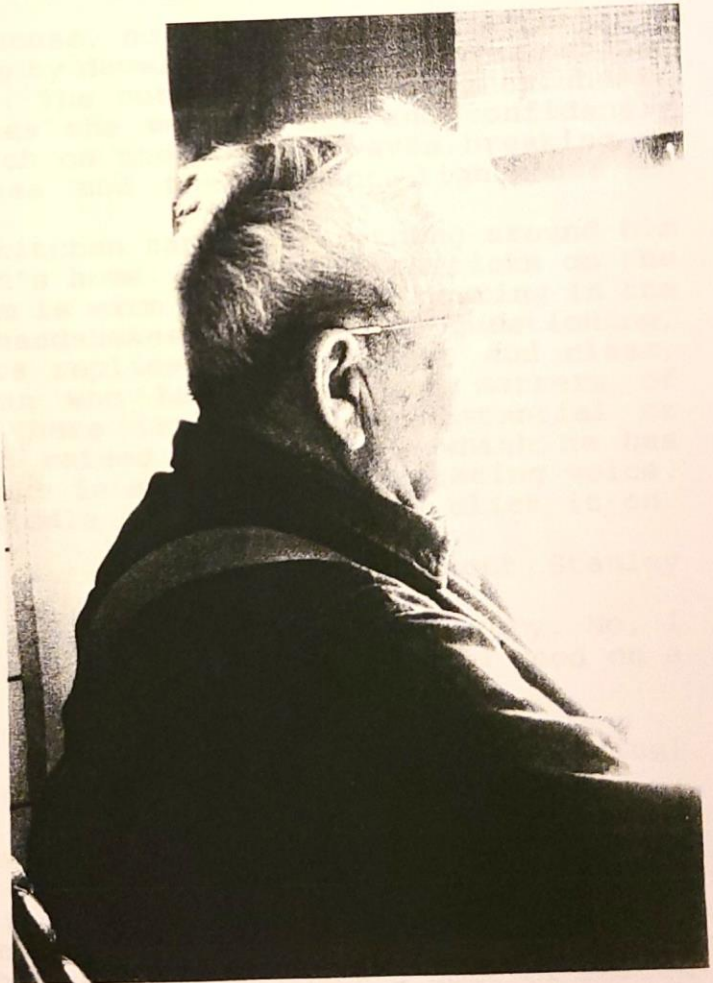
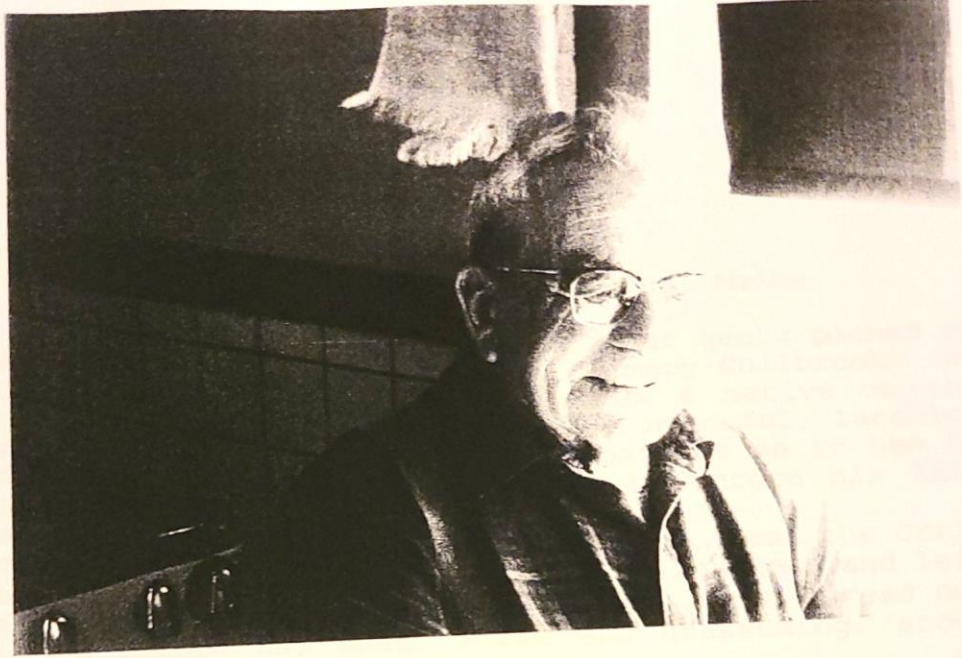


We are welcomed into his sunny warm kitchen



The converstion slips easily into an interview





because each question is answered so fully and
with such significance to the history of the
island of Matinicus

Conversations with
Emery Philbrook
An Oral History of Matinicus, Maine

It was a bright October afternoon when Peter Wentz picked me up in his truck to keep our appointment with Emery Philbrook. We were both from off-island, about to interview a native on the subject of his youth on Matinicus. Emery was humorous, laconic, even-tempered, wise--but we were still apprehensive as to how he would respond to two mainlanders asking him to record his life experiences on tape.

The truck lumbered over the top of the island, past the Orrin Burgess house, past Kathleen's, right on Shag Hollow Road and left on Harbor Point Road. As we came over a rise the ocean spread out to our right and before us, neat, white and unassuming, stood Emery's house.

Emery's is a very Maine house, no nonsense, the kind that is fast disappearing, swallowed up by development, passed over because of its modesty and simplicity. The outbuildings nestle around it like chicks to a hen. It faces the western sun and confidently looks down from its rocky perch on the roiling waves breaking in Old Cove and then out to sea and the distant lighthouse on Matinicus Rock.

Emery is sitting at the kitchen table. Everything around him is orderly and clean, a seaman's home. The Westclock ticks on the shelf above the table. The room is warm from the sun pouring in the windows. After greetings and handshakes we begin our questioning, hesitantly, awkwardly, but his replies are confident and clear, bespeaking the mind of a man who has dealt with matters of substance all of his life. There is nothing insubstantial or forgiving about the sea which raised him and from which he has gained his livelihood. He speaks in a low but unhesitating voice. I place the recorder in the middle of the table and click it on. The interview begins.

Beth: Emery, you were about to tell us a story about Stanley Ripley.

Emery: Well, I'm not so sure I should tell you that story. No, I don't think I'll tell you that story. It wouldn't sound good on a tape.

Peter: Well, then, you can cross it right out.

[Peter is trying to put Emery at ease with the idea of recording]

Emery: [with a chuckle] Well there, it's crossed out.***

[At this point and throughout the interview, when Emery's candor and keen sense of humor is apparent, the easy exchange that is occurring between the three of us allows the reader to imagine either whinnies of laughter from Beth, spontaneous guffaws from Peter or mild chortles from Emery. To insert each time our reactions would belabor the obvious and introduce a note of forced hilarity. The interlocutor will, therefore, just insert a couple of

asterisks to convey the idea of our shared amusement at that particular moment.]

Beth: Oh, Emery, you are smart, you are smart.

Emery: Well then, I'll start with a story about the farm where I grew up on the south end of the island.

Beth: Your mother's farm was where the Thompsons now live, wasn't it?

Emery: Ayah. Now my mother would look out that back window and there would be someone coming down to visit---it was Sunday--- and she'd say to me, "Go on down and grab a rooster and chop his damned head off. We're having company for dinner". And I'd go and kill that chicken. I got where I didn't care for chicken at all.

Peter: Well that's perfectly understandable.

Beth: Wasn't chicken sort of a special meal in those days? Roast chicken was a company meal, wasn't it?

Emery: Used to be.

Beth: Your mother was Lizzie Philbrook. She died just before we came to the island--just before 1969.

Emery: She lived to be 75.

Beth: And she farmed to the very last?

Emery: Toward the last she was on the mainland. And she was in Vinalhaven when she died.

Peter: How many of you were there?

Emery: There was just me and my brother ^{Sherwin} Sherman.

Beth: Then you spent your entire childhood on the island, farming and fishing?

Emery: I went fishing after the garden was in down there. I'd often go on boats out of Monhegan.

Peter: Deep sea boats? Big boats? You went way out there, didn't you?

Emery: Mostly seining boats. I liked seining. We'd go out for about 10 days or so. But they wasn't large boats--50 feet at the most. But I did go out on some large boats. Old Henry Gallant, he was one of the high mucky mucks in Rockland--the fisherman's union and all that--and he'd look up and he'd see me standing on the dock, hungry, and I was, and he'd say, "Come aboard", and so I'd make a trip with Henry Gallant. He had a large boat but I was hand trawling out of a dory. I hated it. If I hadn't been hungry I wouldn't ha' been there.

Peter: You must know that little boat down there in Mystic.

Emery: Ayah. She lay right down here in the harbor. She was an old Friendship sloop. I used to help old captain Jack load her up with traps or I'd drag the buoys and stuff down to her, you know. He'd have her tied up to this old stone wharf right down here, and we'd load the traps on her and then we'd go out and set 'em and, as I say I was just a small kid. You'd put the sails on her--that's all he'd use it for in those days was to set and take up--but he had to have the sails on her--couldn't go with power--he had to have the sails on her. We'd go out and set those traps and then he'd put the sails on her and I could sail around as long as I wanted to. But you know with a young kid, it don't take too long 'fore he wants to come home.

Beth: When you went out line fishing from a dory, was that a single dory or were there a series of dories?

Emery: It would be a vessel with 12 or 14 dories on her, and they'd put 'em over about a mile apart and if you had any wind you'd sail and let the trawl go out overboard. Otherwise, you'd scull with one hand and heave the trawl over with the other.

Peter: That was hard work. How many hooks were on a trawl?

Emery: Oh, thousands of them.

Beth: And then did you pull them up after a certain length of time? How long did you leave them out there?

Emery: Well, it all depended upon the weather and that sort of thing. When they dumped the dory overboard and you jumped into it, they'd tell you how long they were going to set and you timed yourself as best you could. And in case of thick weather or something like that the vessel would go down to what we called the leeward end of the tier and they had the crank horn and we rowed toward that crank horn. And any I was on--they always got their dories back.

Peter: I betcha there was a bunch that didn't.

Emery: There was a lot of them that didn't.

Peter: You know that painting in Clayton Young's front room of just what you've been talking about. Here's this ship with sails that are hanging loose--no wind--and there's two dories in the water and it's just thick 'a fog and here are these guys getting ready to row out and do their thing, and you know that when they get just two boat lengths away, they're not going to be able to see the main boat.

Emery: 'Course that was before my time, but they used to go off here on the Grand Banks and anchor and take the sails off o' them, and the dories rowed away from them each morning and would go out and hand line and they would be out there all summer.

Peter: Till they filled up.

[Peter shakes his head and whistles]

Beth: Wasn't there anyone on board with a compass, navigating, keeping track of the dories? And how did you locate each other when there was fog?

Emery: There was that crank horn, a horn on the ship, and I can tell you I pushed that crank horn many hours--- you could hear it for about three miles--something like that. It made a hell of a racket, I'll tell you.

Beth: But I imagine it was a life saver for many.

Peter: That was an amazing time, and there were lots of fish out there.

Emery: A lot more than there is today. And we ate seals, we ate porpoise which is against the law nowadays. I'll tell you, you won't find anything like that tasty or tender. Seal and porpoise tasted alike but you knew the first bite which was which. Seal was always tender; porpoise was always tough.

Beth: I wonder what explains that? I imagine that, when you think about it, a porpoise uses his muscles a lot more, whereas a seal just goes with the flow and uses a flipper now and again.

