

Interviewee Name: Elmer Hoffses

Project/Collection Title: Beals Heritage Museum

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Unknown

Interview Location: Unknown

Date of Interview: 1968

Interview Description: Elmer Hoffses tells a story about the boats in the harbor freezing during winter and the Coast Guard's attempts to get them out. He then goes on to talk about Guy Peabody taking a car driving at night and Uncle Bob taking charge of a cargo boat that had been abandoned. The tape ends with short conversations and jokes between unknown men about buying a house, carpenters, lobstering, traps, cooking, etc.

Keywords: winter, frozen boat, Hardwood Island, Plumbers Island, cargo, liquor, car,

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Transcribed By: Molly Tucker

EH: Elmer Hoffses

[0:34:58]

EH: [0:00:00] [inaudible] Jack and I went out after the boats because (Vaughan?) had gone on his winter cruise down to Georgia. You knew he went down there.

Interviewer: The boat was in the water?

EH: Oh, yeah. It was all off on the mooring, see. Well, Jack told me, "We'd better go get the boats because it looks as though it might be that we couldn't get them." It was blowing hard nor'west, but still, it was awful cold. Well, we went off, and he and I got ours and brought them in and tied them up alongside of (Kirby's?) car on this side of the wharf. Did I send you a picture of –? Maybe you saw some of the boats in the end there.

Interviewer: Yeah, [inaudible].

EH: [0:00:55] Then they started bringing them in late that afternoon and getting them tied up, and there were nine tied right up here all together. Well, the next – see, Charles never ventured down from the hill. He says he's king of that hill up there, and it takes all of his time to –

Interviewer: Who's Charles?

EH: [inaudible] – takes all of his time to handle being king up there. The next morning, she was froze up pretty well, but the Coast Guard, a big one, come up and cut it out a little. She was frozen in ice down here, and she come way up off of here – [inaudible] boat. Somebody must've called him, so he went down to the Coast Guard, and they went out and broke her out and brought her in and tied her up close alongside George Woodward – Georgie Woodward and [inaudible]. So, no, they didn't want him tied up there because they knew about what would happen because his engines were all [inaudible] down. So, he said, "Well, I'll tie up alongside George." He said, "I know he don't want it, but I'll tie it there." So he tied up by the big, great [inaudible]. He'd got off from the Coast Guard the year before. They towed him in. He said, "Oh, chum, that's just what I need for a road." I guess he got it out somehow. I guess they [inaudible] stern there, and he hauled it in on the [inaudible] – very big one.

[0:02:26] So passed on, and, of course, everything froze up solid then and sealed right up. You could walk right off around here anyway, which we did around the wharves and so forth.

Interviewer: [inaudible]

EH: But the boat was bound and determined to keep cutting into it and running – the Coast Guard come in and make a path, and then they'd run and sail back and forth by it. Well, see, the seas would jump it, see, and break it off. Then they'd have the Coast Guard crisscross back and forth, and then the tide would run it up the reach in the afternoon. Then, of course, the next night, it'd be all froze over. After a while, they broke up, and the [inaudible] tides come. They're running out. Then they run down by Hardwood Island [inaudible] down to Plummers Island and broke it up down there, and then it went out. Got an [inaudible], and it all run out pretty well. So we put them back off on the mooring. Well, that left Uncle Charles – no, it didn't. Before that, it was froze around the wharves in good shape, see? So the boys kept going back and forth by, and we all wanted to go out to moorings, but we knew [inaudible] wouldn't go.

[0:03:45] So I went up, and I said to [inaudible] – I said, “Charles, you want to go down to see your boat?” “Boat? Boat’s all right. What’s wrong with the boat?” “Well, I said, “different ones want to get out, and your boat – sixth or seventh boat, and you got to get it tied up somewhere.” He said, “They’re all right.” He said, “What do you fellows want to keep bothering that ice for?” He said, “Leave it alone. It’ll take care of itself. It’ll be all sealed in there in good shape. Then we won’t have to bother with it. Won’t have to go near them all winter.” Well, he turned out – he was laying on the couch. He got up. I got him into the car, and we struck out. We come down. I didn’t think he’d been drinking. If I had, I wouldn’t have bothered with him. Of course, George and [inaudible] had untied his boat, see, because she wouldn’t go nowhere, but they wanted to get theirs out. They said, “Well, we’ll have to take care of her all winter,” which probably they would have had to if they’d stayed there.

