

# **Wilbur Sherman and Mickey Clark**

## **Fish Traps and Miscellaneous**

**Transcribed by Roger Sherman**

**Program Location Unknown**

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**The program was probably done during the Coupeville Harvest Festival. Wilbur talked about the fish traps and then Mickey talked about some of the slides that he was showing. Most of the program that Mickey was doing was omitted because it was not pertinent to my field of research, maritime history.**

Wilbur---Fish traps were outlawed in this state----the last year they fished was 1934 and I think there are some people here that would remember them. According to the law, a fish trap could extend 2400 feet from the shore or to 78 feet at high water. And there were only three places on the sound, that I remember, that the condition of the bottom was such that they could drive one after the other and up at Point Roberts on the reef and down there at the mouth of San Juan, ah, up there, south part of ???????? There were three of them, right after the other. They go 2,400 feet, then you go 500 and then another. So you did scoop up a lot of fish when they come that way.

And then, about 1933, the purseiners and the sportsmen got together and decided they'd fix our clocks. The sad part of that, to me, was I had worked on the water for seven years and listened to a lot of the bunk house chatter about how you could get a fish trap location. And down here at Hancock Lake, there was one of the best fish trap sites that I have ever had anything to do with. And ah, according to law, it was ???????? on the person that operated the trap they gave him a year to do everything according to law and be on his location and if he wasn't, on the first day of April of the following year the first man to file on that location had the prior right to drive a trap there.

Well, when I was working down there in 1927, that was the year Lindburg flew across the ocean. I remember that quite so well, anyhow, we had driven a trap there for ?????? Fisheries, and it was a dandy, I'll tell you. And, then a little latter on, they had another location, 2400 feet, up the shore and they didn't drive the trap and fish there. They drove what we call a dummy and they never intended to fish it, they just intended to hold the location. They had to drive a trap once in every four years. So, I worked up there and what was kind of interesting to me, I had a new foreman. His name was Zed Ostling?????and the

guy, this was not long after World War I and the guy had been shell shocked. And every time the hammer would hit the pilling, he would go like this and all day long, it just wasn't fun.

I remembered where that fish trap location was, and I thought it can be driven and it can be fished. And by golly, I could drive that one, but anyhow, that would get me into the fish business someday or another. So I had Lem Wanamaker, who was an engineer, do some surveying and finally, when we located the one that I wanted, then we went on down the beach, and I knew where they had driven that trap and they hadn't been on the location for almost four years. And in the meantime, the legislators made a law that you could not vary more than 100 feet from the location. So I filed on it and so they moved out ??????????????????and I had \$800 when I came back from Alaska in 1930. That was the last year I worked on the water and here I am, ?????????????????? Fishery moved down there and drive a trap and what do I do, so I bring a suit against them.

Old Judge Barrel???? he heard the story and report. Seemed strange to me. Here was some of their forman down there that I knew and worked for. Those guys, one of them was a guy by the name of Chim??? Chavalier??? You might have heard of him. He was a half breed, french and Indian, and he was born up on Stewart Island, I believe it was. They were darn fine people. Good mechanic and he sat up there on the witness stand and he couldn't say anything. He was scarred to death. When I worked for him in the shipyard, there wasn't anything he couldn't handle. Seemed strange to me. Anyhow, the lawyer looked me in eye and said, "plaintiff does not come in the court with clean hands." He worked for ?????????? (sounds like Senator Martin Fisheries) and now he is trying to claim their trap location. Judge Bell, looked me right in the eye. He said: "if plaintiff had intelligence enough to realize what was going on, that's all to his credit." You know, that statement kind of stiffened my back bone up. But we won that and they took it to the supreme court and I won that one location. And I didn't get anywhere with it because we were ganged up on by the sportsman and the purseiners and that was the end of it. But I did get a few. I got about \$3,000 out of it and an education because Jim Zylstra was my lawyer and he took me in hand and he told me many, many things about civil law. And I appreciated it.

