

Interviewee Name: Carl Schwab

Project/Collection Title: Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and affiliations: Teagan White (College of the Atlantic Intern)

Interview Location: Maine Fishermen's Forum, Rockland, Maine

Date of Interview: March 1, 2018

Interview Description:

Carl Schwab

Port Clyde, ME

Retired Fisherman

Interviewed by Teagan White

Carl Schwab, a retired fisherman from Port Clyde, ME, who was not born into a fishing family, speaks about how he began to summer in Maine and work on fishing boats. He speaks about his experiences fishing for different species such as lobster, herring, and shrimp and the differences in his personal experience of fishing with his children's growing up in this way of life.

Collection Description:

Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018 is a project of Maine Sea Grant, The First Coast, College of the Atlantic, and the Island Institute, with support from the Maine Fishermen's Forum Board of Directors.

Citation:

Schwab, Carl, Voices of the Maine Fishermen's Forum 2018 Oral History Interview, March 1, 2018, by Teagan White, 12 pages, NOAA Voices from the Fisheries. Online: Insert URL (Last Accessed: Insert Date).

Transcription by: Ela Keegan, College of the Atlantic Intern

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CS: Carl Schwab (interviewee)

TW: Teagan White (lead interviewer)

RC: Rebecca Clark

[0:00:00.0]

TW: Great. Okay. So um I'm Teagan White. And Rebecca Clark, and Carl Schwab is here at the fisherman's forum on March 1st. So, Carl where do you fish out of?

CS: Port Clyde

TW: Port Clyde and how long have you been fishing out of Port Port Clyde?

CS: Oh god since I'd say since 1952.

TW: Oh my gosh wow that's awesome.

CS: Not lobstering but fishing.

TW: Yeah

CS: And uh yeah when I got out of high school I started fishing.

TW: For ground fish?

CS: Yep! Dragging' and purse seining, mackerel and herring. Did all that then after I got married and started thinking about kids or maybe they already came, but then I started to lobster and now I'm retired.

TW: How did you enter the fishery? Did you have friends that did it or people in your family?

CS: No I'm a little different than all of that. Well I guess it started when my dad died as a kid.

[0:01:01.7]

CS: My mother raised me and my godparents had come up to Monhegan Island one summer and this is from New York and that's where I grew up. Born and raised in New York City and uh, Ha Hey

[Person walking by]: How are you?

CS: Good. And uh so she had heard my godparents had come up and spent a couple weeks on Monhegan Island and came back to New York and told my mother what a beautiful place it is and what a great place for a little kid. You know running around the island cause they saw little local kids running and swimming and all that. So my mother come up with the idea we try going to go that next summer. She got in touch with a girlfriend of hers who had also lost a husband and had a kid my well, year or two younger, but anyway, and how they found the place on the island, cause there weren't computers or anything back then.

[0:01:59.2]

CS: But anyway they found a little cottage they could rent two of them and we went to Monhegan and I fell in love.

TW: That's so great.

CS: with Monhegan.

TW: Wow

CS: And uh, in July, cause a lot of the boats, some of the boats they were herring fishing or mackerel fishing, a lot of times you'd be around the island and they'd come in and tie up at the dock and stuff and I used to hang around the dock all the time. And one day I was, one of the boats from Port Clyde, they were mending' their nets tied up on the dock. And uh I was standing there watching them, oh I don't know twelve years old, thirteen, something like that. And anyway the captain invited me aboard, showed me how to haul the net twine, well, and then he asked [...unclear...]

[Laughter]

CS: Where I came from, and I told him, New York.

[0:02:58.9]

CS: He asked if I'd like to go out with him. Now they were purse seining, the boat was from Port Clyde and there were five men on her. Anyway I got all excited and he says well if it's all right with your mother cause I don't wanna [unclear] with my mother. So I ran up and found my mother and brought her down to the dock, introduced her to Captain Levi and he uh told her the same thing you know, here round the island. [Unclear] and she didn't see nothing wrong with it. I don't think she was going to realize that it would wind up my whole life was just going out with Levi, but that's about the way. It was in the summertime, I was gonna, actually my plans were to quit high school and go fishing, I still lived in the city, but I had a great principle of high school and he knew how to handle me and it was due to him I did finish high school, but each summer after that I came up and when I was fourteen or fifteen I came up alone.