[0:04:56] So they untied his to get theirs out. They got out and coming around on the other side – because we cleaned that all out so that we could put our boats higher up in between the two wharves. Because when the drift ice started coming, you got to get out of the way – either get out of the way or go with it. So, [inaudible] come down, and he started going on. He said, “You fellows just drove me completely off the ocean.

Interviewer: Off the couch, you mean.

EH: Yeah. He said, "You don't allow me to fish. You don't allow me to do nothing anymore." He said, "Now, you've turned around and set my boat adrift." I said, "Well, [inaudible], I never set it adrift." "I know who done it," he says. "I know all right who done it." He said, "That damn Georgie Woodward." He says, "And I'm going to tell him something when I go home. I'll call him up and tell him something or other." He kept growling. [inaudible], I said, "Well, [inaudible], where'd you want it tied? I'll go down there." I said, "Why don't you crawl down the ladder there and tie it?" He said, "Am I a damn fool." And I said, "Why?" He says, "Go down there? How'd you think I'm [inaudible] with that ladder?" He says, "[inaudible] How am I going to hang on?" I said, "Well, all you go to do is go right over to the side of that wharf, and you can go down all right." [inaudible] He said, "I guess now you want to kill me, don't you?" I said, "No." I said, "You want me to go down there?" He said, "No, stay where you are." He said, "Let her go adrift." He says, "That's just what you fellows want to do, see my boat going out that reach." I said, "Now, [inaudible], what'd I come up after you for?" He said, "You come up after me, afraid that one of my [inaudible] of yours." I said, "No, I didn't either." I said, "I'll tell you what to do." I said, "You get into that car, and I'll get you up over that hill where I found you." He said, "No, no. I'll walk." I said, "No, you won't either. I'll come get you. I'll take you back where I got you from."

[0:07:04] So, I took him back. He [inaudible] over to [inaudible] and give some of the boys some of it over there. He said, "I'll remember you, every one of you." So I took him home. That night, eleven, twelve o'clock, he showed up again down there. [Recording paused.] I guess that was a smart way of getting rid of his daughter. His son was in the Army, down in Tennessee, wasn't it? Kentucky or Tennessee, one or the other, down in them foothills, I guess. Found him a wife who had three children and fetched her home, and he went to Vietnam. No, he went to Thailand. Just a little ways [inaudible]. So they was going to stay with Roger [inaudible]. So they stayed there

[inaudible] – I guess he didn't think much of the idea. So he went into a crazy spell and threw them all out [inaudible] out for the night. The next day, she took off. I guess she stayed a few more days.

[0:08:27] This guy Peabody went up, and [inaudible] son there – they decided [inaudible] go down the road in [inaudible] car. [inaudible] didn't have no license to drive, but they figured they'd take it, see, after dark and go down and ride it around. Because [inaudible] when he goes in, shuts the storm door for the night, and that's the whole of that until the next morning. But he kind of mistrusted something was up, and a guy come up and took supper with him. [inaudible] they thought they would strike out. It was getting dark enough so they could take the car. They went out and started [inaudible] around the car a little bit and [inaudible] double-barrel and went out and let it go up against the side of that old building there [inaudible], and the guy said he run until he fell. He guessed he wasn't hurt. He said that [inaudible] would kill anybody. He never [inaudible] back up [inaudible]. [Recording paused.]