Note: I (Roger) have copies of the Wilbur's fish trap blue prints. He applied for two locations, near Lake Hancock, in the Greenbank area. He claimed the sites under pound net license number 284 and 285. One site was previously owned by F.C. Roberts of Bellingham and the other (285) was owned by the York Fish Company of Bellingham. The actual blue print of his trap shows that he selected No. 285, the one closest to Lake Hancock in section 6.

Wilbur—But to start with, when I had my first job on the water was for Leonard???? Lowman and Lowman had been a big person in the fisheries and in World War

I, he got to greedy and he sent his boats to far to get fish and they condemned the whole batch. And by golly, that broke him and when I was working for him he couldn't write a check for much more than I could and that was almost zero. The first job that I went out on was on a pile puller and in the fall, they would pull all these traps. They would cut the wire down and take the web and pull the pile and so I got a job there and I was 20 years old and everybody seemed to bedevil me, but the one thing I was, was strong and I could learn, but I remember they didn't like the knots I tied. They had to mostly untie them with an axe, but I did learn to tie a bowline and a bowline in the dark, or a square knot or a half hitch or whatever.

In the spring, I went out on the pile driver and the first trap we drove was down here at cedar hollow and I don't think there had ever been a trap built in there before. It was awfully hard driving and I remember what we caught mostly was a little cod fish, about this long, and of course that wasn't what they wanted, but it did catch some salmon, but one thing I remember so clearly that when the web crew was there to hang the trap, the cook got a tooth ache and went ashore and the web crewman, and all of them were Austrians, and he said to me, he said: "You cook." I said, "I can't cook, I don't know a thing about cooking." "You cook." So when they come in at noon, I didn't even have any hot water there. They began to belly ache a little and one of the guys said: "well, he told you he couldn't cook," so they fooled around there and got a little something to eat, but I guess they realized that I didn't cook.

You know, I often wondered why my mother, there were four of us brothers in the family, six girls, and she never bothered to teach us to cook. I didn't know a darned thing about it until Grace (Wilbur's wife) began to teach me how to cook. And I could put a fair meal on the table now. I think I can anyhow.

Anyhow, we fished down at Ebey's Landing there and I remember when I was a kid, we used to come down Ebey Road. This was early morning because the hours on a pile driver were from seven to six, ten hour days. And the pile driver right in line with the road and they had a donkey engine on there that lifted a five ton hammer. And that hammer sat on what we called the follower. The piling was lifted by the pile runner, so the boom man got the piling and then the hammer man lifted the piling up and he lowered it down and then come down the hammer and the follower. Now this follower weighed about a thousand pounds and it had a dish shaped thing in the follower and that had a block of wood in there. And that block of wood, they'd probably hammer on that for two or three months. That kept it from steel to steel, you know, in hitting that wood and sometimes when they were hammering so hard, it would get to smoking some, but anyhow, this was a---they'd get the piling up there and then they'd shut it down. And then the hammer would turn on it and that whoop and then there was two whoops ??????????????????????And they would unhook the pile and it would come down and we'd take care of that.

I just want to give you the language of a pile driver man, lacking the profanity. I pile driver is a donkey engine on a scow and the bunk house is all overhead and the cookhouse and the crew is fourteen men. Four of those men are the capping crew, so the pile driver crew itself, was ten men. Two of them were deck men, two boom men, two ????? men, the hammerman and the fireman and the cook and the foreman. Now I'm going to ????????? and we've got our anchors out, a stern line, a head line, the head line runs up through a block so they can lower the piling and then the man on either side, he's a set man, so the foreman he said "hit the son of a bitch." Then the head man he'd take his peevie and he'd punch it into the piling and that mark was so that he knew when to stop hitting it. If it was good driving why, that might be ten or fifteen minutes. Then he would say "pile runner on the headline, come to port, slack to starboard." And ah "heave the stern" and this kind of stuff and then the second boom man, he'd say "heave the stern." And they'd ????????? move the pile driver and take a new position. "Slack the headline." Then they'd tighten all these lines.

