

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)

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Interview Description: Ernest Kelley and Tuddy Urquhart guide us through a day in the life of a stop-seining fisherman, with many interjections from Charlie Alley, who was also a stop-seiner.

Key Words: Maine, Jonesport, fishing, herring, stop-siening, 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

[10:14]

START OF ErnestKelley-TuddyUrquhart-02.VOB

[00:00:00]

CA: Now what equipment did you have to have to go stop-seining?

TU: You had to have two or three dorys, to put you to work in.

CA: You had a good sized boat, didn't you?

EK: We had, what was she, 43'? Lovely boat we had.

CA: Now some of these, they stored the twine right in the boat didn't they, some of them?

EK: Yeah, we did, we did that. We weren't using them during the summer, so we'd store our twine until we used it.

CA: And she was equipped so you could live right aboard?

EK: Yeah.

CA: You could cook, and you had bunks in there, you could sleep and everything?

EK: Yeah, we had everything, you could live right on the boat, just inside the cabin, I mean the cab.

[00:01:03]

CA: And how much twine did the average stop-seiner take with him when he left?

EK: We had 800 pound, didn't we? And a purse seine, two purse seine, that's what we had. Some had more, some had less.

TU: We had three dorys, didn't we?

EK: Yeah, and a seine boat.

TU: (Unintelligible)

EK: Three dorys and a seine boat.

CA: How did you determine who was gonna have a cove?

EK: Well, whoever got there first, the way we looked at it. Some people went and put a dory in.

CA: Yeah, that's what I was gonna say, didn't they put a dory in to try and hold the cove?

EK: Course, we had to have plenty of anchors. We had to, we kept one piece of twine, or two pieces for a pocket, if we did run the twine out.

CA: Did most people observe that, if you put a dory in a cove that-

EK: Oh yeah, they all did!

CA: They'd never shut that cove off if they knew you was tending it with that dory?

EK: Nope, that was it.

[00:02:03]

EK: We had a lot of seiners here at one time, and we had dorys in a lot of the coves, you couldn't...

BP: About how long was a dory?

EK: 22', 23' over on the top.

BP: From end to end?

EK, TU: Yeah.

BP: About how wide were they?

EK: Well, the one we got over to Canada was only about what, four feet wide?

CA: She was narrow, wasn't she?

EK: Yeah she was. She was a big dory, she'd lug.

CA: Ok, when you started looking for them, what did you first, what time did you leave to go looking?

EK: Oh, him and I left here at five o'clock, up around the head of the bay and around Spruce island, so we'd be there just the edge of that.

CA: About what time did you get out around the coves to look, after that?

EK: Oh, we'd give up for wanting on that, you could tell if there was gonna be any around, I mean, you'd see some.

CA: Yeah, but I mean, you must have had several coves you went in [unintelligible]?

EK: Right at the edge of that, 'till after.

[00:03:01]

CA: And how long would you work, looking at coves, before you gave up?

EK: Oh yeah.

CA: Ok, now you go, in the evening, and you've found some herring. What did you do?

EK: Well usually we had the dorys right there, and we would go ashore and then we'd check em over again before, before we'd run the twine.

CA: Now, you'd tie it on the bank somewhere?

EK: Right, on a rock or something, right at the top of the tide.

TU: A tree or something.

CA: Now how did you get it out, did you row it out? Did you have a motor?

EK: No, we towed it with an outboard.

CA: Towed it with an outboard, right out 'round and then back to shore?

EK: Yep. When I first started, you rowed it out. When I first started seining with my brother, you had to row it out, no outboards back then.

CA: Did the noise of the outboards scare the herring?

EK: Didn't seem to, no.

[00:04:01]

EK: We always towed it out with an outboard, him and I (Kelley nods towards Tuddy).

CA: Now after you shut off and leave, then what do you do? Go right back and just go to sleep until morning?

EK: Have a nap, and just before daylight, usually we'd put a pocket on.

CA: Ok, now, explain what a pocket is-

EK: You've got a piece of twine, then after that, you'd sink 'em out, down-

CA: -a pocket is just like, you make a big circle-

EK: Just like a weir.

CA: -a big circle with the twine-

EK: Ayup, put the anchors out-

CA: -anchor it out so you've got a... and now explain how you got 'em off of that stop-seine, and into that pocket.

EK: You add some rocks to it and you sunk the mouth down, and they'd go over that twine-

CA: And daylight would come-

EK: Daylight would come and they'd go right into that pocket-

CA: Then you'd bring the twine back up-

EK: -and you'd that up and you had 'em. Then the boat would come and we'd load it, or take out what we had.

CA: How many, what's the most pockets you ever put on for one set?

EK: We had seven down there in [Marl's? Marlin's] cove.

CA: You mean in one set you had seven [unintelligible]?