[0:09:30] The car laid there. Well, he said, of course, I've got to go to Togus. I've got to do this. "Oh," he said, "I'm awful pressed for time." But he said, "You need it done. I may go to work on that." He looked it over. He said, "Gosh, I'm running off the carburetor. You go there. You've let that run almost right ragged." I said, "Well, [inaudible], it don't run good." [inaudible], he said [inaudible]. He said, "Look at it. It's all corroded." "I don't think I can do a thing with it," he said. "Well," I said, "do what you can." I know good and well [inaudible]. "Well," he said, "I might start right in on that this afternoon if I feel well enough." He said, "My eye's going bad on me." I said, "Well, I know you can fix it, [inaudible]." I knew he could. I said, "I'll pay you what you ask." "Oh, well, now, we don't pay no attention to money, but I'll have a look at it." So he said you got to give me some time on it." I said, "Well, [inaudible], take your time.

Interviewer: [0:10:37] [inaudible]

EH: Couple of days after that, he called up. He said, "Come and get your carburetor." I think probably it might work. "It'll work better than it did," he said [inaudible]. So I went up, and he got it – and he overhauled it. He'd take this apart. He said, "That was stuck [inaudible]. That was in awful shape." He said that everything was froze solid. "I had to use penetrating oil. I had to do this. I had to do that." Now, he said, "It ain't all fixed yet. We got to go blow it out." Down to [inaudible]. So after he got fooling around and [inaudible] telling me all about it, telling me everything he'd done to it, then we went down to (Cheyanne's?). "(Cheyanne?)," he said, "you got to have a little air." [inaudible] so he got it fixed up, come down, [inaudible] runs like a charm and has ever since. [Recording paused.]

[0:11:42] He said, "There's one thing I got to do." He said, "You got to do to get this compass." He said, "You got to take me up over the – you've got to take me up by (Jones?)." He said, "You ain't got to know what I'm – I may be buying some milk. You never can tell what I'm buying." [inaudible]

Interviewer: I bet you didn't have the least idea what he was buying.

EH: So I let him go. When he come out, he said, "I got a few little articles in here. You don't care what they are." I said, "No, I'll take you back." So I took him back. Never see him for two weeks. [Recording paused]. He said, "They've got it." He says it's a [inaudible]. He says [inaudible]. [Recording paused.]

[0:12:21] Uncle Bob and one of his relations, Harvey Alley – they decided they'd go out fishing. So they struck out, and they went probably three or four miles outside the head. They see this boat out there. She wasn't going [inaudible] seemed to be in one place all the time. So Uncle Bob said, "[inaudible] there. Let's go out there and see what's wrong with the boat. You never can tell what's happening." So they went out, and Uncle Bob couldn't rouse anybody, and there's nobody aboard. So Uncle Bob went aboard, took charge. "We understand," he said, "something's happened, and they've abandoned ship." So they sailed her in. She had a cargo of – it seems as though a general cargo. Uncle Bob didn't enter her. Evidently, she was a foreign boat. He didn't enter her. So the Customs come down after. So they took Uncle Bob; he went with him [inaudible] Jonesport. I don't remember whether she had some rum aboard of her or whether it was just general cargo.

[0:13:57] Anyway, seems as though that the way the story goes [is] that they brought her up here, and they unloaded her. When they got ready to load her again, she fell short. Some of the stuff wasn't there. Of course, the liquor – that fell short. Somebody hooked some of it probably for their own use. Then they towed her up [to] Bangor, and they done the same thing up there. When she got to Portland, she only had but half a load. Uncle Bob was gone. I guess he must have been gone a month by the time that – they didn't know what [inaudible]. Of course, he couldn't read, and he couldn't write, so he couldn't let nobody know where he was. I guess he didn't care because that's the way he done. When he got ready and went to a place, well, he'd go. When he got ready, he'd come back. So when he come back, he was all dressed up, and he didn't look like Uncle Bob. They said they didn't look nowhere near like Uncle Bob. They said, "Well, Uncle Bob, what happened?" "I understand they used me like a king. They dressed me up, and they bought me anything I wanted and all I wanted to drink." Stayed drunk most of the time, I guess. "Well," I said, "Bob, what'd you get for your boat?" "I understand, never mind the boat. The boat was no good to me," he said. "They must have taken her," he said. "But they used me wonderful," he said. "The king never was used any better."