[0:04:01.2]

CS: Cause I knew everyone on the island and I tried to get a job on the island somewhere on a boat and when I couldn't, I worked at the island Inn. I washed pots and pans and hauled garbage, cut ice, off the ice pond, anything just to stay there until I got on a boat. And then the next summer the same thing, I came up. Cause the trains ran then, you could get on the train in New York come to Thomaston or Rockland. So uh it was easy. I did finish high school. Good ideas with my principal, and he liked fishing also so he took me right under hand and turned out that he and his wife had a small boat in Massachusetts and in the summer when they were off he, they went fishing commercially. They handlined and then sell the fish to the local market to help their teachers salaries and twice he and his wife sailed up here.

TW: Oh wow.

[0:04:58.6]

CS: This is after I get out of school and all, sailed up here, couple times, spent a week or two up here. So it became a lasting friendship and few, well, quite a few years ago when Nancy and I started doing Florida for a few weeks in the winter, they had already retired from living there so we kept in touch. When we get down in Florida, we get in touch with, and teat out or something, and twice he and his wife sailed up to Port Clyde in a sailboat and stayed with us for a couple days.

TW: That's fantastic.

CS: So all because I got in trouble and I got sent down to the principle. So you never know and that, that friendship lasted until they passed away. One year I got a call from one of his daughters said that he had passed away and she passed away about six months later.

TW: Wow.

CS: And anyway so that's part of my Maine and New York story. The day after I graduated high school I jumped into my beat-up '41 Chevy and drove her and been here ever since.

TW: So you started on herring boats and the, moved into groundfish?

CS: Yep, yeah couple of the boats and I went, we went herring on and then rebuilt her like in the winter and spring for groundfish. So I did that. I didn't get into lobstering until my family started coming then I [unclear] college transfer [unclear] seining.

TW: Haha.

CS: We are in a windy place.

TW: Yeah it might be more stable on the ground.

CS: We'll probably go down. That's what I said I'm a little different than most that was born and raised here. Now all my kids were born and raised there and they [unclear].

RC: Nice

TW: That's great

TW: How big were the fish that you were catching in the fifties?

CS: Well we were catching mostly mackerel and herring cause back then the sardine's canneries were all still running so we used to go herring fishing for them.

[0:07:00.3]

CS: And you now, normal mackerel. Um groundfishing we'd get codfish, haddock and hake and all that sorta stuff. When I first started actually full time fishing when I came up here, it's when the big boats used to go out of Rockland, The Wave and The Surf and The Tide, the big steel ones. And I went, I didn't get to steady site on one but, well, kind of quick story, I had a girlfriend whose brother was made on The Tide, it was one of them, the Rockland boats. And one night she calls me up, she she says "My brother needs somebody, they're sailing in the morning, early, would you like to go?" Now I'd never been off where they went so I thought a minute or two and I thought that'd be a good experience. So I went on her, that was when they were going two, three-week trips off to the Grand Banks.

[0:07:55.7]

TW: Oh, wow.

CS: They fished, that was when the factory was in Rockland, a small processing plant. I think three of the big steel boats they bought in Germany I think.

CS: So I went on then just transit trips but mostly seining, purse seining, stop seining which was fair and not lobstering but, I think it was when my second kid came along I started doing lobstering and then herring and on the side I was doing both for several years.

TW: Yeah.

CS: and then I then I dropped one and then I just got into lobstering cause I didn't want to go back on the big

boats cause I wanted to be home more, see the kids growing up you know. So as I say my story's a little different than most. Now my kids have the normal story. They're born, raised, they're both, both my sons go fishing, my daughter too. One of my daughters a parent to a fishermen. Now my grandchildren are going and two of them go together lobstering off shore,

[0:09:03.0]

TW: Nice.

CS: Out of Port Clyde so I see them leave three, four in the morning, coming home ten o'clock at night.

TW: Jeez.

RC: Oh my god.

CS: I don't envy them. I got two grandsons that will fish together and uh so they got into it normal, they were born and raised into it, but I've never been sad I just I love it around here, I love the way of life. I have seen it, cause the sardine industry when I was herring fishing this. I think there was forty one sardine plants,

TW: Oh wow.