Peter: Those seals, they just sit on the rocks and watch the world

go by--and eat the lobsters.***

Emery: I had a friend used to come out here from Litchfield, Maine; he came out here every fall up to the time he died, and we'd go down'n shoot three or four seals just so's he could take them home with him. The damned things, over on the ledges there, with the first shot they'd go overboard and then they'd bounce out of the water right along side of you, and you've got to be ready with a rowboat or a boat with an outboard and get going right quick or otherwise the body goes down---and when they go down, you can't see 'em 'cause the kelp will cover them over. They'd sink right down to the kelp and the kelp would cover them over and you'd lost them. So you've got to be right on the job when you shoot one or you don't get it.

Beth: So what do you do? Do you have a boat hook or something?

Emery: You have a sharp gaff hook and you have less than a minute. They really are very good eating. Then you skin them and take all the fat off and soak them overnight in salt and water and cut them up and they're some good.

Beth: When did you start lobstering, then?

Emery: Oh, I started when I was just a young kid. First fishing I ever done was lobstering, school vacations and that sort of thing.

Beth: And when did you get your first boat?

Emery: Oh, I was probably around 17 or something like that.

Beth: Did ^{Sherman} go with you?

Emery: No, my father and I buddied up a lot but my brother and I, we never got along that well.

[Here there is a long pause. We are aware of the clock ticking on the shelf]

Peter: You go back one generation, two generations when you think about it, before you get to a boat like the one in Mystic, the Captain Morgan; is that the name of it?

Emery: The Morgan, she's a whaling ship.

Peter: A whaling ship?! She's only 60 feet long, maybe 70 feet--something like that. That ship is out there two years until they fill that thing up with whale oil. Can you imagine---with a whole crew on board?

Emery: I was there in Mystic--it was late in the fall--and I guess they close a lot of that stuff down, and they wouldn't let me aboard 'cause I wanted to go on that old Friendship sloop that came from down here, the old Jack Ansel, and I told them if they gave me two or three hours I could sail that damn thing back home again where she belongs. That was some time ago. I told someone the other day, I don't know as I could sail one of those old Friendship sloops---it's been so many years.

Peter: That's baloney. It'd all come back to you. It's like walking.

Beth: The Matinicus sloop--how does that differ from the Friendship?

Emery: Well, it's a different model all together. Old Captain Brad Young, he used to sail those sloops here, I guess. But the Friendship sloop, there are three or four different versions of them-- some of them was built in Friendship village, some in

Friendship, Long Island, and some over at Pleasant Point. Those Matinicus sloops that were built here were much different. The Friendship sloop, she had much better lines on her and they'd sail better--handle better.

Peter: I'm not a boat person, but I look at these lobster boats of today, like the old Edie and Em. I look at them as sort of evolutionary things. They're a very practical boat. They're a product of people like you saying, "I'm tired of hitting my knee on this thing so I'm going to move it," or "I want this kind of a hull so I won't roll over," and "I want this so's I don't get swamped," and that over the years has developed this lobster boat which is so very practical.

Emery: You know the old Edie and Em is still a'going.

Peter: Is it! Where is she?

Emery: Over in Port Clyde. Fellow by the name of Wilson bought her.

Peter: That's good! What's he call it?

Emery: It's still the Edie and Em.

Peter: Great!

Beth: You can't change a boat's name, you know. It's bad luck.

Emery: Costs money to do it, of course, but they can do it.

Peter: Yeah, you can do it, but I didn't know it was bad luck.

Emery: Well, I've never heard of it being good luck.

[This is Emery's gentle way of telling me that I'm wrong.]

Beth: It's like painting a boat brown.

Emery: Or blue. They never used to paint 'em blue. Color of the sea.

Peter: Yeah, makes sense. One's the color of the water, the other's the land color. You don't want to mess with either one.

Beth: It really is interesting when you think about it--the idea of form following function--it's a very sound principle. Blue's the color of the water and you couldn't see it easily. And it's the same with the form of a boat. Anything that's really pure, really beautiful--it's form following function. Some of these new boats, fast boats--the cigarette boats, for instance--they are so ugly. The boat doesn't deserve to be called a boat.

Emery: That's what they build them for now--for speed. Old Frank Ames who lived up there where Unc used to live (Joe Bray's house), he had the slowest boat on the island, the old Jane I think her name was--but he went out there every day (I'd go by him in the morning when he went out)---I'd go right by him, but I only had two or three traps hauled when he got up to me. And he made a living with that boat-- a good living.

Peter: Did anyone ever fish with that boat of Paul Murray's father--the Sea Duck I think she's called. That boat had a one lunger in it, as I understand. It must have taken forever to get from here to anywhere.

Emery: We were fishing one day here to the west of the island and we looked up and we thought she was broke down, and we got almost to her 'fore we realized she was going full blast.***

They made a lot of them---I can't say for sure but I think that was a model they called the Portugee dory.

Peter: To me, a non-boat person, that boat sittin' up there---it's

been there for the last twelve years, just sittin' there---to me it looks like it would be a very pretty boat sittin' in the water.

Beth: It is. I've seen it. It's cute. It's Little Toot, the tug---cute. You want to go up and stroke it.

Peter: And I guess you may as well just put a fire under it right now. I went over there about six months ago and you know you could see right through it. It's just all going to pieces, I'm afraid.

Emery: I don't know, I've looked at some of those old things. You take an old quilt or something and put it right down around the keel and just put water on it, and she'll try to swell up some, and if she don't swell up, of course, you've got to recaulk her, but you've got to swell her before you even think of recaulking her.

Peter:

Yeah, because the cracks are so wide, you just can't do it otherwise. What do you caulk it with, Emery?

Emery: With caulking cotton.

Peter: It's cotton!? Is it treated with something?

Emery: No, it's just plain cotton. But it's been spun and most every layer's about as big around as my thumb and you'll be caulking along with the whole and you'll come to a narrow place and the seam will just split it.

Beth: And over that you put layers and layers of paint?

Emery: No, first some kind of putty, some kind of seam compound.

Peter: So if you were going to put the Sea Duck back in the water and you saw the old caulking was gone, what would you do? Would you pull out the old stuff---or what would you do?

Emery: I imagine the way I would do it would be to put something down at the very bottom to try to soak it together some, even before I'd try to caulk it. And then if you come to a seam where the planking don't come together, you'd rip out the old caulking and recaulk it.

Beth: Well, there's still a couple of wooden ones in the harbor. Vance Bunker has a wooden boat--a new wooden boat. Some people say it's just a superior material.

Emery: It sure is. Take a man my age and ask him to stand up in one of those fiberglass things and then jump back into a wooden one and he'll see a hell of a difference.

Peter: You know what Albert Bunker did with his boat. It's a fiberglass boat but he said, "I'm not walking on fiberglass" and he put a fiberglass deck down and then an inch of pine or spruce, one or the other, on top of that so that when you walk in that boat, you're walking on wood. And he says, "Ah, it feels so much better."

Beth: Isn't that interesting. I always thought it was the stability, that a wooden boat was so much more stable.

Emery: Well, fiberglass is quick, compared with wood. Wood is heavy and you don't thrash around as much.

Peter: It also hits the water differently, I guess. Just plows right through it. [Peter claps his hands smartly, like a boat hitting water] Yeah, but Albert told me, "I'm not standing on that fiberglass. It just kills ya." And he wants a fast boat, too.

Emery: And he has one, too. Most of them want fast boats.

Peter: But he added a whole lot of weight to put that deck on

there.

Peter: Well, I may get a boat some day.

Beth: Do it sooner rather than later.

Peter: My wife is trying to convince me to buy a boat, in fact when Albert got his new boat she said, " Why don't we buy his old one," and it got us all thinking about it.

Beth: You're here four, five, six months. It might be worth it. It's not worth it when you just come and go the way we do, just for a short time.

Peter: Well, if we lived out here full time, it might be worth it. First thing, I'd have to learn how to sail it. Well, Emery has volunteered. He said he'd teach me how to sail it.

Emery: You won't need any teaching.

Peter: Yes I do! I don't know port from bow, and all that kind of thing.***

Emery: There's so many of them out there who don't know a damned thing about it. Those are the ones you have to look out for.

Peter: I spent my life flying airplanes and when I see what's in the air nowadays, I glad I'm not flying anymore. And now I can't even see. You know, it's true. Ten years ago when I was still flying, I had 20/15 vision. Now--I wear tri-focals and if I take 'em off, I can barely make out who you guys are. And read this? [Peter picks up the package of shortbread we have been sharing. One can hear munching and periodic crackling of cellophane as we eat] I can barely read "shortbread" on that package. I think it says "cookies" under it but that's probably 'cause I saw it before with my glasses on.

Emery: Now, it'd be no problem for you on how to handle a boat, but you can't trust most things you see in the water any more. You can go to a boatyard where they rent boats and so forth, and they don't ask you any questions. You want to rent a boat, you've got it.

Beth: And you can be three sheets to the wind and they'll let you get in it. That's the thing that's frightening.

Peter: Yeah, that is frightening! Then somebody who doesn't know what he's doing, can't do it even if he did know.*** Well, look, I'll let you two go on with the party. I've got a couple of things I've got to do. I promised to visit Maude; she's been awful good to me.

Beth: Well, come on, have a cookie first. I still think there's nothing quite as good as shortbread, do you agree?

Peter: Mmmm! That is good. Isn't this a gorgeous day? This is a perfect day to go out and work on your shed, Emery.

Beth: You were working on your shed this morning?

Peter: [answering for Emery] Oh, yeah, you were working on a repair job.

Peter takes his leave, and Beth and Emery continue.

Beth: Well, Emery, we're going to miss you this winter.

Emery: Oh, I don't know, I won't be too far off. I'll be right in Camden as far as I know.

Beth: But you know you could be very warm all winter in this little house. I realize that when the sun shines....

Emery: Oh, I've been here for years and years. I was alone out here

for several years. My daughter, it was in the 50's, she had to go to school on the mainland and I've been alone ever since.

Beth: She lives near you now in Camden, doesn't she? or in the area of Camden? And you have grandchildren there you can visit. But I imagine you just can't wait for the spring to get back out here.

Emery: Well, that's true but I've got to do some things this winter, whirly-gigs and such. I'll be making more of the wooden things. I always do.

Beth: Yours are the most marvelous whirly-gigs I have ever seen.

Emery: I don't make much on them, you know, but it helps to pay the heating bills.

Beth: I have some lovely sconces you made and a darling little doll cradle that I'm going to paint some day.

Emery: Well, it's something that keeps me busy, and I get pleasure out of it too. Seems to make the spring come faster.

Beth: In the spring I'm hoping Chris will come out to Matinicus with me. We have such marvelous birds in our field--hawks this time of year. It's sad to see the piles of feathers where they've made their kills.

Emery: You know, there's a cat out here, belongs to Jamis, and that cat will be going along down the middle of the road and a bird will fly over and he'll jump, I'd swear to God, as much as six feet, and catch that bird. While Jamis has been gone I keep food out for him but he doesn't bother with that--he eats birds. No, I guess it's a female.

Beth: Females are by far the best hunters. Males are more sociable--it's curious about that. Do you have any animals.

Emery: No--I feed cats out here. When you have cats you don't have rats, so I try to feed them.

Beth: We have lots of mice, but I think the rats don't have enough to eat over my way. Farm's gone and so there're not many rats.

Emery: I saw one dead in the road over by Harbor Point but there're not nearly as many as there used to be.

