

NORTHEAST ARCHIVES OF FOLKLORE AND ORAL HISTORY IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH MAINE FOLKLIFE CENTER

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWIN LAWSON FOR THE "LIFE OF THE MAINE  
LOBSTERMAN" PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY RITA SWIDROWSKI

WEST TREMONT, MAINE OCTOBER 20, 1972

TRANSCRIPT BY RITA SWIDROWSKI

EDITED BY WILL DRAXER

Interviewee Name: Edwin Lawson

Project/Collection Title: Life of the Maine Lobsterman

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Rita Swidrowski – Maine Folklife Center

Interview Location: West Tremont, ME

Date of Interview: 10-20-1972

Interview Description: Mr. Edwin Lawson at 73 years old, is an active and successful lobster-fisherman. It is an occupation that he has been steadily working at for 49 years. For about 35 years, until 15 years ago, he also dragged scallops every winter on his own boat. In this interview he discusses the daily routine of a lobsterman, from waking up to selling off the lobster catch. He also speaks on the differences in fishing and fishing culture along the Maine coast, his history and progression as a fisherman, and the gear used.

Key Words: Maine, lobster, lobsterman, fishing, lobster fishing, bait, Tremont, routine, dealer, traps, boats, meals.

Collection Description: The bulk of the nineteen accessions (33 hours) in this collection consists of interviews by David Taylor conducted during the summer of 1974 focused on Maine lobster fishermen. Series NA0726, NA0727, and NA0747 - NA0750, and NA0777 have been added to the collection since they are on the same topic and were done around the same time. Included in the "supplemental material" is the contents of the MF037 collection folder: correspondence, clippings, articles, and surveys relating to the Life of the Maine Lobsterman Project. Transcripts by the Mapping Oceans Stories Project.

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Transcribed By: Rita Swidrowski. Edited By: Will Draxler

RS: Rita Swidrowski

EL: Edwin Lawson

ML: Elsie Lawson (Edwin's wife)

START OF 101372-Lawson-Edwin-Interview-WestTremont-MFC

Sandy Ives: This is the beginning of the second interview. October 20, 1972. The following is a tape of Interview #2, between Rita Swidrowski and Edwin Lawson in his home in West Tremont, Maine. October 20, 1972.

[Before the tape began we had been talking about summer people on Mount Desert Island. Mr. Lawson is telling me about the land he owns and that the summer people own in Goose Cove where he lives.]

[00:02:40.10] [Start of Audio Part 3]

Rita Swidrowski: Really?

Edwin Lawson: They [summer people] own all the shore property, practically.

RS: They keep selling it for more and more money now?

EL: I own quite a lot down here but I wouldn't sell it for – it would be no advantage and I want it for myself. It's only about three or four pieces of land here on this cove, here, that belongs to natives now. Shorefront – a lot of it belongs to summer people and some of them got a lot of it.

RS: Yeah. Are they very friendly, summer people?

EL: Oh, some of them don't want you on their land. They can get all over yours, though but they don't like to have you on their land.

RS: That is too bad, it should work both ways. [laughter]

EL: Yes, I've got my land all posted down there, "no trespassing" [laughter] I just do it for my own protection, so people won't go down there. Three of us go fishing from here and we have trap stuff down on the wharves and everything and they go down there and throw stuff around sometimes, the kids do.

RS: Who is the third one that goes fishing down here?

EL: My son and his son, my grandson.

RS: That is the grandson that is about twenty? Is that the one?

EL: Yeah.

RS: And then your son is building a wharf too?

EL: Yeah, he's building it right alongside mine. We built this road down through here together.  
[referring to road to the right of the house across the street that goes right down to the shore]

RS: What, all three of you?

EL: Well, my [grand]son, no.

[00:04:36.16]

RS: Where do you row your boat? You told me last time that you have some row boats down here on your shore front.

EL: Yeah, we have our boat, the mooring, out in the harbor where we leave our big boats and we land down here, on this shore. And then we have to row out every morning though and back at night.

RS: Out to which harbor?

EL: This one, right here, this is Goose Cove.

RS: Goose Cove has its own harbor then?

EL: Well, yeah, that's what we call harbor [laughter] we call it either one.

RS: Then you just row out? I always think of a harbor as being like Southwest Harbor.

