

MAINE SOUND AND STORY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FIRST COAST

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERNEST KELLY AND TUDDY URQUHART FROM THE
JONESPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AS PART OF THE FIRST COAST JONESPORT/BEALS COLLECTION

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY CHARLIE ALLEY AND BILL PLASKON

JONESPORT, MAINE, JUNE 11th, 2004

TRANSCRIPT BY TRUTH MULLER

Interviewee Name: Ernest Kelley, Tuddy Urquhart

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Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Charlie Alley, Bill Plaskon (Plaskon is also camera man)

Interview Location: Charlie Alley's house (Jonesport, ME)

Date of Interview: 06/11/2004

Interview Description: Charlie Alley and Bill Plaskon ask Ernest Kelley and Tuddy Urquhart about the process of getting permission to build a herring weir in the waters surrounding Jonesport, Maine, and about specifics on constructing and using a herring weir. Urquhart also draws a basic diagram of the weir he and Kelley used when they were weir fishermen and provides a simplified explanation of how they work.

Key Words: Maine, Jonesport, fishing, herring, weirs, traditional knowledge, historical fisheries, historical fishing practices.

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Transcribed By: Truth Muller

EK: Ernest Kelley
TU: Tuddy Urquhart
CA: Charlie Alley
BP: Bill Plaskon

[12:58]

START OF ErnestKelley-TuddyUrquhart-01.VOB

[00:00:00]

CA: This is June 11th, 2004 and we're in Charlie Alley's house and we're gonna do an interview with Tuddy Urquhart and Ernest Kelley. And here they are here if you wanna introduce yourselves.

TU: I'm Tuddy Urquhart.

EK: An' I'm Ernest Kelley.

CA: Could you explain to us the first thing you do when you decide you wanna build a weir?

EK: Well, y' have t' go t' town office an' make out an application to get a permit. And from there, you have t' have it in the paper, it has to be published for seven days. An' then, if you get the town permit, you have t' go t' state, an' you get a state license, and then you start t' build the weir *chuckles*.

[00:01:00]

EK: Y' got t' go n' get yer brush, an' yer stakes, and yer binders, an' that's the start of it, course you've got t' give the dimensions of the weir, the length of the wings...

CA: What is the purpose of puttin' it in there? Is it so if someone don't wantcha to have it they come and stop it, try to stop it?

EK: Yeah, yeah. We was stopped once.

CA: Do they have an open hearing so everyone can come?

EK: Yeah.

CA: So the town has a hearing?

EK: Yeah, they- that's why it's posted the seven days, they have a hearing in the town office before they'll give y' a permit, an' no one, no one appears ag'inst ya, an you'll get the permit; If they do, you probably won't get it.

CA: Now when you go get this, if you want to build it and it comes ashore on someone else's land, can they say 'no, I don't wantcha,' or can they make a deal with you or something, or what?

EK: Well, fah as I know, we, we put in for one of 'em [unintelligible, rogue's bluff?], we couldn't build within 500 feet, wasn' it, Tud?

[00:02:09]

TU: Somethin' around that.

EK: We was denied the permit, cuz 'e had it within 500 feet of Great Pond Island, so we didn't get the permit.

CA: Now, you say you get this town's, and then you get the state's-

EK: Yeah.

CA: -now what does the state process, do they have a hearing too?

EK: No. No, you just make out the blanks, and you do on any of them-

CA: Ok, just like a licence?

EK: Yeah. But now, now, I don't know whether you'd ever get one or not, cuz y' have t' put up a lotta money now. Then you only had to buy the license, now you got-

CA: I can imagine.

EK: I, I.. Last I knew, it was \$500, but I don't know how much now.

CA: How much was it, how much was the license when you was fishing?

TU: Oh, it wasn't hardly anything!

EK: No!

[00:02:58]

TU: But the money you put up is so that when the weir goes down, it's for them t' take the stakes up.

CA: Take the stakes up. Ok.

BP: Who keeps the money?

EK: The State.

BP: Oh, the State. And then, if you don't dismantle the weir, then the State comes in and-

EK: Gets yer money and they'll take care of it.

BP: Ok.

EK: Where there are all a' these [stick an'?] weirs left, and they never had no money t' take 'em back out-

BP: Ok. Yeah.

EK: Over the years.

CA: How do you determine where you want a weir? Do you watch the places and see where herring are a' tendin'? How do you determine where y' gonna put your weir?