Beth: That first summer we were here, I used to lie in bed at night and listen to the rats in the walls---chewing.

Emery: I used to be over to your place a lot when the Raynes owned it, and I don't know how it's laid out there now but in them days the piece on this end was the kitchen and Del Raynes hadn't finished it (the ceiling between the kitchen and the diningroom) and I looked up one night and I didn't know if it was a mouse or a rat but the tail was hanging down through a crack there. And I pointed it out to him and he very calmly reached in his pocket and took out his jack knife and very carefully got out of that chair and reached up and took hold of the tail and cut it off. And, you know, oh, I don't know, it must have been months afterward, he caught a rat in a trap down the toilet---no tail.

Beth: He was a character, old Dalton Raynes, wasn't he?

Emery: Oh, Gawd, yes. Nice old fellow.

Beth: Madeleine Ames used to tell me that when he went by her house, the road was so uneven he'd often fall 'cause he was so crippled in his hip....

Emery: He always used a cane...

Beth: Yup. And he'd fall and call out to her, "Just bring me a chair, Madeleine, so's I can get up," so she'd bring him a chair and he'd lift himself up. He must have been powerful in his shoulders. He was tough and very courageous.

Emery: He was a nice old guy--had two sons. Phillip, he lived in Camden--he's gone now--- and, of course, Alton. He also died.

Beth: The Raynes were known for their milk. Your mother was known for her milk, also. Those were two milk farms. Were there any others?

Emery: Yes, there was Cliff's down to the other end of the island.

Beth: Which were the really functioning working farms? Was the Rayne's farm a working farm or was it just subsistence?

Emery: I don't think they ever made a cent there as far as the farm went. They got their own food out of it, their own milk. Chris Young's father, Earnest, he made a living farming.

Beth:

That was Aunt Marion's husband?

Emery: No, that was her husband's brother. Marion and Grace were sisters and they married brothers. Scott was Marion's husband and he had the store, and, of course, Marion always had boys there helping her with the farm 'cause Scott was in the store. One of those boys was out here for a couple of years I guess, and he worked up there for a dollar a day and board. He educated himself and he's way up in the state government now.

Beth: Warren Williams worked for Aunt Marion summers also.

Emery: Yup, he worked up there for awhile. This other one is way up in education now.

Beth: Did you enjoy farming, Emery? Or did you just want to fish?

Emery: Well, I enjoyed parts of it. I always stayed home in the spring and helped my dad before I took off, and I always arranged that the boat would be in here somewhere around the haying season.

Beth: Did you have oxen at the farm or horses.

Emery: We had oxen.

Beth: Why was it that oxen were preferred on the island--more sure-footed, something like that?

Emery: Not that so much as when they got old, they would use them for meat.

Beth: Of course! I hadn't thought of that! Now the French wouldn't have any problem with horses used for meat. But there's something--one stops short of eating a horse. They're such a gentle friend. But then the oxen are the same, aren't they?

Emery: The oxen, he was such a useful creature; you didn't have to pay any attention to them; you even the land with them; you cut the hay with them and all that, and after you were through using them you just turn them out in the pasture and forget them. They were no care to you.

Beth: I imagine they were hardier than horses in the winter, weren't they?

Emery: Well, I don't know about that. Now we'd always put baskets on their noses. I still have one of them somewhere. As you're going along the road, they'd want to feed--all the nice grass along the road--and the baskets would stop them from that. We'd put those

baskets on and they knew they couldn't feed.

Beth: Oxen were a different stock entirely from cows, weren't they. It wasn't like having a bull for reproducing calves.

Emery: Oh, no, those oxen were about twice the size of an ordinary bull. We had bulls, and Cliff Young at the north end of the island had bulls, and so did Weston Ames at the south end.

Beth: That's an interesting family--Weston and Hilda and their sons, Dorian and Wilmer and their daughter, Eileen. Could you tell me a little more about that family.

Emery: 'Course you know Weston had the house the Prices now own. And Dorian, he had the place that is now the Burrs. Wilmer Ames, he had the house that became Johnny Correo's and now is owned by the priest and his sister. Willy Ames's wife is still alive; I have a cousin who lives near her in Kennebunkport, and I usually see her 'bout once a year--I visit her and then go calling on Elizabeth.

Beth: Everyone liked Wilmer, didn't they. He was a sprightly sort.

Emery: Well, that's a good way to remember him, I suppose. [Emery should have been a diplomat]

Beth: And then there's Eileen, his sister. She still comes to the island. She's a lovely lady.

Emery: Ayuh, she still comes. I don't know if she's been here this year. She has a little cottage down there on the Owen place.

Beth: Was it a very unpleasant time when they had that lobster war on the island? Everyone still talks of it.

Emery: It was pretty much confined to the south end of the island and just involved a few families.

[It is obvious that Emery doesn't wish to touch the subject of the lobster war]

Beth: At the school they're having some problems with discipline right now. When you were in school, were there any problems that you can remember?

Emery: I can't ever remember that the school had any of those kinds of problems. Well, you know the teachers back when I was in school--they could take the child and shake him up a bit and actually it was good for them. They used a ruler on the palm, for one thing. [Emery's voice rises] You know, there's no way on a little island like this that a teacher is going to have discipline if she can't enforce it. She can't tell them to go to the principal or something like that, 'cause there's no one here to help her. She really should have the right to cuff them around a little.

I remember my father---when he went to school the boys would be working into the fall, fishing, and they'd usually start school about the first of December, and they'd get out again in April so's they could go fishing again; something like that. I remember he told me one fall, after they'd gotten through fishing and started school, that first week he thought everything was going along very smoothly, but the next Monday morning the teacher come out and addressed the class and said, "You boys ran the school last week, but from now on I'm running it, and if anyone feels different about that, step up now." And no one stepped up. And I think that's the kind of treatment they should have here now.

Beth: 'Course the parents in those days were different. What the

teacher said, went.

Emery: I remember the school up here. Richard Ames, he was a hellion. He'd watch and when he got a chance, he'd take a rock (he had a little pile) and throw it at the blackboard, and then he'd yell, "Teacha, teacha, someone's throwin' rocks at me and if that 'a hit me, it 'a hurt." We'd all have to stay after school 'cause no one would tell who'd done it. He'd go home whistlin' with his hands in his pockets, and that went on quite a while 'fore she got onto what was goin' on.

Beth: I'm surprised the kids held their tongues. He must have been a leader; ruled the pack. Who was in the school when you were there?

Emery: Well, there was Clayton, of course, but I'm a little older than he is. My mother had a sister in Massachusetts and she was taken sick and we went there, and then I had to go back a year. And then I didn't get along good with the teacher who was already here so they put me back another year so I lost two years.

[This is a distressing memory for Emery---his eyes becomes sad and his voice trails off---so I change the subject]

Beth: What did you do after school in your spare time?

Emery: You know we didn't have much spare time when I was a kid. When we got back from school, we had our chores to do. Oh, I think I had a crystal set I used to play around with: don't know what become of it.

Beth: At the Raynes house they had an organ. Did you ever have hymn sings?

Emery: You know, that organ was there when they bought the house. I don't think the Raynes played it much. Valoris Simmons was the one who bought the organ. When the Raynes bought the house, you know where the kitchen is now, well, it was full of turkeys.***

Beth: Turkeys!!? Must have been kind of smelly. We have a picture of the house at that point, I think. It looked very different, and the kitchen wing, come to think of it, looked sort of like a shed. The house that Hal Owen lives in, was that also a farm?

Emery: Not that I can remember. Scott and Marion Young owned that and they sold it to two sisters by the name of Young. They were known as the Young girls. They had a lot of work done on the house and such, and they hired me to haul off the trash. And I guess they sold to Louise Owen.

Beth: Louise goes way back--to the thirties. She was one of that first group of summer people out here, wasn't she? Were there many other summer folk who built cottages and rusticated out here?

Emery: The first one I remember was the Week's cottage down on Condon Cove. There was a rock chimney built on the outside of it and then up behind it was the Alden house which is the Calhoun place now. I have to tell you about the Alden house. Will Ames and his wife owned it--they lived up there where Paul Murray lives--and there was a young school teacher here and Bradford Ames was kind of beaung her around. 'Course no one locked the doors in those days--and him and the school teacher looked into the old Alden house and they kind of made the rounds and then they left their clothes downstairs. They were kind of naked. Well, later they came

downstairs and were kind of wandering around when they discovered some other people were coming in. It was Mrs. Will Ames, the one who owned the place, and she had some people with her. So, of course, the young folks didn't have their clothes on so they jumped into what was called a little pantry there. And Mrs. Will Ames took the folks all around the house and she didn't even notice the clothes on the floor. Well, they went upstairs and then they came down again, and she said, "Oh, I must show you my little pantry." And she opened the door and there were the two young people, stark naked.***

Beth: Well, nothing has changed, has it.

Emery: No, I guess not.

Beth: Your teachers tended to be older, not young ones?

Emery: You know that's the funny part of it. The most of them that came here to teach were just out of school. First job here.

Beth: Well, to cut your teeth on Matinicus--that's something else. You'd have to learn fast. I taught in a one room schoolhouse in Laos, but I was one of three teachers for grades one through eight. But one teacher for all the grades and all the subjects--that takes some juggling--and especially out here!

Emery: One thing I'll never forget about going to school up here was my first year of school. Now there was a woodshed in the entryway where you go into school and right above that woodshed was a window in the side of the school and Wes Thompson was outside with a string in his hand and the string went up through the window and he said to me, "When I tell you, you take hold of this string and you run like hell with it." Well, I was young and foolish and I did as I was told, and when I got outside the door and ran, I looked back and the teacher was screaming and there was Louise Ames in the doorway with her hands up over her head along with her dress, and there I stood with that string in my hand. He had that string with a fishhook, mind you, and it caught on her dress, and there I stood with the string in my hand, guilty as hell. [Emery gives a throaty chuckle]. And of course I wouldn't tell--the teacher knew somebody had put me up to it--but I wouldn't tell who done it. So every night I had to stay on two hours (I was supposed to get out at 2:30 and I stayed on till 4:30) and when I come out of the school (I wouldn't tell who done it--who told me to run with the string), Wes Thompson would wait for me where that barn--there was a barn back of where Rick Kohls lives--and Wes would wait for me there every night after school and he'd give me a piggyback ride home.

Beth: Oh, that is nice. Trying to make up for it. Was Wes Thompson related to Russ Thompson?

Emery: He was Russ Thompson's youngest brother.

Beth: It's clear the idea of not tattling, not telling, was very important to the island school children. It's not very fair, what happened.

Emery: [Shakes his head] Nothing is fair.

Beth: At a certain point as you grew up in school did you start to have girlfriends and boyfriends, let's say in seventh and eighth grade?

Emery: I can't remember any. Didn't have time for them. There was always something we had to do. There was always something going on at the church but I didn't have time to go to any of them.

Beth: [sadly] Sounds like you worked all the time, Emery.

Emery: I---my first job was on the fish wharf down here---it was in the spring of the year and they would be seining for pollack. I'd go down to the wharf in the morning. The boss would come down at a certain time of day and he'd ask you what time you went to work (he only worked at night) but anyway, they would weigh up these pollack and average 'em out; They'd weigh up 500 pound and then count them and see what each of 200 would weigh, and I did that all day long, counting pollack because the boats would come in and they couldn't get to the wharf 'cause the tide was down so they had to always land their pollack at high water. They might land it in the middle of the night and put a card on the top of the pile with their name on it and I'd go down in the morning and I'd start pitching them into carts. And I tell you, I counted out tons of the damned things. Eight for a hundred pound.