EL: No. [Referring to the second phrase]

RS: I wonder if you could describe a typical day of fishing when you go out, from the time you get up in the morning, what do you do?

EL: I get my breakfast, of course. I put up my own dinner, lunch, go down to the shore, row off for the boat, get under way, go out [and] start hauling traps. That's about all there is to it.

[00:05:55.14]

RS: What time would you usually go?

EL: Well, as soon as we can see. There's a law, they don't enforce it but you can't haul traps a half hour before sunrise or a half hour after sunset. No, that's the law but they don't enforce it unless somebody makes a complaint. I've only known one complaint, that was quite a few years ago I guess somebody just had a grudge against somebody. They run so many traps you've got to get started early, that's the best part of the day in the morning. And in the summertime, of course you get quite a lot of daylight before sunrise.

RS: Do you ever actually pull up your traps in the dark or do you wait until you can see?

EL: Oh no, we have to wait until daylight of course, so we can see a lot of the buoys.

RS: So you go out to your boat and then what do you have to do on your boat? What is the first thing you have to prepare, anything everyday on the boat?

EL: Well, of course we have a lot of bait pockets; small mesh bags with drawstring. Then I generally have fifty or a hundred spare ones so I bait my pockets in the morning and part of them and that saves time, when I haul a trap I just take the old one out and put in another one all baited, I don't lose time that way, it's quicker.

[00:07:48.25]

RS: Do you buy your bait everyday?

EL: No, we bait about twice a week. Of course this time of year bait will keep for all the fall now [with] a little salt, but in the summer it spoils quick, about every two or three days we have to get bait.

RS: Where do you get your bait?

EL: We get it at the fish wharf where we sell our lobsters, it comes from the sardine factory, well some of it comes from Southwest, some of it comes from Downeast, some of it comes clear away from Canada.

RS: What type of fish do you use for your bait?

EL: Herring, what they put for sardines, the part they don't use on the - and then they use a small red fish now, about eight, nine inches long. They seem to be pretty good this time of year, they stay in better, the sea fleas don't eat them so quick.

RS: The sea fleas?

EL: Yeah, little bits of sea fleas, they get in the pockets and they eat more bait than lobsters do. Lobsters don't eat much bait, lobsters or crabs, it's sea fleas what eats the bait. Sometimes, they'll cover the bag right up just so you can't see it when you haul trap out of water. Some of them's as big as pinheads and some of them might be [a] sixteenth of an inch long or perhaps an eighth of an inch long.

[00:09:33.10]

RS: Where do you keep the bait bags on the boat?

EL: We just have a tub to put them into.

RS: Like a bucket?

EL: Yeah, big tub.

RS: Where do you sell your lobsters?

EL: Down to Bass Harbor, Morris Rich, he buys for a man named Hook in Boston. A big dealer, wholesaler, and we sell to Morris, he's the agent here and then he sells them to Hook, he gets a commission on them, just the same as we do.

RS: What is the price right now, would you say?

EL: It's a dollar right now, it's gone up, we got as high as a dollar forty cents this summer but it went down, then they had that clam scare, that red tide and they went down to eighty cents. Now it's bad weather, the boats don't get out so much, they're going back up again now. And we get five cents a pound for taking them down straight from here. It's about three miles down from this harbor to Bass Harbor, and then of course we save crabs too. We get crabs with our lobsters in [the traps], they pay seven cents a pound for crabs. I can get enough out of my crabs to more than pay my expenses now.

RS: To pay your expenses for fishing?

L : Yeah, pay for my bait and the gasoline.

[00:11:20.21]

RS: How long have you been selling to Rich?

EL: Twenty-five, thirty years.

RS: Does he have a lot of people around here he sells to?

EL: Oh yes, he has a lot of boats in Bass Harbor, he has three – I have a son, grandson up here and there's two other boats goes out of here, they sell to on this other side of Bass Harbor. They sell to Radcliff, he's another lobster buyer. There's three buyers in Bass Harbor; there's a New York man, there's Morris Rich and there's Radcliff. And they all have [the] same boats sell to them everyday, they don't change around. A lot of the dealers get their material for them for the traps and hardware, boat stuff and they kind of look out for the fishermen quite a lot.

[00:12:33.25]

RS: Is it a verbal agreement of who will sell to him – ?

EL: Oh, no.

RS: Sign up with him?

