

Bill VanDyk, Interview

By Roger Sherman

December 30, 1998

Roger----This interview was done in Oak Harbor, WA.

Q-Roger----When were you born, Bill?

A-Bill----1907, I'm 91 years old. Birthday is November 2nd, 1907.

Q-Roger----Now, where were you raised? Were you raised on the island, here?

A-Bill----Oh yeah, in Oak Harbor. I was born in Oak Harbor. That is outside of Oak Harbor. I lived here except for three years in the army.

Q-Roger----What I'm interested in, of course, is I'm trying to write the maritime history and this (showed book, part 1) is a good beginning. I hope to finish it in a second book and I'm trying to concentrate on central Whidbey and I'm kind of including Oak Harbor in on it because actually latter on there was more boat traffic going into Oak Harbor than there was Coupeville. So, When did you start working on the dock?

A-Bill----That was September the 1st, 1928. That's when the Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association bought the dock.

Q-Roger----Was it called the Maylors Dock before that?

A-Bill----Yeah.

Q-Roger----Did the Maylor family still own it at that time?

A-Bill----At that time, yeah.

Q-Roger----So you worked on that dock how many years then? You worked for the Washington Egg and then what did they call it after that?

A-Bill----Western Farmers.

Q-Roger----Well, Western Farmers, but wasn't there another name in-between?

A-Bill----Well, no, they always called it Wash Co-op, just for short, but it was Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association.

Q-Roger----And then they changed the name to Western Farmers?

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A-Bill----Yeah.

Q-Roger----Now, when did Western Farmers actually quit using the dock.

A-Bill----That's what I was afraid of. I don't know the exact date.

1958

Q-Roger----Ok, because, I think it burned in ¹⁹⁶⁶64 or something like that, and it was abandoned several years before that?

A-Bill----Yeah. Some boat building outfit took it over after we left. We moved up town where Cenex is now. And ah, so they had it and then it was empty for quite awhile.

Q-Roger----Did they lease it from Western Farmers or did they actually buy the thing?

A-Bill----I'm not sure about that, but I think they just bought it.

Q-Roger----Ok, ah, the boats, when I talked to you on the phone several months ago, you were talking about the boats that you remembered.

A-Bill----Yeah.

Q-Roger----One of them was the Indian?

A-Bill----Oh yeah, those, red boats they called them. There was the Indian and the Warrior that I know of. There might have been more than one.

Q-Roger----You said something about the Iriquois?????(spelling) too. Was that you?

A-Bill----No, I don't think so.

Q-Roger----Ok, well I got that name someplace and I looked it up and there were several Iriquoiss. Ah, one of them was a freighter, but it dated way back and it was built more like the old steam ships where the passenger quarters were up above and the freight deck was on the main deck.

A-Bill----I don't remember a boat like that coming into Oak Harbor. The crew on those red boats called them the Hooligan Navy. They were good boats. They hauled a lot of stuff.

Q-Roger----Well, did the Warrior and the Indian both have the freight elevators on the fore deck there?

A-Bill----Yeah, they had some big jitneys and they had that elevator that took them up to the level of the dock.

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Q-Roger----OK, now, can you remember back far enough, helping to unload boats that didn't have that elevator?

A-Bill----Oh yeah, the Atalanta. Just like the Calista.

Q-Roger----You remember the Atalanta and the Calista both?

A-Bill----I don't remember, I remember when the Calista was sunk but I don't remember----what year was that?

A-Roger----That was 1922.

A-Bill----Oh, I should have remembered that, yeah in 1922, I was a freshman in high school. So I knew about that, but I don't remember much about it.

Q-Roger----Do you remember ridding on it at all?

A-Bill----I might have when I was a little kid because my mother used to take my sister to Tacoma to a doctor. But, I don't actually remember doing it, but I'm quite sure that I was aboard at one time. But I rode the Atalanta a couple of three times.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about her at all, as far as the color?

A-Bill----It was white

Q-Roger----Any black trim or anything, any buff?

A-Bill----I don't remember that part.

Q-Roger----Do you remember the owners, the name of the owners of the Warrior and the Indians?