Beth: Eight cents for a hundred pound?

Emery: No, eight pollack each hundred pound.

Beth: What?! Huge they were! 13, 14 pounds each?

Emery: Yes, lots of them.

Beth: And what did they do with them?

Emery: They split 'em and salted 'em.

Beth: They're very sweet fish, but what about all the bones? Did they sort of disintegrate in the salting?

Emery: Oh, no, no. They salted 'em and in the fall of the year they got them to a company in Rockland. There'd be a vessel of salt come here, or coal, and they'd wash out the hold and dump those fish down there and stack 'em in and then go to Rockland.

Beth: You hear of salt cod, but never salt pollack. I suppose they sold them interchangeably.

Emery: They'd salt everything that come in here--pollack and cod--but they kept much of the pollack.

Beth: You know, in the new island cookbook, Vance Bunker has a recipe for salt cod. Most people don't even know what it is anymore. And they certainly don't know how to fix it, and the fact that you don't cut it but pull it off in strips and soak it and so forth.

Emery: You can buy that in pound boxes now; bought one someplace, can't remember where, recently. You used to be able to buy it for forty nine cents a pound and now it's six dollars a pound.

Beth: But it's still good and it will last forever, right?

Emery: Ayah. Now and then I get hungry for salt fish and I fix it up for myself.

Beth: Do you make a chowder or a stew?

Emery: No, I fix it up--I have cold dried fish and potato. I try out some pork fat and then mix it with potato and it's good. That's what we used to do in the old vessels.

Beth: Tasty! Everything was dried for preservation at one time, wasn't it. Was it a very lonely life on board ship? Was the camaraderie enough to carry you through the time.

Emery: Oh, Gawd, yes. I enjoyed myself. There was a lot of work, and I didn't enjoy the work too much, but there was a least a dozen of us on board and I enjoyed the companionship of the crew. But 'was hard work. You didn't know what time of night they were going to wake you up and tell you to get in that dory---always depended on the weather.

The captain and the cook, they'd watch the barometer and see what was out there, you know, and whether it was blowin'. They'd watch the barometer and the stars and so forth, and by and by they'd wake you up---it might be one o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the afternoon. You'd jump into that dory and they'd tell you how many trawls to set, one or two or three, and you did what you were told.

Beth: This was summer and winter?

Emery: Ayah.

Beth: Did you ever have an experience that was very dangerous? Did you ever find yourself in a storm?

Emery: I was just lucky. I was serious about it but it was just plain luck.

Beth: The life saving stations along the coast were a weak attempt to save lives. So many lives were lost.

[A long silence followed--a sort of requiem on both our parts for those lost].

Emery: [brightening] There's one thing I miss a lot. When we would go by the Boston Light Ship, the Portland Light Ship, there was always someone out there to hail you. And nowadays there's nothing but that little thing sticking up out there--no sign of life---all automated.

Beth: When we first came here in the early 70's, Albert took us out to the Rock and there were Coast Guard personnel still living there and it was nice to be greeted by them. Being a lighthouse keeper or the wife of a lighthouse keeper was an experience. I really think they loved the life--the drama of the storms, the solitude, the beauty of it.

Emery: There was a woman, Kay Thomas, lived just a little ways from my cousin. Her father was on Matinicus Rock and she was with him as a child. She's in her 90's now. She always talked about it a lot. There's one grave on Matinicus Rock---can't remember her name now---but she was born there and she died there, and there was no way of getting her body off to bury it so they put it in a crevice of a rock and covered it as best they could. It used to be, when the Coast Guard was there, they whitewashed that grave every year. It was alongside of the boathouse. That was way before my time so I never saw it.

Beth: Do you remember when the Bucheisters were out there? The Audubon Society couple?

Emery: Ayuh, I took them out there one year. That was when the Mary A. was running and Stuart Ames owned her and they started out and the Mary A's motor just died and Stuart didn't want to go out there so he got me to take the Bucheisters down there and they told me, "We'll be looking to you next year," and I said, "I'll be right here," and I gave them my address and everything and I never heard

from them again. They got in touch with another fisherman, I think. Beth: They just didn't know what they'd passed up, Emery. It's always a pleasure to be with you on a boat.

[Emery smiles modestly. He knows he's on of the best boatmen around]

So, Emery, your memories of childhood are mainly work memories. I worked but I also played a lot.

Emery: I remember we played, but there wasn't too much of it. My father, he was always sickly, and my mother always worked for somebody else, cleaning house or something. If we needed anything, we'd go to the main to buy new clothes for school and that was all.

Beth: No jalopies to putter with, no Model T's?

Emery: No, not to play around with. I can remember the first time I come out here, after----- there was a Model T, I don't know 'xactly what you would call it--it had curtains on the side of it--sort of a model T surrey. And that was the first automobile out here.

Beth: Oh, dear, horses are so much more sensible--produce fertilizer and no mechanical failures, no rusting out. They make so much more sense out here. And airplanes, do you remember the first airplane that landed on Matinicus?

Emery: I was just reading something about that the other day, too. They had Andrew home at the time--there were no fish biting at that time--- and I think there were one or two other ones on the same flight. I think the plane landed on the south end in the fields. It was sometime in the late 30's, I would say. No, it might of been earlier than that 'cause in the early 30's there were sea planes landing here all the time. My uncle, when I was going to school in Rockland, if there was something I could do--a lot of times there were things I could do for him--I'd stay over and then he'd hire the seaplane to come get me. I think it was called the Winkapoor at that time.

Beth: Where did they land in Rockland?

Emery: Down at the public landing down there in Rockland. They had a ramp that went downhill and no matter where the tide was they would just run that ramp down and the plane would roll up on it.

Beth: Planes are fine but I still prefer taking a boat.

Emery: I never got so as I liked the plane. I will go that way if I have to. When my mother died, they called me and I flew in.

Beth: Is she buried in the cemetery here?

Emery: Ayuh.

Beth: It's a beautiful cemetery, and very well maintained. Very nice.

When did things really begin to change on Matinicus. Of course the whole society has changed, but when did that change arrive here?

Emery: Oh, I don't know, sometime during the 30's I would imagine. When the radio came in. With the first radios, they'd all gather together in one house and listen.

You know, over where you live, Russ Thompson was there a lot and I was there. We used to sleep up in the attic chamber. It was open up there, just boards on the floor. He had a little Crosley

radio with earphones, and old Del, he didn't like it when we turned the radio on, so when we went to bed in that old open chamber (Gawd it was cold, couldn't 'a been colder) Russ would have one earphone on and I would listen with the other.

Then we had a phonograph. My daughter has it. It's one of the old sleeve-type phonographs. And she won't part with it. It just lays there doing nobody any good. My father gave it to her before he died; he had it there at home, and he gave it to her before he died and she just won't part with it. That's all there is to it.

Beth: She probably has a lot of memories associated with it, don't you think? What she might do is put the cylinders on just once and tape them so you and she could enjoy them. Would you enjoy that?

Emery: [emphatically] Yes, I would. It has a big horn on it. Gawd, that horn weighs--a lot.

Beth: This is one of those with a mahogany cabinet with legs?

Emery: Yup. Last time I had it going, it worked fine.

Beth: Interesting how our ears got used to all that scratching and wheezing. We thought the music was wonderful in those days.

Do you have any recollections of a special automobile that you owned?

Emery: I didn't have one out here. I had one for a while when my daughter was young, but I really never had any use for it afterward. I think, maybe in '48, '49, was the first one I ever owned. I bought an old wreck, a Studebaker, so's I had something to turn in. I turned it in for a new Ford.

Beth: Might have been the same model Ford we had. We always had Fords and drove them 10, 12 years.

When did you move into this lovely house?

Emery: It was given to me by my uncle. I was married in '41 and was given this house.

Beth: What a lovely present. Does your wife like it here.

Emery: She hasn't been out here for, it must be now, 16 years. And I don't push it. If she isn't content out here, well, that's her business. But it was nice when my wife was here to take care of it. I don't care for it the way she did.

Alexander You see, this house was built originally for two brothers, *Alexander* *Eric* and *Alden* *Alley*, and it was built as a camp for them when they went lobstering, the main part of the house, that is. So *Eric*, he was foolish, he got married, and *Alden* didn't want to be with his brother so he finished off an apartment in one of those little fish houses down there. Well, *Eric*, he had that wife a little while and she died. He put this kitchen on this house, as I remember him talking about it, and then in a short time he married his wife's sister and he built that little stair along way inside there for to lengthen out the diningroom. Well, she died, and then he married a third one and when he married, he had that little room built along side there. If he'd kept on marrying, 'suppose the house would ha' kept on growing.***

Beth: Well, each of the additions are really quite charming, so you're ahead, Emery. You know the first time we came out here in Alton's old, very large lobster boat with his whole family, Bernard and Eleanore and Deanna and Dawn and I forget how many more D's, we

landed on the westside and we explored that pretty thoroughly, and then we came down to the harbor and, lo and behold, Bernard couldn't start the motor. Well, while he was waiting for a spare part to arrive via one of his cousins who was out lobstering, we had plenty of time to walk around on this side of the island. Now the westside is very pretty and all that, but it isn't dramatic the way this side is. And I remember rounding the bend in the road there, and seeing your house and the lighthouse in the distance and Old Cove and thinking, "Oh, this is a beautiful island." The moon was rising over your house, and it was a clear, cold October evening and I was enchanted. And your house was part of that enchantment.

We became good friends with Bernard and his family that day. There was no dickering about the price, no disagreement. He wanted his shrimp boat and our house was going to pay for it, simple as that. We ended up with, not only an old farm on an island, we also ended up with a friendship, and that's nice. And Bernard ended up with his beautiful wooden shrimp boat.

Emery: She's still a'going.

Beth: She is?! She is beautiful.

We came here when the old island was still more or less in place. Merrill Young was still in the Pilgrim, and Madeleine and Brad still in the bungalow at the crossroads, and Cliff was still on his farm at the northend, and Unc, of course, was there next to the Bunkers, and Dorothy and Milton Philbrook, and Madeleine Ames at the crossroads, and Heck and Leila Webber down near the stream. It had changed since you were a boy, but a little of it was still there. And then it all changed, like fruit basket upset. But you still have your memories, Emery, and those are never going to change.

I left Emery that evening feeling I had come to know a little better this extraordinary man who had suffered and seen hard times but was still humorous and kind. As I wandered back along stark and beautiful Old Cove, I thought how fortunate I had been to become just a small part of this island community and to have known the generation which had touched a simpler and more comprehensible world. Their wisdom will always be of incalculable value; their stories will represent to us of the late 20th century a poignant moment gone from our experience forever.

It is now October 22, 1997, the evening. Emery has been invited to Peter's home. They are having supper together. Peter has just gone off to make chow. There is lot of clattering of pans as he asks Emery, "What did you like most to eat for supper when you were a kid?"

Emery: Most of the time it was fish.

Peter: Is that what you liked to eat or is that what you got.

Emery: That's what we got. Everybody put in a lot of salt fish in the fall. They bought it out here, and so we would go down to the fish wharf to buy some--didn't cost much of anything--and you stored them in the haymow if you had a barn somewhere 'cause they

salt nice in that haymow.

Peter: What kind of fish? Codfish, herring?

Emery: Codfish, pollack.