EL: Oh, no, no, you can go anywhere you want to [chuckling] but a lot of them, they owe the dealers, so they have to sell to the dealers. But the ones that don't owe, they can go anywhere if they want to. Some of them, once in a while do, but not very often. They all have their own boats and fish houses where we have bait down there, and that kind of holds the – anybody at the same place, he's got a big wharf there and a lot of buildings and they're parted off, each fisherman has his own bait shed where he keeps his bait and he can lock it up if he wants to. Sometimes, it's better if you do lock it up, I lost about a half a barrel of red fish this morning.

RS: Did you really?

EL: Somebody just helped themselves, I guess.

RS: Do you have any idea who?

EL: Well, sometimes you have an idea but, you're not always right. As a general thing, they're a good bunch of people. You find one, two bad ones in every crowd of people. Not really bad, a little stealing don't hurt nothing. [laughter] As long as you've got plenty [of] bait, why, I don't mind.

[00:14:28.00]

RS: That happens I guess. Will they – ?

EL: You're a lot better if you don't say anything [than] if you do, sometimes. [laughter]

RS: You think so? Did they take anybody else's this morning?

EL: Oh, they do, off and on, they take somebody's.

RS: Yeah, what, do you think – ?

EL: Not very much, don't amount to much. Only once in a while, we leave our lobsters all up here in small crates [for] three or four days, before we take them to the market. And once in a while, there's somebody that goes off from here, off from the shore and takes a few lobsters out of our crates, but that don't happen very often, once in a while.

RS: You think somebody from – ?

EL: [They] just want some to eat, they'll take a dozen, half a dozen, or something like that. If you've got a lot of lobsters, you'll never miss them, but if you happen to have a few. You can tell [by] the way the crates are tied up again, about always; if it's not a fisherman that takes them, they don't have a regular knot, they just have any kind of a knot and sometimes they don't tie them up at all but, general thing you can tell.

RS: What kind of knots do you use, any special knot?

EL: A square knot, about always, fishermen use it. And mostly anybody that don't tie – a lot of people don't tie a square knot, they tie what they call a granny knot, it's just about backwards from a square knot.

RS: But all the fishermen would use a square knot?

EL: Generally yeah.

RS: So in most cases, you find that if it is somebody, you are going to find the other kind of knot?

EL: Yeah about always you do.



[00:16:26.17]

RS: Would you do anything if you found out, who stole this morning?

EL: No, I wouldn't do anything.

RS: You just would not do anything?

EL: No, no.

RS: But some people around here would, some of the fishermen might?

EL: No, I don't think so, they might say something to them, They wouldn't – that would be as far as it would go.

S : Yeah.

[Mrs. Lawson who is in the room comments that a home run was made on the world series game on t.v. Mr. Lawso asks who it is. There is silence for about 5 seconds as we watch. Mr. Lawson comments that it was the home team that did it.]

RS: So you think in most cases they might not? How about last week, you were telling me in Stonington, I have heard like, what is it, Cranberry?

EL: Cranberry Island?

RS: Around there, would it be different you think, would the fishermen mind more, if that happened to them?

EL: No, I don't think so, they wouldn't do anything about it. Not really worthwhile to make the trouble over, it don't happen. If it happened all the time – often when its only just once in a while, no, general run of fishermen, they're all honest. Some of them's quite rough, but they're honest.  
[laughter]

RS: What do you mean that they are rough?

EL: Oh, just rough and ready.

RS: Just in their ways?

EL: Yeah.

RS: Do you think they ever scare summer people people in their roughness?

EL: No, I don't know as they do.

RS: Yeah.

[00:18:18.24]

EL: The only thing – when you lose anything like that, it's always in the night, you might mistrust somebody but you'd never know, really. You'd know in your own mind, but just as well not say too much about it.

RS: Last week, you told me that up around Stonington, they do not like the part time people and summer people to mix in as much into the places where they are fishing. Is that right?

EL: No, I don't think so, no, I don't think there's anybody that likes it. They don't say much about it, but not much you can do about it. It's a free country and if they can, if they're issued a license they've got a right to fish. Sometimes, they might take it into their own hands and destroy their gear or something like that [and] you couldn't stop them.

RS: What is the nearest that people will come to each other? Are traps set next to each other?

EL: Just as near as they can, if there happens to be a bottom where there's lobsters, there'll be a lot of traps. We figure on them, just so they won't snarl up, but sometimes [with] the tide changing, they'll snarl up quite a lot, tangle up.