A-Bill----No and I've forgotten who owned the Atalanta. I remember the crew used to complain about the head man up there, Woodworf. Woodworf????(spelling)was his name, the head man of Puget Sound Navigation, something like that.

Q-Roger----Well it was----The company that owned that boat and the previous boats was the Island Transportation Company.

Bill----Oh, was that so? I don't remember that.

Q-Roger----You said, I think it was you, that Art Milliner was one of the skippers?

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A-Bill----Yeah, he was the first mate on the Atalanta, but he was the skipper of either the Indian or the Warrior. I remember that.

Q-Roger----What about an Ole Swenson?

A-Bill----Yeah, he was the skipper of the Atalanta. My first actual recollections of the Atalanta was when my brother Garrett used to go down to meet the boat and after the passengers were unloaded, we'd get the magazines and newspapers.

Roger----Talked about the Whidby and if Bill remembered any stories about it?

A-Bill----That burned in 1911, was it? So, I was four years old and I always thought that I saw the thing burning out there in the middle of the bay, but I'm not sure cause I don't know if I could remember when I was four years old. The boys here say that when they dredged the bay out when the navy came in, they covered it up, but I don't know. I have some snap shots of it lying up there on the beach on Maylors Point where the rest of it was still whole.

Q-Roger----Also, you said that you had a couple of newspaper articles about the Calista.

A-Bill----Yeah, I think I , I don't know what papers but it's ah-----

Q-Roger----Do you remember the Fairhaven?

A-Bill----No, I don't remember that.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about the docks. We already talked about that a little bit about when the co-op bought it and that type of stuff. But, do you remember any stories, any happenings?

A-Bill----Well, ah, I remember one night when the Atalanta came in when it was foggy and when she was quite away out, she would blow the whistle and have it echo back from the Scenic Heights cliff so they could tell how far from shore they were. Then when they were three or four hundred yards from the dock they'd ah stop the engine so everything was quiet and I would beat on a sheet of cast iron with a hammer so that they could hear that and then they knew just where the dock was. That was one thing with the Atalanta. I was always at the end of the dock to catch the heaving line, you know, to put it around the post when she moved into the dock. I remember one time when Art Millner, when he was a mate on the ship, somebody shipped a tractor up to Oak Harbor and they pulled it up with a chain with a steam engine they had in there and he decided he'd ride on it and ah, just for the fun of it. He was a farm boy. But the cable broke and back went the tractor, up against the boat and he went and fell in the water. I looked down there and saw his cap floating around and then he popped up.

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Roger----Told some sea stories.

Bill----John VanWieringn one time, he was the skipper of the Atalanta, after Ole, I guess it was, he ran into what you'd call a sand bar. They had a light there, but he must have cut corners because they got stuck out there, coming into Oak Harbor. Just a little ways out of Oak Harbor by the spit. He was the skipper but he went down with the crew to shift the cargo a little bit so they could get off. One time Holman, had a sawmill up there practically on the beach and it caught fire one time. The Atalanta, it was high tide, so the Atalanta pulled up clear onto the beach there and used their fire hose.

Q-Roger----Where was the sawmill located from the dock?

A-Bill----Oh, about, there was a machine shop next to the dock. Maybe 100 yards or so to the West. The Atalanta came up alongside the west side of the dock, clear up the beach about 700 feet that dock went to the north. They pulled up there, practically on the beach and got their fire hoses out.

Q-Roger----Did that mill burn completely down then or did they-----

A-Bill----I don't remember whether they saved it or not.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything about the Coupeville Water Festival? Did you used to go over there when that was going on?

A-Bill----Oh yeah, I don't remember much. I used to go and watch the races.

Q-Roger----Deception Pass ferry. Do you remember that at all? Before they put the bridge in.

A-Bill----I remember when we use to go, we had relatives up in Lynden and we would cross that ferry when the Langs had it. It was just a scow with a tug boat alongside.

Q-Roger----Ok, the Lang's owned it at one time.

A-Bill----Yeah, I think John Lang started it.