[0:15:49] So Uncle Bob must have lost the boat outright. They said that he didn't take her in legally, so I guess it must've been a fine they took. I guess he got a little, enough to last him all winter of it – probably a couple hundred dollars or so. Let it go at that. [Recording paused.]

"Coast guard," he said, "Couldn't you give me that piece of rope on the bow?" They towed him somewhere. [inaudible] said, "Well, no, we can't give it to you, but if you can get it and get away with it, [inaudible] off the bow. [inaudible] piece of rope and you cut it; it's destroyed. [inaudible] just swing around [inaudible] tied her up [inaudible] some scarce [inaudible] six miles [inaudible] no lobsters. Well, let that gas and oil [inaudible]. [laughter]. He wouldn't bite [inaudible]. They said, "Want some gas?" "No, dear. No gas right now. We don't need no gas right now. We don't need no gas." [inaudible] buy no gas for the next time he'd come up [inaudible].

[0:17:53] Well, I might get enough [inaudible] come back," he says. When he come back, "[inaudible] I didn't do much." [inaudible] [Recording paused.]

Unknown Speaker: – can't tell how the wind is

Unknown Speaker: Going to haul it away.

Unknown Speaker: You're going to haul it away?

Unknown Speaker: Yes.

Unknown Speaker: What for?

Unknown Speaker: To take it home.

Unknown Speaker: Well, it's not fair if you're going to take it home.

Unknown Speaker: [laughter] What in the hell?

Unknown Speaker: Christ, we need that.

Unknown Speaker: What for? I'm going to take it home.

Unknown Speaker: For what?

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] what do you think – [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: I call that [inaudible]. [laughter] Everybody in that house [inaudible] got him to buy the house, see? [inaudible] in them days, when that house was built, everything was dirt cheap. Today, you couldn't get a [inaudible] two dollars in half a day – good ones [inaudible] two dollars. Two, two and a half were the going price for the good old state of Maine wages. Of course, they bought all the fixtures and everything.

Unknown Speaker: [0:19:21] [inaudible] get it all through. [inaudible] almost five hundred dollars [inaudible].

Unknown Speaker: So I told [inaudible] the other day [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] It's twenty-five [inaudible] next day he went [inaudible] sixty-five pound –

Unknown Speaker: (Eighty-five?) pounds.

Unknown Speaker: (Eighty-five?)-pound lobsters.

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: I said I [inaudible].

Unknown Speaker: [0:20:21] [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: Stood by and watched. Then by and by, [inaudible] we seen him come down the lane, and he was a'coming [inaudible]. Do you know the time we took him out in the boat? He wanted to climb the ladder.

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: Oh, Jesus, no. They was too wise for him. They made him get the skiff and sent him to shore. [laughter]

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] [Recording paused.] Had soup for dinner. Sam peeled the potatoes, peeled all the vegetable things [inaudible], and got it on the stove. She said, "I'll put the rice in it," and she made stew. [laughter] [Recording paused.]

Unknown Speaker: [0:21:24] said, "I sized it up [inaudible]." [inaudible] the minute you slacked up [inaudible] landed, that's where she [inaudible] you never had to [inaudible] you didn't have to go [inaudible] "I'm going to catch my fish on a silver hook." [inaudible] silver hook. The old man [inaudible] and he got home – he lived way down where the [inaudible] she knew money. [inaudible] "How much is that?" [inaudible] that one? [inaudible] chopped the wood and [inaudible].

[0:26:17] – telling stories. That mat sat there, and [inaudible] people gather around, and they'd start telling stories. [inaudible] what he was talking to me about – how much he could drink. [inaudible] drink twelve bottles of [inaudible], and he said that just as [inaudible] every window in the house and laid on the [inaudible] all night. That's when [inaudible].

[0:27:16] [inaudible] I suppose you're going [inaudible] this Spring. [inaudible] Well, [inaudible] twelve dollars and half black [inaudible]. [Recording paused.]