RS: Tangle up with one another?

EL: Yeah.

RS: Really?

EL: Yeah.

RS: What do you do then, if you find it tangled?

EL: All you can do, [laughter] clear them when you haul them. That's when some people will cut yours and let it go.

RS: Just because it is easier to do?

EL: Yeah, ot too many fishermen.

[00:20:19.19]

RS: Yeah, you said that you know the bottom around here, you must know it pretty well?

EL: Yes, I know it quite well.

RS: What is a good place to set a trap?

EL: Well, you want a hard bottom, rocky bottom, there's a lot of mud bottom; all in the middle of the bay, most of that's mud. Well, this time of year, lobsters go on the mud when they're going off from the shore but in the summertime, you can't catch a lobster on the mud. They're all right anywhere from two, three feet of water, they don't go out very far in the summer. When they're shedding, they'll come right in out to the shore, around two, three feet of water, they'll cover up in the rocks or hide. You never see one, but after they've shed, when it starts to get cold, cold weather will start to drive them off from shore, in deeper water where the water's warmer. I don't know where they go in the winter, I don't think they go out of the bay, of course you'd get the same kind of lobsters there, you can tell, there's a difference in the bay lobster and an outside lobster, you can tell by looking at it, general thing. Well after they go off, get so late here in the bay you can't catch them, I don't know if they bury up or they just don't trap.

[00:22:01.20]

RS: What is the difference between a bay and the outside? What do you mean when you're talking about the outside?

EL: Oh, it's the outside islands, on the outside islands right out into the ocean. You know, where there's nothing between the outside islands and across to the other side of the ocean. [laughter]

RS: So what would be the difference between an outside lobster and a bay lobster?

EL: Well, there's really no difference but, you can tell, they look a little different. The shell's a little different, if you didn't know you'd never know the difference. Some of them look alike, but

there's lobsters [that] we get way up in the head of the bay, this way [gesturing]. They don't look like an outside lobster, and you get the same kind every year in the same places.

RS: There is something in the color?

EL: So, they don't go out of the bay, we used to think they could go out of the bay in cold weather, and come back in the spring. Well, of course a lot of them do, but there's a lot of them stay right in the bay, they just hide, I guess.

RS: Do you think it is something with the shell or is there a general size difference?

EL: Well, general darker color, that's about the only way you can tell, a little darker color.

RS: At what time on the boat do you have lunch? Do you eat on the boat?

EL: Anytime.

RS: Anytime you are hungry?

EL: I generally have lunch at about nine o'clock if I can, I don't eat much breakfast anyhow. Then, sometimes I don't open my dinner pail for the rest of the day. If it comes right so I'm busy all the time, I don't get hungry, when I'm in the house I won't eat all the time.

[00:23:57.23]

RS: You do not seem to get as hungry out there though?

EL: Oh sometimes, I'm a little hungry, but I never seem to have time to eat, there's a lot of people who will stop to eat but I can't. If I'm going to run from one place to another, I'll eat in between, but when I've got a lot of traps right along in a row I never stop to eat. Sometimes I don't open my dinner pail until two o'clock [pm] and other times it's all cleaned out at ten o'clock [am].

RS: What do you usually pack, big dinner?

EL: No, I just buy it mostly, mostly sweet stuff anyway, donuts and cookies and cake, pie. This summer I am not even taking a sandwich. I used to take sandwiches, I'd generally bring them home. Sometimes, I get out inside 20 minutes, I get my (coffee?) and dinner pail brought out and ready to go offshore, I don't lose much time.

RS: Would you put all your oil skins on right here?

EL: Oh no, we keep them onboard the boat.

RS: Keep them in the boat?

EL: Yeah, right down in the cabin.

RS: That would be the first thing when you get on the boat? Put them right on?

EL: Well, that's for when we leave the moorings, head out, that's the first thing you'll do is put on your oil clothes.

RS: When you are out there, do you communicate? Do you have a radio on your boat?

[00:25:43.23]

EL: No, they do, a lot – I've had a ship-to-shore radio now for about four years and it's never been used yet. I get the news on it and sometimes when there's a ballgame on, if I have time, I turn it on for the radio part, but I never talk on it.

RS: So it is just a ship-to-shore radio?

EL: Yeah, talk with each other, sit in boats, you can call up the coast guard.