Q-Roger----I know there was one ferry----I haven't really looked into this much yet, but there was one of them called the Deception Pass but it didn't push a scow or anything, I think it was made for a few cars. Now do you remember where they ran? Was it out at the end of Hoypus Point? At one time they ran from in Cornett Bay and finally the county put the road out to Hoypus Point so that it was a little shorter. Now where did they go on the other side?

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A-Bill----To Dewey. There was a little store at the top of the hill. Still remember that, Blaunts?????(spelling) Bazaar. They even mention that sometimes around here nowadays. But, it went to Dewey.

Q-Roger----Ok, now, there was a woman skipper that owned that boat for awhile and she also owned the boat that was on the Oak Harbor-Utsalady run. Do you remember any of that?

A-Bill----Yeah, I've crossed there too. Olson, but I don't remember which Olson.

Q-Roger----There's an Olson's Landing. Where in the heck is that?

A-Bill----That must have been where we got aboard on this side. There is a little settlement there now, don't remember what they call it.

Q-Roger----Would it have been out on the east side of Polnell Point?

A-Bill----Yeah, clear out to the end.

Q-Roger----There's a Mariner Cove out there.

A-Bill----Yeah, that's what I mean. That's where the ferry came in.

Q-Roger----Do you remember anything at all about the smuggling? Prohibition, any stories?

A-Bill----I've just heard stories they tell here about how the speed boats would come in on the west side of the island and they would bring their stuff and a farmer or two would let them for a few bottles and then a truck or something would come up and take it out.

Q-Roger----What about fish traps? Do you remember any of the old fish traps?

A-Bill----I remember when they had them out there.

Q-Roger----Do you remember where they were located?

A-Bill----Not exactly. I just know that they were located on the west side of Whidbey Island, maybe West Beach. And I think there was one down towards Coupeville. One of the traps was wiped out in a storm and one of my friends, Fred Ernst was working there and he clung to a pole for quite awhile and it was swaying back and forth and he didn't know when it was going to collapse. Someone came along and picked him up. I guess the farmers traded food for fish.

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Roger----talked about if he remembered any of the old yachts, such as the yacht Calista, not to be confused with the steam boat.

Bill----I remember when the Loui Mayer Griffith used to come into Oak Harbor with the Sugaa and he had a farm out here. Beachview farm. So he would come up in that once in awhile. In fact my dad built a round oak barn for him.

Q-Roger----Do you remember what type of fuel oil the steamers used.

A-Bill----I know they didn't use cordwood. I never gave it a thought.

Q-Roger----Do you remember when the Atalanta quit running?

A-Bill----No, but I don't remember why the Atalanta quit because the red boats brought the co-op feed in. Lets see, with the Atalanta they shipped a lot eggs in wooden cases. They changed that to cardboard boxes and John Ronhour used to come down with his trucks and haul them to Mount Vernon. So that's probably when they quit, but they still had to have feed come in. We started getting feed from Tacoma by truck. That must have been when we moved uptown because I don't remember a truck load of feed coming down to the dock. But I don't remember what date that was.

Q-Roger----Do you remember when the Navy took the spit out?

A-Bill----It must have been 1941 or something or 42 or something like that because I was in the Army about that time. In fact, at high tide, I use to be able to throw rocks from the end of the dock to the spit. I sure can't now.

Q-Roger----Do you remember any other stories, any funny happenings, any goings on, on the dock or any of the boats or ones like that tractor you were telling me about, mishaps of any kind?

A-Bill----Of course, when the Atalanta was moored, maybe during the daytime, I don't know what it was, Sunday or what, but Johnny Boss and I were rowing around the bay in a rowboat and rowed around the boat there and saw a couple of pies up in the window of the galley, so we helped ourselves to one of them. Well, we left them one pie anyhow.

Q-Roger----Did the Atalanta serve food to the passengers?

A-Bill----No, not while I was aboard anyway. I think I was on it a couple of three times to Seattle, but I don't remember them serving food. I used to like to watch that engine run, so ?????? would go down there and watch that thing puffing away.

This was the end of the tape. There were numerous parts where we wandered around that I did not include. If anyone wants to borrow the tape, it is available.