

UPPER PENINSULA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE CONTENTS

NARRATOR'S NAME: Wayne Nestor Seaman Age 47, April 1981

TAPE NO: \_\_\_\_\_

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Interviewer - Patricia Rasmussen, Garden, Michigan

Narrator - Wayne Seaman, Fairport, Michigan

Subject - Commercial Fishing

Wayne Nestor Seaman was born June 22, 1934. He is the son of Beatrice Casey and Nestor Seaman and a great grandson of one of the first settlers of Fairport, Patrick Casey.

He is married to Sharon Gauthier and they have two children, Mariann, 20 years old and Cori age 13.

He is a rugged, hardworking individual who has been very successful as a commercial fisherman. This is possibly due to knowledge of fish and their habits, modern equipment and his feeling that the work he does is just play because he so thoroughly enjoys his chosen occupation.

The interview was held in the family room of Wayne's home. The only outside interference on the tape was the phone ringing once, a door squeaking as people went in and out and a dog barking outside.

This tape was intended to be a biography with commercial fishing as the topic. I planned to compare three different eras of commercial fishing: 40 years ago, 20 years ago, and commercial fishing today.

Wayne was very nervous about talking on the tape and when talking about his early life with his brother he got very upset and emotional so I didn't delve too deeply in this era. His speech is slurred therefore the tape is difficult to understand. (This is the reason that I transcribed the first twenty-five minutes)

He hadn't written anything down to answer the list of questions that I had given him and was depending on his memory but then found it difficult to keep events straight at times. Possibly I should have asked him more questions to hold him on one subject, because he would keep interjecting things that didn't pertain to the question.

Sometimes I would forget to have him describe something because I was familiar with the term -- such as boiling vat .

I choose Wayne as my interviewee because there has been a lot of research and interviews going on recently concerning the history of

The Garden Peninsula, Fairport and Commercial Fishing, but the researchers have been digging into the early 1900's and before and sometimes have forgotten today. Therefore, I felt by talking to a younger commercial fisherman it would give more insight into more recent times which will be history some day.

Terms and names which may be unfamiliar:

boiling vat - 8 ft. long metal tub used to boil nets that were  
made of cotton

reel - nets wound on when taken from boiling vat

lifter - automatic machine used to take nets from the water

trap net - type of net used

gill net - type of net used

Van Lanchute

Bill Hermes

Vernon Seaman

Duane Seaman

Sy Seaman (Grandad)

Nestor Seaman (Old Man)

Names of Boats

Catherine

P & P

D & W

Janice

Mar Cor

Finn

Sharon

This is an interview by Pat Rasmussen of Garden, Mi. . An interview done with Wayne Nestor Seaman, 47 yrs. old, a commercial fisherman. He lives at Fairport, Michigan.

Wayne What are your first memories of your commercial fishing career?  
well I was about 7 yrs. old. reeling nets for Dad

Okay What do you mean by reeling nets?

the nets - well we used to have to dry our nets all the time and they were all cotton - all cotton - <sup>and linen</sup> put them on a reel - hard to explain unless you really see it. maybe about 8 feet long and 4 different bars going out. keep pushing them up and up - almost like a ferris wheel they work on.

ok the nets would just wind up around it

wind up around it and we'd put them on there to dry and leave them there <sup>a day or so</sup> and pull them back down - dried out - and work on them.

That was about just once a month and then they were treated too - put in a boiling vat - and boil them to get the bacteria out of them. - due to black rot - up to 1957 we used to do that - monofilament or nylon twine but we used the sidelines or meter as we call it (was of cotton) we still had to boil them and treat them. Before that when we were young -

I am a twin - Me and my twin brother we used to have a row boat

Back about the same time (about 1941) 7-8 years - my dad had a

You were about 7-8 years old when you had this row boat?

He had a guy by the name of Mike Andrews there (build the boat)

We named it the D and W

The D and W

Yea just skip that there.

(The tape was shut off at this time because of the emotions that were being felt by the narrator)

The D & W was named after Duane and Wayne Seaman. This is Wayne's twin brother.

Did you and your brother actually do any fishing from this row boat?  
<sup>in the bay</sup>

Just when we were kids, we had some perch nets in the passage here we call it - even in the harbor where we lay right now (where the boats are tied) there used to be a few perch and that we played with it.

Dad give us some nets

\ The passage - you mean between Fairport and Summer Island?