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] buy mine? [inaudible] on the face of the Earth [inaudible] rotten disposition. [inaudible] rotten disposition [inaudible] anybody with any brains would know to use vacuum sweepers on carpets and lawnmowers on lawns. [inaudible] [Recording paused.]

[0:28:37] A lot of company coming from across the reach to spend the day. They've come unannounced, of course. [inaudible] Old [inaudible] men, women, everything. She said, "Oh, Lordy [inaudible]." She says, "Here comes a whole dory-load of company from across the reach. Oh, what shall I do? Oh, what am I going to do?" So she grabbed the vinegar jug [inaudible] vinegar and took her bandana handkerchief and rang it out and wrapped it around her head. That's what they used to use – vinegar for headaches in those days. Tied a red bandana handkerchief around her head, and then she went to bed when they came to the door. [Imitates

groaning.] "Who is it? Oh, I never was so near dead. My head is just bursting. I'm sick to my stomach." [inaudible] cleaned up the house and did all the work, made up the bed [inaudible]. [Recording paused.]

Unknown Speaker: [0:29:39] [inaudible] boat, a little vessel [inaudible] Bay of Fundy, where we've [inaudible] before, right after storm, hail, rain, or sleet. [inaudible] a harbor must make. [inaudible] [Singing] "We cast our lines; I like to try. But lucky or not, doesn't matter to me. [inaudible] harbor must be. Oh, the thunder doth roar, and the lightning is sharp. The wind through the rigging is shrill as a harp. But thunder and lightning don't matter to me because [inaudible] our harbor must be. [inaudible] home in our proud, lofty craft [inaudible] proud, lofty craft. Each one is expecting he'll be in the draft. But if they can catch us, they're welcome [inaudible] our harbor must be."

[0:30:45] [inaudible] just this morning. Kept right on the [inaudible] "Did you hear what I told you? What is the matter with you, operator?" He kept trying to – "Well, what is going on? I'd like to know. Can't you understand any English? I called him this morning." The whole time [inaudible]. And I reached right around where father had his birch wood all piled up from winter right around the stove. She says, "Now, I got little" – I got a round birch stick about that big round. She says, "[inaudible] son-of-a-bitch have it right between his eyes." Well, it sucked him right back on his haunches [inaudible]. He made a funny sound, and I said, "My god, have I killed him?" [inaudible] anymore, now I'll tell you. He never tripped me anymore. But boy, would he look at me with a baleful eye.

[0:31:50] Don't believe a word of it. [inaudible] used to elect the governor and [inaudible] celebration, illumination. People would light their houses, and kids would have torches and parade through town. If it was a Democratic governor, they went [inaudible] around his house and towns [inaudible] Republicans. People would light every window, put candles in the windows [inaudible], so that's what he had reference to. [inaudible]

Unknown Speaker: What'd you do? Come home?

Unknown Speaker: I'd have the lights on [inaudible] have too many lights on, burning up too much electricity.

Unknown Speaker: They let him [inaudible].

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] money. [inaudible] money [inaudible] cemetery [inaudible] picnic [inaudible] that set her off.

Unknown Speaker: [0:33:10] Beautiful day.

Unknown Speaker: Boy, what she [inaudible] give the [inaudible] coming from around here. An oil burner going [inaudible] like that. Ten, eleven o'clock at night.

Unknown Speaker: Electric blanket.

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] what's the matter? He said, "When you go to sleep, why don't you wake up and turn it off?" [inaudible] used to watch it [inaudible] well, I need [inaudible] wake up the next morning [inaudible] finally, I got [inaudible] put over it [inaudible] he said, "Well, I didn't see any [inaudible], but I had [inaudible]." I said, "Well, I think it just does that automatically." "Oh, no, it doesn't do it automatically." He says, "You got the light covered over." [inaudible] I said, "Well, you'll have [inaudible]." Just about [inaudible] come in droves. I'm cooking and waiting and tending all the time. I've got to sell this place and go back to the west end. [inaudible]

[0:34:58]

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Transcribed by Molly Tucker

Reviewed by Ela Keegan

Reviewed by Molly A. Graham 9/15/2022