Peter: Just like the Newfoundlanders. Did you salt it in a barrel yourself?

Emery: No, we bought it from the fish wharf down there. They bought fish here in those days and they shipped them to Gloucester come winter. A vessel'd come out here with a load of coal or something. They'd wash her out as best they could and they'd dump these fish in it and she'd take 'em back to Gloucester when she went back in that direction. They salted them right here on racks in the flakeyard.

The thing I remember maybe best of all when I started working down there was bailing out the codliver oil 'cause they dumped the livers in big hogsters, is what they called them, big barrels. And when you dumped the first ones in the bottom, of course the gulls were sliding around, hungry as hell, and they'd jump down in there to get something to eat, into the bottom of those barrels, and they couldn't get out. Later on when it come time to filter that codliver oil, you had a big funnel, oh about as wide across the top of it as that piece of cloth there, so the bones didn't go down through.

Peter: [a note of disgust in his voice] Huh! Cod bones and gull bones!

So your family down to the south end didn't have a barrel where they'd salt fish, they just went down to the wharf to buy some.

Emery: By the time we were living down there, the old fish wharf had closed down anyhow.

Peter: Where were you living when the fish wharf closed down?

Emery: Down where Hoadley is now.

Peter: Oh, sure, was there not a sea captain lived next door for a long time?

Emery: That was old Captain Wes Ames. He was a different Ames from the ones that are around here now. I can't remember how it come that way, but there were two brothers of them, Frank and Wes. Frank was a great uncle to me by marriage. He was a sea captain, too. He lived where Joe Bray lives now.

Peter: I remember going down to, not Hoadley's house, but the one next to it a long time ago. Not the one that Lilla used to own but the other one, a long time ago.

Emery: When I was a kid, Auntie Belle lived there.

Peter: Really! [Peter's exclamation "really!" always conveys both innocent surprise and ever so slight disbelief.] Well, anyway, in that house that I'm trying to describe, there was a picture of this old nineteenth century ship captain with a big beard and a handle bar mustache, and, you know, pictures of four-masted schooners. He must have been quite a guy.

Emery: I don't think he ever went on anything besides fishing vessels. He might have, but I think he was always on fishing vessels.

Peter: Did they ever fish with a four-master?

Emery: No, don't think so.

Peter: So you liked to eat salt fish---that was your favorite meal? I'm trying to get you hungry now for this supper we're getting ready to have.

[Emery chuckles. It is going to be a relaxed and pleasant evening]

Emery: Well, that was really the staple around here in those days. Everybody had salt fish that they'd buy in the fall.

Peter: Now, how did your mother cook salt fish? You had this salt cod that had been salted and was there in the haymow for most of the winter---I guess first you'd have to soak it for a while to get the salt out.

Emery: You'd have to soak it at least one day---change the water two or three times on it.

Peter: And then what would you do with it to cook it?

Emery: You really didn't have to cook it. Changing that water, and then letting it come to a boil, it was all cooked by the time---

Peter: You mean you put it in hot water.

Emery: Right and that would take the salt out of it. You put it on in cold water, let it come to a boil and then change the water and do it all over again.

Peter: That must have been a pretty regular meal. What was special. When your birthday comes along, what would you get for a birthday supper when you were a kid?

Emery: Oh, maybe a chicken or something like that.

Peter: A chicken!

Emery: That's why I come to not like 'em. Oh, I can get 'em down but I don't care for 'em 'cause I always had to kill 'em.

Peter: Well, don't worry, you won't have to get 'em down here. I hope you eat salad.

Emery: I do. There's a little rabbit in me, I guess.

Peter: A little rabbit in everyone.

Emery: You know, everyone ate fish more than anything else. And with the fish you ate potatoes which were grown right here. Everyone had a little garden.

Peter: You would put the potatoes in the root cellar, right?, so you'd have enough to last the winter. What did you do for other vegetables?

Emery: Oh, you ate something you'd raised yourself. You'd can them in jars for the winter; there wasn't any other way of keeping them.

Peter: Now you've got to tell me something else about your childhood. When you went to school, it was in the old schoolhouse out here. What was a typical day like? You'd get up in the morning and have some breakfast and go off to school. How many kids were in the school?

Emery: The most I can remember was 24 with but one teacher.

Peter: Well, what happened when you got a little unruly.

Emery: Oh, they'd see to it that we behaved ourselves. There were no questions asked. If they used a ruler on you or something, you didn't go home and tell about it 'cause otherwise you'd have got something else.

Peter: Oh-h-h. They don't do that nowadays.

Emery: [emphatically] Nowadays they don't do it.

Peter: Nowadays it's against the law or something. So you sat in school. Now if you were an eighth grader, didn't you get bored with what the third graders were learning?

Emery: No. That was our study period while the teacher was taking care of those little ones. And, of course, in the morning they was only there for a couple of hours, and in the afternoon, maybe they was there for an hour and a half, something like that. And I can remember the way my father talked and the way the people talked about my father and the older men around here, when they got through going to school here, my father and them, they had the equivalent of a high school education.

Peter: Really! [again that element of surprise in the exclamation]

Emery: They went to school 'till they was 21.

Peter: Well, they had a lot more than 8 grades then.

Emery: No. The way I understood it was the eighth grade was as far as they went, but they went fishing summers and until cold weather so they didn't start their school year until late in November, maybe December, and then they took off again in April or May. And they went to school until they were 21.

Peter: So they had a shorter school year but they had a lot more of them.

Emery: Sure.

Peter: So when was your father born and where?

Emery: Here. He died in '54 and he was 70.

Peter: [taking time for the calculation] He was born in 1884. That's 10 years before my father was born. So he was going to school from about 1889 to--add 21 years --till about 1910. So, did you go to school till you were 21?

Emery: No. I went to school there through the eighth grade and I went to Rockland to go to high school. I worked my board with an undertaker, and one time he went to Detroit to buy a new hearse and he told me what to do. He said, "There's no sense for me to tell you, do as your uncle taught you to do to take care of my yacht." He had a yacht tied up there in Rockland. So I done just as my uncle taught me to do. And he come home ('course he was drunk all the time, and he was stone drunk when he got back home) and he says, "How'd you make out with the boat?" and I said, "Finest kind" cause I had gone down to her almost every morning 'cause it had rained almost the whole time he'd been gone and I had to go down pump her out. He went down and talked to people and they told him that I had come down every morning and started the motor 'cause that's how I was taught to do it at home. He come up and, Gawd, he gave me hell for starting the engine. I said, "You told me to do as my uncle taught me to do," and after he'd finished giving me hell, I said, "Mr. Bowles, may I use your telephone?" and he said, "Why, yes." So I called up the island and I asked them to get word to my father to come get me.

Peter: He was an undertaker, eh? Did you ever think of taking up the undertaker's trade?

Emery: I would have had it not been for that little incident.

I liked it.

Peter: Yeah, your customers don't talk back a whole lot to you, do

they?

Emery: You know, I was in the Marine Hospital in Portland (had a back operation) and I was up and around. Now, they didn't tell you you had to do something to help, but if there was anything you could do, they liked it if you'd offer. So, old Del Raynes, lived over where the Russells do now, he was in there too, and got so's I could get around and everything. They asked me if I ever done any barber work--shaves and haircuts--and I said, "Why yes, I'd done quite a lot of it." Well, I did, see, 'cause as an undertaker that was one of the things you had to do, and old Del Raynes was sitting' over in the corner, laughing, 'cause the nurse asked me, "Did you ever cut anybody," and I said, "I never had a complaint." He commenced to laugh and she asked him what he was laughing about, and he said, "Well," he said, "Those he was working on were unable to complain. They were deader 'n hell!" So she went around and told all of them that I could do that kind of work and that I'd never had a complaint for the simple reason they'd all been dead 'fore I went to work on 'em.***

Peter: So did you, when you were there in the hospital, cut hair for them?

Emery: Sure, cut hair and shave 'em.

Peter: And they sat nice and still, too.

Emery: Oh, yeah.

Peter: Well, that's somethin'. I didn't know you had a back operation.

Emery: I had a cyst on the end of my spine.

Peter: Phew! That's supposed to be really painful, isn't it.

Emery: It was.

Peter: It's painful 'bout no matter what you do-- sittin' down, standin' up, or anything.

Emery: Yeah, it got so just the last few years---that was done back in '31, '32, somewheres along there, I don't know, even a bit before that---it's just the last few years it's got so's it doesn't bother me.

Peter: What!! You're kiddin' me! The operation was in '31 or '32 and it's only been '96 or '97 that---

Emery: Well, you know, it's always been that it bothered some and I guess it's 'cause now I don't notice it, I've gotten used to it.

Well, you sit down, you know, and if you happen to hit that, there's no meat over that bone anymore.

Peter: 'Cause they took it all off. You have to sit down kinda careful.

Emery: I usually do.

Peter: Now I've got to ask you a kind of technical question.[a pause to emphasize the importance of the question] Do you like this kind of dressing for your salad?

Emery: [Bemused] 'Guess that'd be all right.

Peter: Boy, you're easy to please. This is right out of a bottle, I'm not makin' it, you see.

Emery: Well, most anything that's out of a bottle is all right with me.***

Peter: So you were in a marine hospital, you said? Why were you in

a marine hospital?

Emery: Because they would take fishermen. Anyone who went on a boat, measured up into so many ton, then you could get in the marine hospital.

Peter: Oh, I didn't know that.

Emery: Yup, nowadays I don't think it's that easy anymore.

Peter: No, I don't think so. They take marines in the marine hospital and that's about it.

Emery: This was right in Portland. You drive down Route 1, you drive right by it.

Peter: I'll be darned. So, because you were working on a boat of some size---

Emery: She wasn't that big either. I think she was only 6 ton, but that got me in.

Peter: Well, I mean, your little boat around here is 'bout 6 ton.

Emery: Well, that boat that Dick has got, the Mary and Donna, she's 'bout 6 ton. That's the way they measure 'em up. They're all a little different. [There is a decisive clattering of dishes that signals a finale. Supper is almost ready.]

Peter: Now when you went to school, just a normal day, you'd get up in the morning and you'd have some chores before you went to school?

Emery: I'd have to lug some water.

Peter: Now you were living down in Shag Hallow. Where would you have to go to get water? all the way down to the town well?

Emery: Oh, no, that was just below the house there was a well, between where we lived--where Hoadley is now--and the house that Paul Murray's got. In between there, there was a well right on the edge of the swamp, on his side and on our side of the swamp.

Peter: Oh! So you'd have to go down there and bring a few buckets back home to your mom. And then off to school? What time did you have to start school, do you remember?

Emery: As I recall we started 'round 8:30 and we'd get out a noontime and we'd go back home for lunch and then after about an hour, we'd go back to school, 'round 1:00.

Peter: Then it lasted how long?

Emery: Well, it depended on what grade we were. First three grades got out about 2 o'clock and the rest of us got out 'bout 3:30.

Peter: So you had about two and one half hours in the afternoon and three and one half hours in the morning--about the same as today, I would imagine.

Emery: Well, I guess.

Peter: Well, I'm going to turn this thing (tape recorder) off for now, Emery, and we're going to eat supper, how's that strike you? You want another one of those things from a bottle? Was that one all right?

Emery: Fine. Maybe I should take this one down a little, and then have a little more.

Peter: O.K.

Later in the evening

Emery: You know, if someone could just get to Ruth Ives, she's got all her diaries 'bout the island. She was a great aunt to me and in

her own family if something didn't sound right, she made no mention of it, but the other news on the island, why, she kept track of it pretty good.