Yea. And the slip where the boats lay - there used to be fish in there

And then Wayne who did you work for after you worked for your dad?  
 Well I quit school when I was about 15 then say I fished one year or  
 a couple of years with Dad. Grandpa was here, Sy Seaman was here, fished 1 winter  
 underneath the ice with him - Dad put him in control - put up some nets  
 for me and Duane and Duane and me were partners - kind of fished with him  
 And Grandpa needed some work so Dad - we went and fished under the ice  
 with him - we bought an old model A Ford there - we fished under the ice  
 with him - and then maybe when I was 16 or 17 - worked pretty well with  
 him there for a long time - Well like anything else when you get about  
 17 - well nobody can tell you what to do so - I worked on - well we  
 were fishing out of - fishing was bad here - we went to Cheboygan,  
 Michigan. couldn't make any money there I got a chance to - I was 17  
 when I went down there fished on Lake Huron on the Catherine  
 On the Catherine - Who owned that boat?

A guy by the name of a Vogelheim really owned it out  
 of Rogers City.

Vogelheim Fisheries out of Rogers City

Yea I worked there 1 summer I was kind of a bum then after I was 17  
 And where did I go from there - After I was 17 - I am getting ahead  
 of my story a little bit - about 17 - nope I take that back - I went to  
 Lansing - Flint - Lansing one time - stayed with my sister - Back to  
 the fishing deals - That's when I went to Rogers City I was about 17 -  
 18 I went to Rogers City - I fished on Lake Huron I worked and went  
 up to - I worked for other people then - Well we do a pretty good job  
 I am a reasonable good fisherman - I went to Huron - not Huron -  
 Then I worked for a guy on Lake Superior - Munising - I worked for  
 Van Lanchute Maybe I was 18 - 19 then A couple of years I probably did  
 nothing We came back then - around Fairport and Dad Dad died about '57  
 I was about 23 or so and me and my younger brother took over the fish  
 rig

Okay Who is your younger brother?

Vernon Seaman

Okay - Vernon Seaman

What what was the name of the boat that you had at this time?

The name was the P & P

The P & P

We never did change the name on it.

You fished with your brother and then you went on your own?

When you and your brother split up fishing?

Yea we kept on for two years , three years together - after '57 when we took over when Dad died - because '60 we bought a new pickup - around '60 we got a chance to buy another boat and than me and him split up and then I went on my own and he went on his own.

1957 What kind of fish did you catch then?

We were just fishing chubs.

Just Chubs. How much were they a lb.?

I believe a reasonable price was .20 ¢

.20¢ a lb. And what was an average catch?

At that time in '60 - '61 - I figured my boat If I went out and caught a hundred bucks of fish I was making money.

Because than gas and other expenses weren't so much.

They were down.

Could you explain the fishing gear that you were using at this time?

Yea - That were nylon type twineand pretty well cotton meter - we still had to rope our nets up (reel them up) We usually used lime on the meter so we could leave them out 6 weeks to two months during the summer - We had trouble with black rot at that time - we had to watch it we were fishing white fish out of another port . We didn't have the facilities to boil them as we would at our own port . But the twine was about the same

You were still fishing at Oscoda?

Out of Oscoda.

Do you remember how much a license cost at this time?

At that time to buy a commercial license I believe it were a dollar a ft. dollar a ton - the boat we had was about 42 ft. so it'd be about \$60 was all we paid for it

They aren't out of reason now with license - never kick on license.

How much do you pay for license now?

I pay about one thousand dollars a year for the equipment I have now.

Okay. Would you tell me how your fishing career has progressed?

Well you had 1 boat when you and your brother split up - this was about 40 ft. long And what was the name of that boat?

That was the P and P - the Old Man's boat - we'll call him the Old Man because we all knew him as the Old Man. Well The P & P had a gas engine in it. Vern put a cummings (engine) in it. I bought the Janice.

I fished with it for 20 years. That was a gill net boat. Like every thing else the more years your at it the more money you make at it. How many boats do you have now?

I've got 3 boats. But I've really only got 1 license. One by the name of Mari-Cor --She's a trap (trap net boat)

Mari-Cor

Yes--named after my 2 daughters. and she's 42 ft. boat no only 40 ft. 10 ft. beam on her. I've got one that I bought out of Huron river - outside of Detroit. She was a 36 footer and 7 years ago - she had a Chrysler engine in it. And then when we brought her up here she wasn't big enough so we had to put another 4 ft. in her. Now I've got a 295 v-8 cummings in her.

What is the name of this boat?

The Finn

Why did you call it The Finn?

Well my brother-in-law , my wife's sister used to call me Finn - She is a Finlander (too) So so for some reason or anoter we just called it The Finn.