CS: On the coast.

TW: Yeah yeah.

CS: And now there's none. Now you're going to ask anymore questions? What you might want to lead me to.

TW: Well do you have a favorite species after all of your experience, kind a finger in every pie?

CS: To eat or you mean to catch?

TW: To catch or to eat, both is great.

RC: or to eat.

[Laughter]

CS: I like haddock best.

[0:09:59.5]

CS: course lobsters are good too. No I couldn't complain a bit. I retired about oh god, five six years ago, and my sons got my boat. So I still, she's on the same mooring, still [unclear], see her going. I think that made it easier and of course he also told me "dad anytime you want to go just call me" for. I haven't called him yet it's been almost five years since that. Four years I guess...

TW: What's the name of the boat?

CS: Well lets see the Diana and Dawn was my first boat that was my, both kids names, Dianna and Dawn. And then Cathy Elle which was my first wife, wife, mother of all my kids.

TW: Yep.

CS: Then we split up few years ago and then my son took the boat over from me and I told him well I changed

the name to the Nancy S which is the one you saw going in the [unclear].

TW: Oh

[0:11:00.4]

CS: And I told Brad I says you know you change the name anytime you want, I says you don't have to keep Nancy's name on it you know if you wanna just put your wife's name on it. But still the Nancy S.

TW: That's great. So do you guys, was there overlap? Where you fish out of the same harbor or you pretty much handed everything off to him?

CS: No I handed all to him and he told me he said "dad anytime you want to go just call me the night before" and it's been about 5 years I haven't called him yet. I've helped him load traps and stuff cause my dock's right in back of the house and he uses the dock and all.

TW: Yeah.

CS: So it's kind of a hand me down in a way.

TW: The technology must have changed a lot over the course of your time on the water.

CS: Well from the beginning. I can't say I went back to hauling by hand. My kids did cause they had skiffs, outboards, you know, when they started to haul by hand. When I started lobstering, I had, you know I bought a powerboat, but we didn't have the hydraulic collars.

[0:12:03.9]

TW: Mmm.

CS: We had the heads that you know we wound it around and we pulled it in and so that, course fathom meters, radar, all that stuff came along and one by one I did put em in the boat. And uh that's what I did although I always did couple other things, I worked here actually.

TW: Oh really?

CS: Ten winters. Cause I'd winter fished all my life up until [unclear] when they started the timeshare project here. So you know, I came up and friend of mind down home was selling up here at the time. Course first thing he did was call all his friends, come up see, go on a tour get a free dinner at Marcel's

TW: Hahaha

CS: So I did it, and uh I got thinking about it that night and this was in January, first part of January and I called him up and I says Christ can you make a living up there?

[0:13:02.9]

CS: and he said well he says well it's all commission, so I said well that's nothing new I never was promised anything anyway going fishing. So I came up and ended up getting the job selling timeshare here in the winter. And I guess, sales manager told me, he says, cause I went back lobstering all summer and fall, and he says when you get done come back, says I'll put up with you for another winter if you want it. Four or five winters I worked here I'd fish until January then come up here till May or June and then go back summer and fall fishing. Kind of played it into the [unclear] me a break too.

TW: Be inside for a little bit.

CS: Get away from something. Yea, it was interesting. I've been involved ever since with the timeshare project. We did buy several of our own so we have timeshare here.

TW: That's awesome.

[0:14:00.4]

CS: And I'm on the board of directors for the association.

TW: Oh wow.

CS: The timeshare. Its not well it's not fishing but we have a lot of fishermen that own timeshare.

TW: Yeah right. That's cool.

CS: It's been kind of interesting.

TW: Yeah. Wow.

CS: I never let much grass grow onto my feet.

TW: Yeah. Well that sounds like quite a classic story to me, something... something new every season.

CS: It worked out well you know having this, and then Nancy started working here too. Lets see she worked here year round but I just worked in the winter then went back fishing.

TW: Yeah yeah.

CS: and passing the fishing business, my son is going in my boat and my grandsons got their own boats.

TW: That's so crazy.