Peter: Now Bruce Ives, is he related to Kathleen?

Emery: No, I don't think he is any relation to Kathleen. She always done errands for his grandmother, and he's kind of taken her under his wing.

Peter: He kind of watches over Kathleen like everyone else does.

Emery: He's out here every summer. He stays over in the cottage on the beach there, the one that used to belong to the Kohls'. Rick Kohls father and mother built it.

Peter: Oh, yeah, the Katz cottage, now.

Emery: Yeah, that one. There's a lot of things that I can't even remember that went on in the old days that would be in Ruth Ive's diaries. Old Captain Will Ames, the vessel captain, he was drowned out here, I think he was 80, and as far as I know, besides me, he was the oldest man ever who went lobstering. 'Course now I'm even older than that.

Peter: How old are you, Emery?

Emery: I'm 83.

Peter: Really! Last time I knew your age was when we went to your 75th birthday party. Dick and Monique had a birthday party for you, 75 years, and I was there and we all drank a little too much.

Emery: So you don't know whether I done anything bad or not.

Peter: No, you didn't do anything bad. Now, I've got to ask you a technical question---do you like bread with your supper? I was going to slice up some.

Emery: Homemade bread. Of course I 'd like some.

Peter: You know in my family my father always used to make bread, and he taught me how to make bread--so I got to be good at that. If I could just serve you bread for supper, then I would invite the whole island. I'd say, "Come on!" But you can't do that.

How old was Orrin Ames when he quit lobstering? You know, Ken's father.

Emery: Oh, I don't think he was that old. He's in his 90's now, but I would think---he went away to live in Thomaston. Well, I do know how you could find out. If you knew when Max bought his house, that's when he went. He had it all sold to someone else and then.....

Peter: I've never met Orrin Ames but I've heard a lot about him. He must have been quite a man. Somebody gave him an outboard motor to go on his boat and he said, "Oh, thank you very much but I don't much like motors," and he went out into the harbor with it and pulled on the rope a couple of times and it wouldn't start so he just took it off and threw it in the water.

Emery: I imagine that was what he would do. He rowed that double ender around and he was used to doing it, he and Russ Thompson. Now, old Frank Ames he had a boat (I think she was 32 foot) and he had a double cylinder 12 horsepower on it, a 10 to 12 they called it, and Russ rowed out one morning and Frank was coming up along, and Frank says, "Throw me your painter, Russ, and I'll give you a tow," and Russ said, "Oh, never mind, Frank, I'm in a hurry," he

said, and he rowed right along away.***

Peter: Well, so many people have talked about this guy Orrin Ames. Cripes, just pullin' his traps he must have had arms that were like--this big. I guess he's in kind of sad shape right now, according to Kenny, but he's still hanging in there.

Emery: My first winter going lobstering I had a double ender. My father towed me out in the morning and I went on one string and he went on the other one, and if the tide and wind were just right, I could haul more traps than he could. He had the power boat there and he would haul what I had hauled the day before and haul 'em on and then run 'em off again so they would be straight. That double ender, if there was any wind at all, there was one trap here and one there.

Peter: Well, are you 'bout ready to eat supper here?

Emery: Any time, Pete.

Peter: Well, we'll turn this guy off then.

Still later on in the evening

Peter: Now, tell me about when you were the cook on the boat. How old were you anyway.

Emery: Oh, hell, I was probably in my early 20's. I never really cooked. I was engineer and the cook, one time, didn't like running that engine so he would get everything ready---

Peter: Why did he have to run the engine?

Emery: Well, those engines, you'd have to be right long side of them and know what their peculiarities were because they all were a little different and you had to really understand the damn things and they wouldn't work for everybody.

Peter: And you were supposed to be out there to fish so you'd leave the cook to look after the engine.

Emery: And the cook didn't want to do that 'cause he didn't like the engine, so he'd put the stuff on the stove to start cooking and tell me what to do with it, and he'd go with the gang in the seining boat that we used to use to fish and leave me tending the food and everything.

Peter: That's good. So you'd put a little crankcase oil in it and stuff like that?

Emery: Oh, every now and then.

Peter: That'd get the crew going. And you did this for several years on that boat?

Emery: Well, I wasn't always on the same boat all the time. I went on one boat---

Peter: What was the name of the boat where the cook didn't like the engine?

Emery: The Old Njordh. He really didn't like that engine, and I really couldn't blame him. And that old engine, she started on four coils and then she had a magneto that she run on. The four coils was on the bulkhead right under the seat that was in the pilot house, and I don't know how it ever happened, but when somebody was sittin' in a certain place on that seat, the old skipper, he sunk his heel down on the deck and that person would get an awful charge from those four coils.***

[There is a remarkable screech of laughter from Peter]
Peter: And you were right down below there---Well, I'm going to turn this thing off again and we're going to eat!

Again, later.

Emery: You know, Chaney, he can't afford to hire a room or anything when we take the Mary and Donna in. He just stays with the boat.

Peter: Really! He stays aboard that boat?

Emery: Even in the winter. Dick puts an electric heater aboard there for him.

Peter: Is that right! Oh, Man! Where do you guys put up now that they've done over that dock in Rockland?

Emery: We still have a berth there if we let them know ahead of time. Around the fish wharves, they have a set of floats.

Peter: Well, I'm going to make us another drink and you've got to tell me about the old days. Do you see that over there. That's my bait bag that you taught me how to make. So you spent a lot of time as a kid making bait bags, didn't ya?

Emery: I done all of them myself and people used to hire my mother and father to make them. Those days the twine came in five pound balls of manila and, of course, the manila became sisal during the war, and I used to use a five pound ball up in a day.

Peter: You'd make them into whatever you'd want--bait bags or heads?

Emery: Usually heads. Those days with manila and everything, the traps didn't last and you had to hit the traps a couple times a year.

Peter: That's right, everything would just rot all to pieces, wouldn't it? How long does the nylon last?

Emery: These days there's so many hogsheads and sea urchins, they eat the nylon up.

Peter: They eat the nylon?!---But in the old days you'd come home from school and then you'd have to knit a couple of heads---?

Emery: We had to knit so many heads a day, and then the older folks did the same. When my father and mother were both knitting, I could just about keep the needles wound ahead for them.

Peter: Really! [wonderfully emphatic] So when did you learn how to do that kind of work?

Emery: Oh, Gawd, I couldn't tell you anymore--ten or so.

Peter: And as soon as you learned, they put you right behind it to do it, right? And before then you just wound the needles, right?

And what about traps. Those wooden traps were always coming apart, too.

Emery: When I first started, they were all spruce, spruce laths, spruce bows. You cut the bows out in the woods somewhere. You made them all out a certain length and then made the ends to fit in that seven eighths hole.

Peter: And then how did you bend them--did you just bend 'em green or did you steam 'em?

Emery: We'd just bend 'em green or sometimes if they got dry enough we'd steam 'em or we'd soak 'em. Steaming was the most work--had to build a fire and keep the water going and so forth, but it was the

fastest. Oh, you had to work in those days.

Peter: 'Tell you what, Emery, work never hurt anybody, and nothing's any good unless you work for it, 'least that's the way I think.

[There is a pause as Emery silently agrees]

Emery: Old Juddy Young, he had that fish house where his grandson now has it, and I could tell when he went home at night what he was going to do the next morning. If he took a hatchet with him he was going to cut three bows either on the way home or the way back in the morning, and he was going to build a trap. He'd start and go out and find an old barrel (it'd be falling apart) and he'd take the stays out of it for sills and he'd measure them off and saw 'em and bore 'em, and then he'd take the bows and put 'em in and then he'd sit down on his ass and set them traps a'soaking. 'Didn't make any difference what time of year it was. Then he'd knit two baitbags for each trap.

Peter: What did you use to weight them down? A green trap would be awfully buoyant.

Emery: A flat rock. You fastened them in, nailed them in there.

Peter: Why didn't you just throw them in?

Emery: 'Cause then they could roll around inside the trap and if they were all at one end the trap would stand on end.

Peter: So you fastened them in there. How'd you do that?

Emery: We nailed laths over them.

Peter: So now getting back to your school days--you spent 6 hours a day in school and you spent time knittin' heads and filling needles. What else did you do in those days? I mean, when did you get to go chase the girls, 'n stuff like that?

Emery: By the time we were gettin' out of grammar school we were doing that, I guess.

You know in the winter we school kids could slide from the Orrin Burgess house all the way down to where Sam and Leona live. Of course, the sleds would kind of wear it down and so late in the afternoon, we'd mix some snow and water and cover the bare spots and that night it would freeze over before we went sledding again. It was called Carrie's Hill and the old people used to come out and go sledding, too. There were a couple of ridges on that hill and we'd cover them over to make it faster.

Peter: That must have been fun. I understand Carrie's Hill was named for Kathleen's mother.

Emery: T'was. There was always someone we were pickin' on and Hilton was the one we were pickin' on this particular day. We'd take turns--he couldn't slide anywhere near as fast as the rest of us--and when he started to slide we'd take turns, come up behind him and give his sled a yank and tip him off into the bushes. And I'll never forget it, it was my turn, and I didn't see his father standin' there in the middle of the road with a club in his hand. Well, there was just one thing to do and I done it. I headed right for him. I don't know how high up in the air he went, and I didn't look back to see how high he was, but I went right under him and I'll tell ya, I didn't slide there again that winter.

But it went on for years. I had an old boat called the Hazel

M. and she was comin' apart and I couldn't seem to find anybody to help me on it so I finally asked old Bob, Blanchard his name was, Hilton's father, I said, "Old Bob, what do you say?" and we had the whole thing apart, everything yanked out and the old tide ebbin' and flowin' and all of a sudden he put down his tools and got up, and I said, "What the hell's going' on here?" "Well," he said, "I just got to thinkin' about the day I was standing in the road with that club and you were sliding down the hill," he said, "So I guess now it's a good time to leave." Well, he got me all heiffered up there wantin' him to stay, and he said, "Well, I guess we'll take you as you are now," and he stayed.

Peter: But he got the message across.

Emery: He did.

Peter: Isn't it funny, the things you remember, the things you don't. Now, Emery, tell me for the sake of the tape. I can remember two stories you told me. You told me that when you were young, there was an old fellow who was sick (he was a fisherman out here) and you said he didn't even need a compass in his boat, you said...

Emery: That was old Del Raynes.

Peter: He was ill, wasn't he, and he was in the boat and you were driving the boat as a young kid, taking him to the hospital. You remember that story?

Emery: It wasn't just like you've got it there. Actually, somebody was suing him for wages and he called my uncle to go in. I was with him and my uncle on the boat. I was about 16 or 17. He never carried a compass. It was very calm with no sun and thick a fog, so I talked it over with my uncle and we didn't know if we were heading south or west. So I reached down and pulled the throttle and I asked Del if he knew where we was headin'. Well, it's hard to believe, but he hauled himself up (they used to call him an old seal because of the way he waddled along with a crutch under one arm and a cane in the other), and he stood there sniffing the air and then he told us how we were taking the course, exactly where we were headin'. We had a compass and could tell, but he couldn't see that compass from where he was sitting and there was no sun out or anything, no wind, and it was thick a fog.

Peter: You had a compass and could see...

Emery: He had nothing to go by--it was thick a fog, no sun, no wind, he just sniffed the air.

Peter: I remember that story because I don't think it was unique.