EK: We watched the herring. Y'know at night, just 'fore, just after dark, they'll start, and you'll watch 'em night after night while they go, and you'll have some idea where you're gonna build that weir.

CA: Now you say you have to go in the winter t' get your stuff?

EK: Yeah, that's what we done, in the early spring.

CA:. Yeah, Now-

[00:03:58]

EK: We, we went t'... Well, didn't we go in Black Woods one year?

TU: Yeah, there-

EK: When we asked the man an' he wouldn't let us an' then the State was cuttin' it an' then all we had t' do was go 'n get it!

TU: They put, put in the-

BP: *Laughing*

EK: Yeah, he wouldn't let us cut it!

CA: Now, what was that you got? Was it stakes or brush?

EK: Naw, this was brush we got up there.

TU: That's brush.

CA: Brush. Ok.

EK: And we didn't have too many stakes a year. We did go up north a' 'ere an' get some one year?

TU: We cut, we cut some brush one year over on the- between Jonesport and Machaias, y' remember, by that pond?

EK: Oh yes. Yeah.

TU: We got a lot in that area.

EK: [Beasly's length? Peasely's length?]

TU: Most of it we got for nothing.

EK: Just go cut it.

TU: You'd just go cut it.

BP: What do you call brush?

EK: Small birch.

BP: Small birch?

EK: Or spruce.

BP: And what's the purpose of that? What does that do?

EK: Well, that would-

CA: Well, why don't we explain how you build a weir, an' then you'll understand.

[00:04:59]

BP: Ok.

CA: Ok, first thing when y' go build a weir, tell them what you do.

EK: You drive the stakes first. You got it mapped out what you want, an' you have to drive the stakes. Usually you'd drive 'em, what? Six feet apart?

TU: Yeah.

EK: About six feet apart.

BP: How do you determine, when you map it out, how big it's gonna be, what the shape of it is? Do you do that yourself, do you map it out yourself, depending on where you're going to put it?

EK: Yeah, that would be in the application you'd make out t' get the permit. When you start it, you start out with two corner poles [unintelligible, where fish is?], and then go out round, y'd want a 15 fathom swing they called it, then you'd putt around and then you'd drive your stakes around.

CA: Now how far did you plan on gettin' your stakes down there, when you drove 'em?

EK: Oh, lahd, we could drive 'em five, six, seven feet up in there.

CA: Yeah, just, that was easy to drive?

EK: Yeah.

TU: Yeah.

[00:06:00]

BP: How do you drive them in?

EK: We made a pile driver, what we called a pile driver. I- we had a flat, flat platform, we had a tripod, with a tackle, and- usually they used a motor, but we done it by hand.

CA: Yeah. You had-

EK: Had a maul on the end-

CA: You have a big square block of-

EK: -square maul-

CA: -of weight-

EK: The shivs, the way the shivs was... we used Cecil's, Cecil let us have his a lot. Alfred-

TU: Alfred.

EK: one ah- But we made one and used one year, or two.

CA: Now, drivin' your stakes, how, how big stakes did you have, how big 'round were they?

EK: Oh, probably about six, ten inches.

CA: How much did you cut 'em off at the top?

TU: 'bout six inches.

CA: About six inches?

EK: About six, on th' top.

CA: An' when you cut 'em off, in the pound, and what tide did you cut 'em off at, about half tide?

[00:07:05]

EK: Yeah, about, just about half tide.

CA: Yup. And-

EK: Then, we got what they called, they call 'em ribbons, we called 'em binders.

CA: Yeah, that's what we called them, binders.

EK: That's why I liked goin' t' spr- Goin' to Spruce Island, you could go three, four stakes they had 'em, awful long, narrow-

CA: Ok, yeah, now-

BP: You weaved these in around the stakes?

CA: No, no no-

EK: No, not 'round em, seize 'em on-

BP: Right up around the back side?

EK: -Seize 'em on-

CA: On the inside.

EK: -'round on the inside. Seize 'em on and spike 'em.

CA: How many sets of binders did you have on yours?

EK: Two.

CA: Just two.

EK: Top.

CA: I think Cecil had three, probably, down there when I was in. I guess... I don't know how you could explain t' people, can you, d' you know how to explain how you put the binders on?

BP: I just want to hit pause-

[00:07:57]

BP: Nobody today coming to Jonesport would know what a weir is-

EK: No, 'cuz there's not a one around now.