CS: Now I'm pleased with it. It's nice to see the guys and they they fish offshore and I never went off that far. I did when I was dragging' but.

TW: offshore for lobster?

CS: Yeah.

RC: Yeah yeah.

CS: That's where the big money is right now.

RC: Right.

CS: is offshore.

TW: So

CS: I wouldn't even dream of what they do.

TW: Right.

CS: And I've never asked them how much they do [laughing]. But I know he does quite well, in fact he just got another boat. Newer one.

TW: Oh Wow.

CS: Brought it a home, bought it down in Connecticut. No not Connecticut, New Jersey, just brought it home last week.

TW: Wow. What uh made him decide to go to New Jersey instead of uh?

CS: He saw an add for for in the paper and he called them up.

TW: Okay.

CS: Sounded like what he wanted.

TW: Uh Huh.

CS: He's still got his other boat, he'll be fishing', cause there's always stuff he's got to do on the one he just brought home. So then he'll sell the one he's got.

TW: Did you do uh... Sorry did you do a similar process when you got your boats or did you have them built by a..

CS: My first boat I bought in New Hampshire. See part of purse seining

[0:15:59.4]

CS: When I was going, we'd go up to New Hampshire in the fall for sea herring [unclear]. So we'd go up there usually first part of November and stay there through January, fishing' for big herring at the Isles of Shoals. You ever hear of those islands?

TW: Yeah yeah.

CS: That's where we used to be, and we used to tie up in Kittery. So we lived on the boat basically and I got to know a few of the fishermen down down there, the lobster fishermen, cause being down there, for oh go four five falls, we went down there, and uh, now wait a minute, there was a quick story that tied in with what you asked me there.

TW: Great.

CS: Something about the boats. Oh yeah. Yeah so I get to know some local fishermen in Kittery and they were into these fast boats, big engines and all steam down the river you know, race out to the Isles of Shoals and stuff. So when I got thinking about getting getting a boat.

[0:17:00.1]

CS: I heard about fella I knew down there and his boat for sale. And she was about ten years old and had a Cadillac V8 engine, went like hell. And anyway so I bought her that was my first boat, that I had, of mine. Then I used that boat for quite a few years then I had a new one built over in Friendship, the Lash brothers. And that boat is almost forty years old now.

TW: Wow.

CS: and that's the one my son has now, but I did get out of the Cadillac end, when that calved on me I was dragging and I was shrimping. I used to go shrimping in there and also dragging in the winter. And uh finished that Cadillac off and I put a, put a six cylinder Chevy. The got me out of high speed and back into normal running and I've had two 92s in her since.

TW: How big was your first boat?

CS: Thirty four.

TW: Thirty four. And your new one that your son just got is that generally the same size or did you go bigger?

CS: No my sons got mine. My grandsons, the one...

TW: Oh okay.

CS: Got the boat down in New Jersey. Yeah she's forty five foot and they fish eight hundred traps, fifteen trap trawls. So..

TW: That's crazy.

CS: I can sit right in my kitchen, watching, baiting up, going out and coming back so I kind of like that part of it now.

[Laughing]

TW: That's great.

CS: I'm probably leading you in all different directions.

RC: No.

CS: Like I told you in the beginning I'm not quite normal. Like my kids were normal they were born they were raised, they went out with me when they were little guys and all that. And I didn't have any of that in my background.

RC: Yeah

CS: But I fell in love with Maine and and fishing.

TW: How would you like start a new, like, so you started with herring and then groundfish then you went to shrimp? Like how would you get into shrimp, did you have someone showing you?

[0:19:04.9]

CS: No shrimping, shrimping I went in my own boat and it just meant putting a gallus frame on for the doors and winching. So I think five winters I went shrimping with that, and then sixth winter is when I guess I started here.

TW: Was there much of a learning curve to it? Or it was pretty much was just dragging.

CS: No, I been fishing anywhere, I've been on the Grand Banks, I've been on the inshore boats, so I didn't by then I didn't need much training, it was just something to do in the winter when the lobstering was the poorest.

TW: Yeah.

CS: I went dragging then I uh set on timeshare, but that was not a plan, it just happened.

TW: Do you think it takes something different to be a fisherman now than it did when you first started?