Emery: He had a son Phillip, lived in Camden, and he'd go all over the bay, day and night.

Peter: And go up to Vinalhaven where all those rocks are and everything and never hit any of them?! And Tenants Harbor is supposed to be hard if you can't tell where you are. Not so easy. Rockland's pretty easy; you have so many landmarks.

Emery: Ayah, but if we go long enough we all make a mistake somewheres.

Peter: I suppose so. Now the other story I remember is that story of the first time that you ever got paid driving a boat from here to Rockland, and that led into another story about how you got your license to be a captain. But as I remember you got paid for taking

someone to Rockland and you were, like, 11 years old--twelve maybe. Emery: I probably was more like 15, I would imagine. Well, Clyde Young was getting the mail for old Captain Stuart Ames of the old Colisto Morro. When Stuart broke down, the old Colisto Morro that is, he'd have to get someone to spell for him--and sometimes he'd get Clyde and sometimes he'd get me to take the mail and the freight until he could get her goin' again. He told me I had to go get a license 'cause he couldn't rely on Clyde all the time and the license would last me a lifetime. Well, they made it that way for a while and then it wasn't very long 'fore you had to get it every year. Now I think it's every five years.

Peter: Tell us about going to get that license. You had to go to Portland for it, didn't you?

Emery: When I got there, there was really nothing to it. I had to take my application down and the inspector told me, "You have to have three steamboat captains sign it," and I said, "There's no way. I don't know any steamboat captains." "Well," he says, "maybe you can find some fishermen to sign it." I said, "I can get acquainted with them damn good." I went out and got a taxi and I told the taxi driver to head for Commercial Street, that I was going to buy a bottle of rum. 'Bought the bottle of rum and then I told him what I was up to. I went down to the Harris Company wharf and told him to wait there, I'd be right back. On the way to the first vessel I met Kenneth Trath ('course I knew him. His mother lived here) and told him what I was up to. No problem, whatever. We got aboard that vessel (can't remember anymore which one it was) and went below. Christ, every bunk was full and they were all drunk anyway. Ken Trath said, "Look, boys, here's a bottle. Just sign your names on this paper here, and then have a drink." That's the way I got my license.

Peter: And you got more than three signatures.

Emery: Oh, Gawd, yes! When I got back up to the extension office, the officer said, "Look, boy, you deserve a license!" That paper was all covered up with signatures.

Peter: So you got a license you thought was good for a lifetime and it had to be renewed every year, you found out a couple of years later.

Emery: Ayup. Now it's every five years.

Peter: Yeah, things have tightened up a bit since then. You must have a pretty old lobster license number, too. What is your number?

Emery: 377---and I knew the man who had number one.

Peter: You did!!

Emery: Ayup. He had an old Friendship. I was trying to think of his last name just this morning. His wife was an aunt to my wife but I can't think of his last name. Alfred Standard who was one of my friends went on the same boat. He was a grandfather to Alfred. Alfred lives in Rockland. When I think of it, I'm going to find out what his name was.

Peter: But you got number 377. That was your license number.

Emery: Still is. I got my grandfather's license number. There was a man named Kreeger who was the commissioner at the time my grandfather died in '29, and my license number---seems to me it was

1500 and something--anyway, I went in and told him my grandfather had died and I had inherited all of his booze and stuff and I also would like to inherit his license number---and I got it.

Peter: And you still use 377 today. Boy! You see the numbers on some of these traps---they're 15,000, 25,000---there's been a lot of licenses given out. Let's see now, we've got to come up with another story, Emery. Did you ever take a trip anyplace? When you were a kid?

Emery: No, we couldn't go away when I was a kid. You need money to go away.

Peter: So, let's see. You've been on seiners and you've probably been to Nova Scotia. You've been to Nova Scotia, haven't you?

Emery: I've been to Nova Scotia line trawling. I hated that. I think it was when I worked for old Henry Gallant. Yup, he'd look up, see me standin' on the dock, and he'd say, "You hungry?" Well, I'd have to be hungry if I went on something like that 'cause I hated it.

Peter: That's the trawl in the dory? and you'd go out and set it by hand?

Emery: If you had any wind, and the tide was just right, you could sail with it, but most of the time you'd scull it. Scull it with one hand and feed the line with the other.

Peter: No wonder you didn't like it. And how many of those hooks did you catch on yourself? [Emery ignores the question]

You went out in a fair number of seining boats, didn't you? And they went out a distance---in deep ocean.

Emery: Oh, Yeah. That 54 foot one. Christ Almighty, we went anywhere with that one.

Peter: So you fished the Grand Banks...

Emery: No, No. I never fished the Grand Banks, 'least not that I know of. I won't say that I didn't. Sometimes we didn't have a clue....

Peter: You ever been up around Sable Island? I used to fly over Sable Island.

Emery: Well, I might have been around there. I've been to Halifax in one of them old "hookers", those line trawlers. They call them hookers sometimes 'cause they have over a thousand hooks on one line.

Peter: You remember when you set a trawl out here? We set it out together. I went with you--this must have been ten years ago. You took a---I didn't even know what a trawl was--and you had this barrel with an incredible number of hooks on the line, and we went back the next day---I guess it was the next day---and hauled that thing up and there was all manner of stuff on it.

Emery: Those trawls are still down to the fish house. They belong to Rick now.

Peter: And I remember, wasn't too many years ago, Biscuit down to Vinalhaven, didn't he get a couple of halibut? But he had a bunch of trawls out. You'd get big fish on those things, big halibut, like 100 pounds.

Emery: The Amses down to the south end, they had trawls out and they got one at 220, dressed out. The first fish that was caught on

it was a hake, that long..

Peter: Four feet! Five feet!

Emery: A halibut swallowed that hake! I carried it to Criehaven and sold it to Andrew Hones; I sold him the hake. It hadn't been in the halibut long enough to do it any harm. I sold him that hake and after he'd bought it and paid for it, I told him that he bought the bait that caught the halibut and I tell you he wasn't too pleased with me.

Peter: (Shaking his head and laughing) Isn't that something. Do you ever get bluefish around here?

Emery: No, but we've caught a lot of pollack.

Peter: 'Cause I heard something--now I'm not a fisherman--but one of the fisherman told me that one time a ship was coming along and they had some bluefish on board and he got three bluefish and he didn't know what to do with them--they were full of bones and oily--so he chopped them up and put them in his lobster traps and when he went to haul them up, they were so full of lobster that the lobsters couldn't move. That is really the super bait--super bait! Well, can you think of any more old stories or shall we call it a night?

Isn't it funny how time flies, Emery? I remember your 75th birthday over at Dick and Monique's and it doesn't seem that long ago--and what happened to last year? Sometimes I wonder---gone---

Emery: Gone. Oh, I've been very fortunate to keep going as long as I have.

Peter: Me too, me too. People asks me sometimes, you know, they say, "How're you doing?" I don't care. You know I've got such pain in my finger I can't bend it, my back hurts and all. You know there's a rule, and it came from you or one of the old wise fisherman. It says, you're havin' a good day if you've got both feet on the deck. I've got this arthritis, you know. Everybody's got to have something and you can't complain about it, it just makes you feel bad, but it hurts, you know. Jes---- I've got both feet on the deck--I'm doin' all right. If my back's there and my feet are up, then I've got problems.

[Peter and Emery sit in silence in the kitchen of Peter's cape on the north end of the island. There is a great sympathy and understanding between the two, and no more need for talking. It is all said.]

Well, I guess that's just about it, Emery. Hmmm, the tape is still going but let's end it here. So--- this is the end of the tape of the interview with Emery Philbrook on, let's see, what is the date?--oh, yes, the 23rd of October, 1997. How does that sound? Say good night, Emery.

Emery:[reluctantly] Umm...good night.

[Emery is obviously tired and ready to call it a day]

Peter: Well, the date is now the 27th of October and Emery is back to tell us about his boats.

Emery: Well, I had two boats, old traps you might call them, 'fore I had money enough to have one built. I've been very fortunate, every one of them was quite usable and as far as I know one of them

is still going. The first one I had built, she was lost down off the Jersey coast in a hurricane.

Peter: Now what was the first boat you fished with?

Emery: Oh, my gawd, I wouldn't dare say. I had a big double ender, the Nellie D. Alec Perry had that built.

Peter: Now, you fished by yourself.

Emery: Right. I fished by myself. My father, he wasn't able to go by himself in the winter time so I took him with me.

Peter: Did you still have the double ender when you took your father?

Emery: I had the Hazel M. when I took my father. She was a Brad Young boat, the man who lived up here in this place. He built her down in the old crank shop.

Peter: Huh. W. Bradbury Young.

Emery: Ayup. He was an old vessel captain.

Peter: And that boat was called the Hazel M?

Emery: Yup. We always called her "the Old Bull". She was kind of a queer lookin' old thing, but she was seaworthy.

Peter: Well, I'm kind of queer lookin'.... [Peter's voice trails off]

Emery: I fished that one with my dad, and then I had the Glen B. My uncle had her built back in '26. It was probably in the late 30's that I had her. I had her a few years and then the first one I had built for myself was the Emily E. and she was built in '49. I sold her and she was the one that was lost off the Jersey coast--I can't remember what year it was.

Peter: And how many years did you have her?

Emery: I had her right around 20 years.

Peter: Hmmm! Into the 60's! You must have had her right up to the Edie and Em.

Emery: I Had the Edie and Em built right after I sold her and the Edie and Em, she's still a'goin' down there in Port Clyde. Fellow by the name of Wilson bought her. She's still a'goin'.

Peter: Makes you feel good, doesn't it, Emery?

Emery: [with a shy laugh] I like to look at her every now and again.

Peter: Sure! I mean, you were married to her for going on 20 years, right? You can't not.

Emery: Well, one thing about them, they can't talk back to you like your wives do.

Peter: That's for sure. But you get to know them just as well, and they talk to you, don't they? I bet your boats talk to you. You know, they say, "Now this isn't right" or "that isn't right", you know.

[a chortle from Emery]

Emery: You get to know them quite well.

Peter: So this boat went down in a hurricane and they never got her up? I guess she's still down there, huh?

Emery: Well, she washed up on a beach. The man who bought her was supposed to have been an able-bodied man who knew what he was doing and that hurricane warning was up but he went out anyway with his wife and two children with him. He lashed the children to the

canopy--he'd gotten in shoal waters--. I told him when he took her, "If you keep deep water under her, she'll take care of you." But I might have done the same thing if I'd been there. I'd have wanted to get my family in near as I could, and that's what he tried to do. Down off the Jersey coast somewhere he got her in too close. 'Course the canopy was gone, the children were gone 'cause they were attached to it, and they found him along the beach walkin' around in a daze, half conscious, and they found his wife. She was drowned.

Peter: [shaking his head in dismay] No, no, no! Not good. I wouldn't make a judgement about it, but hurricanes are nasty things. The best place to spend a hurricane is right here in the house.

Emery: Boats aren't built to fight with hurricanes.

Peter: That's right. The hurricane's going to win. I don't care what kind of a boat you have. Um,m,m. So that was your boat for twenty years. Did you design that boat?

Emery: No, I had a guy down in Friendship that built her. You know the old Rackatash, he tried to make something that would look like that old boat. Well, she was a good boat and all that but she wasn't anything like the Rackatash.

Peter: What was the Rackatash?

Emery: The Rackatash was built on Criehaven by old Peter Nixon. She was a nice boat. I think she was built for Leslie Wilson. She was sold a dozen times before she was lost somewhere. There was two men gassing her down alongside the dock at the old store.....