It was a kind of a thing, you kind of got to love and every once in awhile, you'd get into some kind of a storm and it would be something to go along in a hurry. But I'll tell you one time in Alaska when really, something happened there that I didn't have sense enough to get scarred, but you've heard of those willowas up there that come from nowhere and come in real force. We were in southeastern Alaska and we were driving a trap close to what they called Kake Island. It really wasn't too far from Prince Rupert. It was about as far south as you could get in Alaska and we had a diver there. They generally put a diver overboard to locate the webbing that they had cut down from the year before and put you exactly on those ????????? And he'd come up he'd put us where we were going to start driving and they took him on a secondary tender and started for Ketchikan. And you could see, and this is something they say, "if you see a black streak out there, you'd better make a blue streak." But that day, there was a black streak out there all right and but the boat had already pulled out and we had started to drive and all of a sudden, with all four anchors out, we just began to sail and the wind hit us and we really began to go and we were headed for the beach and our tender, which was a pretty good sized tow boat, you might say, she tried to get a hold of us and it did and so we had to throw all of the lines overboard and just hope that we'd catch them again and the other boat saw what we were in to, that was taking the diver ashore, and they come back, and hooked onto us and they were able to get us out of there. But I remember we always pulled the stern forward first. I was standing back there and one of those big waves, the sea didn't come right away, but when it did come, it just come right down over us and we were standing on the stern there to take the lines, you know, from the tug boats. One of the guys, the wave come and took him right overboard. I caught him by the seat of his britches and pulled him back, but that's the kind of stuff you get into in a seaman's work.

There were a lot of things I learned that working there when I came back

and went into farming and ranching, that's all I did know, they served me in hand, all of my life. I don't figure I've wasted my time. Is there any question about it?

Mickey—Tell them about the real heavy runs you had out there.

Wilbur—The fish?

Mickey—Yeah

Wilbur—Well, I'll tell you, the humpies were the ones that really, when they come, they come in large quantities and this trap down there by Greenbank, they'd come down there and brail two or three scow loads out of that in a day. They had two spillers on it. Now, the spiller is where the fish come into, the first thing, you're coming off from shore with a row of pilings and then you put on a piling lashed to it and this is what we called the caping. And then the wire was put on that, about a four inch size wire and then on the head end was what we called, it began with a, sometimes they only had one pot and a spiller. Now the pot was a stationary thing and the fish come in there and then they'd come into a tunnel. The tunnel was narrowed down to about. It wasn't any bigger than this and the fish would begin coming in there. They'd hit the lead thing, come down there and then they hit what they called the big harp???? It was driven, it's hard for me to tell you that, but it went there about two hundred feet on either side of the trap because the trap fished both sides and then they had a small harp and the fish worked up and down there and then all of a sudden they got up there and then in the channel and scooted through there and then they were into a smaller place and then they worked around there until they finally went into the pot. And when they got into the pot and then here was this tunnel and they scooted in there and they didn't have enough brains to get back out of there so that's what goes on, that's how you catch a salmon.

Note----Mickey showed pictures and talked about them.

Mickey--Here's the old "Whidby" and it burned up at the Oak Harbor dock.

Wilbur---In 1911 the two men that were killed, on there, were Jas Parker, which I suppose is James Parker and Silva and they are buried up there in our cemetery. The county buried them and one of the things that I'm amazed at is those headboards that were put up there are still standing there. At least the last time I was up there. This is 1911 until now.

Mickey--??????? This was right across from Kennedy's Lagoon.

Wilbur---That's the old milling place.

Mickey---Right across from Ed Fisher's place. Note: Ed Fisher lived on the little spit

of land, next to Madrona Way, on the east side of Kennedy's Lagoon.

Wilbur---Yeah, It went down in 1932, in the Columbus Day storm. And it crashed down and it stood there until that time, but I understand that it took its power out of the lagoon there and they ground grain in that building. Tidal flow.

Note----Mickey shows slides of central Whidbey, including some of San de Fuca and Oak Habor. Lots of commentary. Listening to the tape, it's sort of like a blind person listening to television. Not much there.