[0:19:53.4]

CS: No, I think, I think, I think the same thoughts gotta go through your mind. First of all you gotta like it, you gotta feel comfortable on the water otherwise it's a hard bitch of a job, and I mean specially like my sons and grandsons they'll leave three, four in the morning and get done eight, nine, ten o'clock at night, you know they put in long days and so uh I don't know is I'd like that as much, but probably whatever that was the name of the game at the time.

TW: Did you ever think about aquaculture as it was starting to expand or while.

CS: You mean getting into it?

TW: Yeah.

CS: Never, actually I never thought of anything except what I did.

TW: Yeah. Great. I don't think so

[laughing].

TW: Oh coffee smells good. Let's see.

RC: How many years have you been coming to the Fishermen's Forum?

CS: Ever since it started.

[0:21:00.6]

RC: Yeah.

CS: You tell me the year it started and that was the year I started coming to it.

TW: That's fantastic.

CS: In-fact the first week of timeshare that I bought, that's how I ended up selling, I ended up buying one, but the one I bought was the one that ties in with the, generally, the dates with the Forum. That's why I bought that particular week and I can come out and have a drink or two, don't have to drive home and just see friends that you see once a year or something like that. So uh that was the week I brought, week 10. And right after that I started working here, that winter, then I brought a couple more, once I got to know more about it. Timeshares been good to me. We, we traveled all over on it. We just got back from Hawaii actually using timeshare, swapping.

[0:21:58.5]

TW: Were you there when they had the alert about a nuclear?

CS: No I wasn't.

[Person enters and side conversation occurs about picking up a ticket from front desk].

TW: Have you, and you don't have to answer this question, but have you had any close encounters on the water that come to mind?

CS: Uh I've gone overboard a couple times. I guess the closest was I was in the harbor coming on the mooring and it was in the winter and everything was icy and when I came, to get on the mooring, you gotta get out from behind the wheelhouse and go up on the bow. Well coming back I went overboard cause everything was icy and uh the boat was all right she was on the mooring. But I first tried to get aboard, you know grab the rail, and

[0:23:02.6]

CS: I couldn't get myself up. But cause when we go out lobstering, course we leave a skiff on the mooring. So luckily the skiff was on the mooring so I was able to crawl into the skiff and then get out. I wasn't in danger of drowning but it was in February so it was cold. Uh I've lost a couple of boots getting caught in the rope. And once I got hauled right down the stern and then the boot, the boot went. Cause I always went alone so I didn't have anybody with me. Even dragging when I went shrimping those years I went alone.

TW: Really? Wow.

CS: Yeah so and I never had a sternman. I didn't wanna deal with wondering if they're going to show up every morning and this and that. I never really gave it a thought about taking a sternman, I never wanted to get into having a million traps and but I guess that was... Here comes Nancy.

[0:24:02.0]

TW: Well we have.

CS: That's the name of the boat, the Nancy S.

TW: We are just six minutes away from uh, from the full time slot. Is there anything that you wanna talk about? Or any story that is super great that you'd like your great grandkids to be able to hear.

CS: Well I just as proud of them as I am my own sons, doing in the business and I get kind of a thrill cause where I live, I like look right out and see them coming and going. And uh my grandchildren and my greats, they're growing up in fishing families. So it may continue on I hope. It's an honest way, it's a hard job but its it's good, its good. I sure can't complain one bit. But I bitched a little some days. Even when I went to the grand banks I don't know how many trips I made then. A lot, I'd never made a full time job of it. I'd fill in once in a while if a guy got sick or something. Even that was an experience, there, we did four days and nights just steaming, to get to the bottom, and then it ten days in, eight to ten days, twelve, fourteen day trips, that was how I first started. It wasn't lobstering. I'd never even thought about lobstering at that time. It was just dragging and seining. Seining was the main thing for me through that period, both purse purse seining and stop seining. No I've no complaints coming and like you said my kids, grandchildren seem to be following, soon, it's, it's a way of life and it's you know, I can't complain about it. I'm glad I did it, I like looking back over time and history and uh nothing wrong with it.

TW: Great. Thank you.

CS: Thank you.

[Conversation and laughing.]