Peter: I didn't know they made boats on Criehaven.

Emery: Oh, Gawd, yes, they made them anywhere there was an old fence to get wood off of.***

Peter: Now you told me, Emery, that when you were a kid there were more people living on Criehaven than there were on Matinicus. Is that right?

Emery: I might have led you to believe that but I don't think I said it that way. I probably said there probably was nearly as many on Criehaven as there was here.

Peter: Pretty girls were down there or were they up here?

Emery: Oh, they were mixed up. We had dances up here and down there too, and during the summer months we'd go down there one night a week and the next dance night they'd come up here. There was two dances a week, usually. Down here Wednesday night and up there Saturday night or the other way around. I don't remember which way it was.

Peter: You got pretty good at rowing across that....

Emery: A lot of them rowed. I remember, there was one man named Williams (it was Warren Williams grandfather), he came out here and bought some cattle and I took him in on my boat. He bought the cattle and I took him into Rockland on my boat, the old Glen D, and coming back that night it set down thick a fog and Roland Dickaby was with me and my father was there, and we made the bell buoy and we was coming down inside the beach ledges, headin' along easy and Roland was on the bow listening and he could hear the surf on the shore. "Christ, Emery," he says, "there's somebody rowing a dory.

I can hear the oars hittin' the tholl pins." It was Art White from Criehaven. He'd rowed up here to go to the dance...He'd rowed in through the Gut and out through the mouth of the harbor, it was so thick a fog...

Peter: And he'd probably still be goin' if you hadn't caught him, huh?

Emery: As far as I know he's still alive. He lives up near Sidmore or someplace like that.

Peter: Can you beat that. He must have begun to wonder after awhile. Oh, man!

Emery: At that time he was chasing one of the Thompson girls lived right across from where Dick Moody lives now. [a chortle from Emery and a reflective pause]

Peter: Oh, boy, there must have been some great times then. Now don't tell me you ever rowed down to Criehaven to chase after anybody. [mock disbelief] You wouldn't do that.

Emery: I don't think so.

Peter: Nah...nah.....you wouldn't do that.

When you were a kid were most of the boats sail, or one lungers or what were they powered by?

Emery: Most of them were one lungers and Lathrops, Myannises and Atwoods, and I've been told that my father's Myannis engine is over there in Rockland somewhere. I've been down there looking for it but I probably wouldn't recognize it unless I saw the old pin on the flywheel. I might recognize that.

Peter: Well, they'd probably have a sign on it...

Emery: As I understand it, when my father changed engines, Frank Ames had a Volful? and he wanted a second engine and he bought a Palmer and somehow he came by my father's old Myannis. He took it out when he put in a Palmer. May still be in there and as I say the only way I could recognize it would be by the loose pin in the flywheel.

Peter: You don't see old one lungers around anymore, do you? Unless the old Sea Duck has one. Do you know if Paul Murray's boat has a one lunger in it.

Emery: It does! and a small one! I'd like to own that thing. I'm gettin' to the point where I can't do much of anything anyway. It wouldn't cost anything to run it. If he doesn't get to it real soon...

Peter: Paul told me that he used to take that thing and go to Portland and it would take him twelve to fourteen hours.

Emery: Everett and I were at, what we call the cabinet? shoal hauling lobster pots. It was hazy and nasty and all of a sudden it cleared and we looked up and there was that boat that Paul has hauled up there headed for Tenants Harbor. We hauled another string or so and looked and it still hadn't gone anywhere so we took after it; we thought it had broke down. We hadn't gone too long 'fore we could see the steam comin' out the stern when she went "put, put, put." So we turned around and come back, and he finally went out of sight. That was when his father owned it.

Peter: Tell me about Paul Murray's father. He wasn't a fisherman, was he?

Emery: No. He was a jack-of-all-trades, I guess.

Peter: Just like Paul.

Emery: Ayah. He seemed to be a real nice kind of person and his wife was the same. He was kind of retired when he got here, but he would do anything to help anybody. Very well-liked.

Peter: And that was his boat. The way I understand it they went back and forth to the mainland on it. I like it because it has a nice line to it, you know. I almost went to Paul one time and asked him if I could buy it. I'm not a boat person, and now it looks like it needs both a boat person and a lot of work if you wanted to use it.

Emery: I don't know what kind of shape she's in; I glance at it when I go by there every once in awhile. If people just wanted to drift around, I think it would be a nice thing to have. She looks as if she'd be comfortable to go in.

Peter: It must be! It looks like it would be a pretty boat in the water. Do you have any idea when she was built?

Emery: No, but as I remember 'em, seems to me that they were called Portugee Dories.

Peter: Well, it just looks to me like it would be...

Emery: An antique.

Peter: No, it just looks to me like it would be...I could tell you in airplane terms but...it just looks like it would be a.... comfortable boat. You can just picture it...you go and look at it and you can just picture it in the water with that little house on it and the stack sticking up there. It looks like it would be quite seaworthy.

Emery: Well, when they first came here, it was his mother and father who came out here in that, they were just cruising around, and they kind of liked it here and bought their place.

Peter: Yeah, that's the way most people came here, I expect. Even old Ebenezer Hall, I suppose he was just cruising around, and he saw the place and he liked it, right?, and he stayed.***

Emery: I'm a direct descendent of him.

Peter: You are!?

Emery: On my mother's side. I don't know too much about him.

Peter: You remember old Gib Hall. When I first met him, I said, "Are you any relation to...?" "Oh, yes," he said, "as a matter of fact, I'm a direct descendent of old Ebenezer."

Emery: Depends on what side of the house he comes in on...***

[There's a clattering of dishes and Peter says...] I'll tell you how you clean these things, see. You put them in hot water with a little bit of soap and let them sit, and then you attack them in the morning. How's that?

Now this here's the end of my tomatoes, and you've had some other stuff out of the garden here. Now, when you were a kid, you had to have a big garden, right?

Emery: Well, my parents used to have after they moved. They used to live down where Hoadley is now, and then they moved down to where the Thompsons are.

Peter: And that included the barn and...

Emery: Oh, yes. That included some acres there. They had oxen and

I stayed on in the spring until they had things planted right and, if things worked out right, I'd get on a seiner and come back sometime the middle of July and help them get the hay in. Usually I'd be on the boat and talk them into comin' in here for a day or two. The weather had to be so's the hay could go into the barn. You needed a lot of help.

One thing I remember, I think about it so many times. I think I was on the Nyop (Njordh?) at the time. This was early in the season so I think it was the time for gettin' the hay in, and my father when he had a calf down there, he always wanted it to weigh at least 100 pounds before he had it butchered. Well, we were goin out the next morning, and I went down to see the folks and I went out to the barn to see if that calf would dress over a 100. Well, I looked that calf over and I said, "Christ, yes, it'd dress better'n 100." I wanted to butcher him right then for him. He said, "No, I don't want to do it now." The cows were tied up there and everything and they would smell the blood. "Can't you do it in the morning?" he said.

"Well, the skipper wasn't planning to go out till about eight or nine o'clock so I said, "I guess I could". So that's the way we left it.

Well, this maybe shouldn't be on tape but it will be; I never went in that barn but what I had to take a leak. So I walked by the calf, and my father, he went over there and there was a big barn door that slid on a track with a small door in the middle of that, and he went over there standin' in that little door with his hands in his pockets and I walked out by the calf and was about to do it, and there was my father lookin' out to the field, not payin' any attention. Well, first I had to take that leak and as I did it the calf got spooked and that damn rope parted. Well, the calf ran for the door, that small door, specifically the light between Ralph's legs. My father is still standin' there with his hands still in his pockets, and he ends up on the calf's back and takes about a minute and a half ride across the road and back. He's unable to get his hands out of his pockets, see? Well, he finally fell off, and I was laughin' like hell. But my father didn't think it was so funny. He thought I had cut that rope on purpose, and he was mad. I'll tell you, I can still see it all as if it happened yesterday. [Emery chortles and Peter lets out a guffaw]

Peter: I'll bet there are a lot of things you could tell us, Emery, as if they happened yesterday. But we've run out of tape. Maybe we can continue some other time on another tape.

This is the end of the interview of Emery Philbrook by Peter Wentz the 27th of October, 1997. The sympathy which is felt between these two men is apparent in Emery's complete self-forgetfulness as he responds to Peter's questions. The result is a remarkable and beautiful exchange which I have been privileged to transcribe.

Elsbeth Russell
July 23, 1998

Addendum: Emery Philbrook, An Oral History of Matinicus

Re: The Raynes farm

I can remember one evening I was over to the Raynes farm and Bill Sheldan was there in the kitchen. He used to do a lot of odd jobs around the island and stay with the people he did jobs for. He was working at the Raynes Farm at that time. Now there was this big wood box in front of the kitchen stove and that wood box was Ethel's favorite seat. Now Bill, he'd be chewing tobacco and he was sort of cross-eyed and he'd aim for that stove to spit his tobacco spittle. Ethel would hunch up as he got ready to spit and she'd look at him kind of suspiciois 'cause she didn't trust his aim, but he'd hit that stove, right on, everytime and the spittle would make a loud hiss when it landed.

Re: Fishing and Emery's first boat

I started to fish as a boy in one of those double-enders, a peapod. My first boat cost me eight dollars--it was all stove in and needed a lot of work, but I caulked her up real good and she worked fine for me. Those were the times when cod was the cash crop and lobsters only sold for ten to fourteen cents a pound. We didn't catch a lot of lobsters in a trap and we didn't fish a lot of traps, maybe 100 or so. The biggest haul I ever made was 1100 pounds and that was during the war. For a period of a couple of months there seemed to be more lobsters out there. We figured it was 'cause they were being driven in by the shelling out to Seal Island.

My father used to take out his power boat and haul my double ender after it. Then I'd get into my boat and go off on my own. I could get a better catch with my smaller boat without power and I was warmer and drier in my own boat too.

One time it was thick 'a fog and I lost my father's boat. I knew'bout where the island was and I come 'round the north end while he was coming in through the Gut. But usually we'd find each other and he'd tow me back in. He had one of those hand held fog horns and he was supposed to blow it every so often so's I know where he was. Well, he sort of forgot about blowing it and so I was on my own that time; makes a fellow grow up fast.

Orrin Ames, he had power boats but he always preferred his peapod. One day he said he was tired of that damned motor and he just up and threw it overboard. He'd use his motors for awhile and then go back to fishing and rowing, standing up of course, in his peapod. That single roller pulley at the end of the peapod, it worked well to get the traps up and also to keep the boat up into the wind as you was hauling. Those wooden traps weighed loaded as much as 60 to 75 pounds and as you come along side the weight of it would roll the boat over almost to the gunnel and then it was easy to haul it aboard. The operation was done standing up. Orrin had powerful shoulders and arms.

Harriet Ames used to make slickers and people would come all the way from the mainland to buy them. I can remember she lived in the house where Ed Spencer now lives and the slickers would be hung

up in the yard to dry. They were made of canvas dipped in boiled linseed oil. It must have been thick underfoot and some slick in that house. They become yellow as they dried. Under the slicker you'd wear a wool shirt or sweater and on your hands you'd wear wool mittens or gloves. In cold weather they'd freeze on the outside and when you slid out your hands they'd be steaming wet but they'd be warm. That mitten would be froze solid into a fist.

Elsbeth Russell, copied from
notes taken with her husband,
Christopher in 1998

July 9, 2005