RS: Do the men out here in the bay talk to one another from boat to boat?

EL: Oh, yes, some of them talk all the time. Yeah, they like to talk, they talk a half an hour and don't say anything, really. [laughter]

RS: So everybody else has to listen to it?

EL: They make me nervous, they're quite loud when they're on, everybody's got a different voice and the stuff don't interest me much.

RS: What do they talk about?

EL: They talk just the same as they would if they was to home, a lot of them. Some of them, if they happened to find somebody's trap they'll tell them about it, they never tell if they're getting any lobsters, that's for sure. No, no, that's one thing that they never – I've never known of anybody ever telling anybody where there's any lobsters or fish or anything.

[00:27:43.01]

RS: When did your kids go out with you, your two boys?

EL: They used to go with me, they started in probably when they was, seven or eight years old, and they went with me until they was old enough to have a boat of their own. My oldest boy went with me until he went in the Navy, when he come home from the Navy, he got his own boat.

RS: Did you like having the kids out?

EL: Oh, yeah, they were a big help, they'd bait pockets and plug lobsters and help you quite a lot. But you can't- if anybody goes with you now they have to have a license, they're not allowed to help you. If I took anybody out, they wouldn't be allowed to do anything aboard the boat.

RS: That is what I have heard, they are pretty strict on that, the warden?

EL: Well, they would if they caught you, yes, of course there's not enough wardens around. [laughter] They do it, I've seen them do it, once in a while they get caught. I've noticed in the paper this summer, two or three kids got caught for – I think it's a twenty-five dollar fine.

RS: Isn't it against the law, if you found a trap or a buoy on an island?

EL: Yeah. You're not allowed to touch it.

RS: Even if the numbers are worn off?

EL: The what?

RS: If the numbers are worn off, are you then allowed?

EL: I suppose that would be alright, I imagine, whether you could prove it was yours or not.

[00:29:36.09]

RS: How do you judge when a trap is condemned? What makes it no good to you?

EL: When the laths get worn off or rotten, when they get so you can't use it.

RS: What do you do with most of the condemned ones, you give them all to your sons?

EL: Well, I used to give them to my grandson, he used to have it. Now, he has better traps and he doesn't care too much about old traps or repairing them.

RS: So what do you do now?

EL: You repair an old trap, and it's awful tender, you hit it and laths will break and nails coming out and everything like that, the heads get bad. They're kind of a nuisance, we have too many of them. I condemn pretty good traps now, there's fifty down on the wharf there now that, when I first started, I would call them good traps. [laughter] When you're running a big string of traps, you want good traps so you won't have to be patching them up all the time. Well, sometimes we patch them up in the winter when we ain't doing much, but when you're fishing, it's just a nuisance, old traps.

[00:31:13.07]

RS: Then you make new ones too, don't you?

EL: I make fifty every winter now, I used to make a hundred but now I'm only making fifty. Just about keep my string, what I condemn, what I lose; I lose quite a few. A lot of yachts in the bay in the summer, outboards, they cut the buoys off with their propellers and you lose a trap that way; I lose more that way than I lose myself.

RS: What, in storms?

EL: We don't lose any in storms, here in this bay, there's no undertow. This last storm, some of the boats down in Bass Harbor there lost fifty, sixty traps.

RS: When was that, just recently?

EL: About two weeks ago, southwest wind is what staves up the traps, makes an undertow on that out shore and it rolls the traps right over and over and tears them all to pieces. Sometimes it will take fifteen, twenty traps and snarl them all up in a bunch, and they can't unclear them.

RS: What is the average life of a trap, would you say, before it starts rotting?

EL: About three years, I still think about three years or so. They do use them longer sometimes, but after three years they start to show quite a lot of wear and tear.

RS: When you make your traps now, do you buy your trap stuff from the dealer?

EL: Yeah.

[00:33:07.09]

RS: What exactly would you buy, what are the parts of it that you would buy?

EL: Well, you buy the bottom, the sills –

RS: The sill comes ready made?

EL: – and the cross pieces. They're already sawed out and bored, the holes are bored to put them together. And then there are three bows to a trap, They're all hardwood.

RS: They are bored?

EL: Yes, they're all bored, the holes are all bored in them and then the cross pieces are all turned down so that they fit right into the holes; all you've got to do is put them right together.