BP: -if they didn't grow up here. So, someone can jot it on there.

EK: That does a good job for y'.

TU: Now this is the one up, we had up at [Difficult to understand location; Freeport Mire? Freightport Mouth? Freight Point Mar?]. We had what y' call a [Unintelligible; shunnerfence? sunnerfence?], that comes out here as far as y' want it.

BP: Ok.

TU: And then out here, there's an opening right here and an opening right there. And the stakes would go 'round like that, back to there. And then- And the fish would come up on this side, and hit that [something fence]. Circling.

BP: Going round and round?

TU: Going round and round.

[00:09:00]

EK: Then we had a pocket off on [unintelligible].

TU: Then, over on this side we had another smaller pound, we called it a pound.

EK: Keeper.

TU: A pocket. I don't know, what, made like that it was, though?

EK: It was pretty well like that. Yeah [unintelligible].

TU: Anyway, you could save up little lots of fish-

BP: Ok.

TU: -and put 'em in this pound.

BP: Ok.

TU: We got, what, hundred hogshead one time, wasn't it?

EK: Oh yeah, the hundred hogshead one.

TU: Charlie Stevens took 'em. We kept savin' up little lots an' puttin' 'em in there.

BP: Now where would these stakes go in relation to what you just drew? How far apart would each stake be?

TU: Oh, probably... I wouldn't know f' sure, but-

EK: I think it was right close to six feet.

BP: Every six feet?

EK: Yeah.

BP: And how big- that typical diagram that you just drew there, what would be the size of it in diameter?

TU: Oh, jimminy, that-

EK: Probably would be about three 'undred feet around it, from one mouth to the other, yeah.

BP: Ok, three hundred circumference.

CA: [..].

EK: [..] 300 feet.

BP: Right, ok.

CA: It'd be about a hundred feet across, then.

[00:10:05]

TU: But we would go up there in the night, I remember when, the herring would come in in the evening, and we'd watch 'em, and we'd go out in the morning and we wouldn't have any. So, Ernie? says "let's go out and seine her out in the night." I said, "allright." We always had lines tied on the weir, that we could grab without a flashlight or anything, And we'd know just what- we never had to speak to each other, we knew just what we had to do.

BP: Right.

TU: And we seined her when it got daylight and Ernie says "Well, we gotta pick the mackerel out of the herring." And I said "you've gotta pick the herring out of the mackerel" I said "we got all mackerel!" And what was happening, the mackerel was coming in and driving the herring out. So we [unintelligible], took the mackerel, we didn't know what we was gonna do with them.

[00:11:03]

TU: And this pound over here would be built just like this here, same thing. You'd use the same stakes and...

CA: The top binder probably was down, probably about a foot down from the top of the state?

EK: Oh... no, probably about six inches.

CA: Six inches?

EK: Yeah, we had 'em quite close t' the top of the stake.

CA: And the next one was down almost to the low water mark?

EK: Almost t' low water mark, common tides.

CA: Common tides.

BP: Now that was just to hold the net?

CA: The stakes together.

EK: The stakes together.

CA: Well, and some to put the brush on-

EK: And then you'd put your brush on, on the binders.

BP: Ok, and you'd just lash them on?

EK: No, you'd nail em.

CA: You had, on the pound, you had bottom brush that you'd put on the outside of the binders, you'd put 'em down and you'd nail em to the binders, and they'd fill that hole between the stakes.

TU: Yeah.

[00:12:00]

EK: And then on the stakes, you'd cut poles and you'd peel- they was softwood poles, spruce, and we'd peel the bark off em, and put the twine on the top.

BP: And you'd nail them onto the stakes?

EK: You'd nail 'em onto the stakes, goin' round. And then you'd put your twine on it, the twine was usually about ten feet high.

BP: The brush was just to confuse the fish?

EK: Yup, and they'd get trapped. And that brush would-

CA: fill in with kelp and all kind of stuff, so that would hold fish in the weir.

CA: Now, on the weir itself, you only had bottom brush?

EK: Yeah.

CA: But then you went? the leaders, you had-

EK: That was bottom brush

TU: Bottom brush.

CA: -bottom brush.

EK: And top, top brush.

CA: And then you had some brush that went to the top, you didn't use twine, on the leaders?

EK: No.

[00:12:58]

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