EK: Now we had four up in Great Cove once, that one day; we put two down and then two behind them.

TU: Yep.

[00:05:05]

EK: 'Cuz we never had no water up there, and we had about 500 hogshead, fair. And we never had no water so we had, we put two down, and then we put two more behind them, and just run them right through, so we had the four pockets.

CA: Now did you ever have a situation that you had your pockets full, and your stock pond still had a lot of herring? What did you do, just leave them in the stock pond

EK: Just leave them in there, yeah, [unintelligible].

CA: Until you got a chance to...

EK: Usually some of, most of the time, before the factories started closing, you didn't have to worry too much about a boat, in a day or two, you'd have a boat, and you'd take out. You know, was a ton of them.

CA: Now, when you got herring, the first thing they'd do is they'd check them for feed.

EK: Yeah.

CA: Now, if they was feedy, could you leave them in those pockets and they'd clean themselves up in a few days?

EK: Yeah, they'd clean themselves out right, they'd clean up in two or three days.

CA: And I guess my meaning [by] feedy, they'd been eating, and in their stomachs would be some of that stuff they'd been eating.

[00:06:05]

EK: Usually it's when the moon dropped, is when they'd be feedy.

CA: Now, when is the best to go herring, catching herring, is when the moon, when there isn't any moon, isn't there?

EK: Yeah.

CA: When it's horrifically dark, the moon isn't full.

EK: Usually it didn't matter what, what I always saw, you never knew when you was gonna see a herring in a cove or not.

CA: But I remember they always used to talk about, I think it was the August Dark...

EK: August Dark.

CA: That's when they'd be looking for them, the August Dark-

EK: -was when they'd be looking for them. But then, a lot of the time there'd be a lot of herring caught before the August Dark, ayup.

BP: I've never heard that term before.

EK: Oh yeah, the August Dark.

CA: Now, when you went seining, you had to stay away, so far away from weirs, unless it was your own weir?

EK: Yeah.

CA: What was it, 1000 feet?

EK: 2000 feet.

BP: Did the weather affect the fish, you know, would you catch as many fish if it was raining as if it was clear weather?

[00:07:01]

TU: I don't know if it made much difference.

EK: Yeah, I was gonna say, we got wet a lot of the time.

TU: We shut off, going into The Farm, and you went somewhere (pointing to Kelley). And your boys and I-

EK: I went down to, was it, Prince Edward Island?

TU: I don't know [unintelligible, ernie and cal?]

EK: Well, I went somewhere.

TU: And I was help- putting the pocket on. Well, I was running the outboard, and what we did, we'd tow the, when we'd get to the leader, we'd be going, try to be going fast enough that we could tip the outboard up, and go in over it, and then let it drop back and pull it some more so you could bring it right up the leader. There was blowing all past a gale of wind, and when I went to go in over that leader, I didn't get it in over far enough, and she got the wheel caught in the twine.

[00:07:59]

TU: Well I tipped the outboard up, and locked it, and was reaching out over clearing the twine out from the outboard, and the lock slipped or something and that outboard tipped and went so quick, threw me right over, I lost my balance, and I went overboard, clothes, boots and all!

TU, EK, CA, BP: (all laughing).

EK: When I got back, that's what I heard, and I says "you can't trust him a minute."

CA: Now how did, did most seiners own their own twine, or did most of them, did the factories supply the twine to them?

EK: Most of them the factories supplied it so they could get the, so they could get the first-

CA: And that way they had digs into them?

EK: Yeah, they had the first [unintelligible]

CA: Like the weir fishermen. Yeah, Harold, Al, and those fellows, they always had their first digs on the cuttings up at the co-op, up to Underwood.

EK: Underwood, yeah. I had a barrel right there, my name right on it.

CA: Everyone had a weir-

CA, EK: (Overlapping audio, unintelligible).

CA: You could get bait quicker than just for, ordinary lobster fishing.

[00:09:05]

EK: Well, usually Uncle Albert would have the barrels set out, and he'd fill them up during the day and have your names on them.

BP: Most of the bait came from the sardine factories?

EK, CA: Yeah.

CA: I don't know what year it was, it must have been the late 1940's, but there was one charge of herring in the Eastern Bay that year; that was the year that they ran all the factories in eastern-

EK: Well, they had 28 weirs, in that bay, one.

CA: How long would you stay aboard the boat at a time, usually?

EK: Oh, the next day you'd go home-

CA: You didn't usually-

EK: -unless you had herring, some would-

CA: If you had herring, would you stay there a week at a time?

TU: Yeah.

EK: Some would stay there and the other ones would go home, you'd take turns. But I mean, If you never had no herring, oh you'd all go home, go clamming, tend your traps, or whatever.

CA: Ok, is that, I guess that's about it-

EK: Yeah.

CA: Is there anything to wind this up?

[00:10:14]

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