So you've got the Mari-Cor, the Finn and you've got another boat? I've got a gill netter that I just built sne is about 3 yrs. old.

You had this boat built?

Yes built in Escanaba.

How big is it?

She is 51 by 14

What is the name of this boat?

This boat is named after my wife Sharon.

The Sharon. Do you mind telling us what you had to pay to have this boat built?

It's up to you you don't have too.

Yea I'll tell you. It doesn't matter anyhow. I've got about 90 thousand in her. I should have a new lifter in her. I don't have a pilot (automatic) in her I do have radar, a couple of sounders an awfully good engine. So she's a good boat--could be a bit better. more equipment on her.

Okay. You mentioned a few minutes a lifter. What do you do with a lifter?

That would be where you bring in your gill nets. They come in --- a gill net we can lift in almost any kind of weather --and mine



is old if you can get one at the time - they aren't too expensive you can get one about 5,000 or 6,000. Just ain't the call for them They make them down in New York some place.

To lift the gill nets you just hook the gill nets and it just kind of reels them around?

Bring them it It's got jaws They've got a circle, about 36 in. 16 jaws, You handle the boat (along side the nets) just like a fence in the water. Just like going along a field cutting grain.

And you just pick the fish out of the nets?

Ok Do you have any nets - well you must have other nets besides the gill nets. because you said you had a trap net boat. You have 2 trap net boats.

Yes

How are trap nets different from gill nets?

Gill net is actually the same thing as a fence. You set them in the water. There an awful good rig - they've been using them for a good many years. You can set and remove --anything that get's caught in the gill net is suppose to be gilled and suppose to be dead. Well I disagree with that. I do have a trap net rig. A trap net is the same as a live trap that you trap minnows in the creek or a turtle trap - every one knows what a turtle trap is. They work on the same principle. They work on the same thing if you had wild horses. You've got points out them to bring them in and then you close the gate. Only on a corral you don't have the lead to bring them in, Like a fence (for the fish to follow into the pot) Then we bring them up - I guess we're allowed about 90 ft. of water. Bring the up (from ) that ueep. We don't have very much trouble - you can let them go back.

Do the fish usually live when they come out of a trap net?

They must because I've been fishing them for 7 yrs. and it seems like the more we fish them the more fish we've got here. We fish on a certain type grounds here, fishing an awful good crop of fish. We've got more little ones than big ones. We've been fishing for 7 years here in Big Bay and it seems like the more fish the more we've got. We do have an abundance of small fish right now. But we don't have no herring here in the Bay. You're fishing - right now - white fish?

White fish. That's all we can fish.

You said a minute ago that you didn't agree that the gill nets killed the fish?

They do kill the fish but they are the most respected net there is you can set in a certain kind of water.

when the fish are there. You stay out of the water where the other fish is.

If it's a fish that is too small or a fish that you just aren't suppose to be catching than you just don't set your nets there.

Are there any areas of Lake Michigan that are closed to you as a commercial fisherman?

Oh yea.

Where can you fish right now?

With gill nets - if you had a farm - 40 A. I would have less than 10 A. to fish. You have more area with trap nets. You can't go over 90 ft. 90 ft. deep - the water can't be

No we can't fish traps in over 90 ft.

The bottom we don't fish on. They don't restrict us but certain bottoms we can't fish on because we can't hold our nets. (Anchors won't hold) Stony bottom or there ain't no fish there. Fish runs the same as the banks out there. Any place you go fishing - you look at the land. Where the land is hilly the bottom (of the lake) is the same thing. We do have (depth) sounders. The DNR (Department of Natural Resources) do have a deal the fish do travel in temperatures of water.

You can set a trap net in about an hour (23 on the tape)

Mostly where you want to set it. I've run already two days to set a trap net - trying to find the right bank that I want. We do have sounders and you want to know the depth of the water.

Weather must be very calm to set a trap net where as a trap net rig can go out in any weather.

You've been fishing trap nets for seven years. Why did you decide to start fishing trap nets when you were satisfied fishing gill nets?

They came out (The DNR) about 7 yrs. ago put out the gill nets and not give us a choice - pay us off. I can take my pay off 40,000 and quit fishing but I've been fishing (trap nets) for 7 years I don't want to quit fishing. I've been fishing too long and what's \$40,000? Do you mean if you quit fishing right now the DNR would pay you \$40,000 for your license?

Yes I can fish trap nets though.

But the gill nets are out then - I don't know- The gill nets would be out I don't have any sons. I can't see it. I am 47 years . I am good for another 20 years yet. (25 on the tape)