RS: And then you nail them?

EL: Yeah, nail them, so they won't come apart, of course.

RS: And then you knit your heads.

EL: I knit my own heads, yes.

RS: Do most people knit their own heads?

EL: No, there's some of them but they buy a lot, have people knit them for them. They used to charge three cents a head to knit, now they charge about fifteen. Some of these knitters are women, they make pretty good money, just knitting heads.

RS: I would imagine so.

EL: It's good, fast knitters.

RS: How do you knit a head? Do you just use your hands or you have a tool?



EL: Well, you have a wooden – we call it a needle, and we fill it up with enough twine on it to knit the whole head, so you don't have to stop and tie a knot in it.

[00:34:41.14]

[Interrupted by TV, off topic discussion follows]

RS: Who taught you to knit a head?

[00:36:44.18]

EL: I think my brother did, I used to hire most of my heads because I couldn't knit fast enough. I didn't think I could, now I can't knit very fast but I have a lot of time to knit them.

RS: So you did not knit your own heads at first?

EL: Not at first, I didn't.

RS: That was when you were around seventeen, eighteen?

EL: Yeah, around that time. When I was first married I didn't knit them.

RS: Did you make the rest of the traps?

EL: Yeah I always made my own traps, but we used to have to go into the woods and get the material to make the sills and cross pieces. We used tree branches for bows, the big tree branches, spruce trees, that was quite slow work.

RS: Were you right here then? [Pointing to the area across the street that goes down to Mr. Lawson's shore.]

EL: Yeah.

RS: Where did you go, right down in there?

EL: Well, we [went] anywhere in the woods where we could find the stuff. People didn't care then, I don't know if they would now or not, [chuckling] probably, summer people, they might not like it. It didn't hurt the trees any, we only took the big branches for the bows and the little trees that were just three, four inches around for sills. And then they had to be all peeled and

made down and bored, and it took quite a lot of time. A good winter's work to make fifty traps, now you can make three or four hundred if you wanted to, same length of time.

[00:38:46.11]

RS: How do you bend the bows, are they already curved?

EL: Oh, they're already curved, they steam them, they're already steamed on a tray, on a mold, and they put down over a rack that they come on when we get them. They put right down over it and they're perfect when they come on these racks.

RS: They do that now at the mill?

EL: Yeah, they do it right in the mill.

RS: How about when you got used to cut them from the woods?

EL: We used to have to just bend them, put them in at the same- when we bend them just as fast as we bend them, and put them in.

RS: I see, so did you flatten the branches, peel them or straighten them?

EL: No, no, sometimes you'd have to take off a little, but not too much. When they're green, they'll bend.

RS: How many years did you do that for, going into the woods to get your stuff?

EL: I wouldn't know, probably first ten years, anyhow, that I went.

RS: What was the average number of traps that you hauled at that time, in those ten years?

[00:40:13.13]

EL: Of course, we didn't have the power hoisters and we didn't have four-cycle engines then. We had just single cylinder and brake engine; you stop your engine everytime you haul a trap.

RS: Why did you have to stop it?

EL: We had to stop it, it's no transmission, no clutch on it, it was straight drive, right through. Of course, now you have the reverse gear, just like you do in a car.

RS: Was that when you had the twenty-two foot boat?

EL: Yes, mostly, years ago, it's been a long while since I had any two cycle engines. They were just one cylinder, two cycle engines, they [had] about ten horse power. It was anywhere from five to ten horsepower, they was reliable but they was awful, quite noisy. They'd go anytime, you didn't have to keep them dry.

RS: Have you named your boats, the boats you have owned? They all have names?

EL: I know this one is – I never got to put the name on it, the Elsie L. When you have a telephone you have to have a boat name, to call and then your call number.

RS: Where did you get your boats built? Different places?

EL: No, no, I've only had one built, this one I've got now. It's about eleven years old. I had her built down here, to Duck Cove, that's a boat shop about about a mile down the road.

[00:42:17.13]

RS: How big?

EL: It's a place where they haul boats out, they haul yachts and store them for the winter. They haul fish boats out, repair them. I haul my boat out there every winter, leave until about the first of May; I have a big tarpaulin I put over.

RS: What do you have to do to her the first of May, when you start?

EL: Well, we have to scrape and paint you know, and overhaul your engines and your machinery, whatever there is to do. Some of them will leave them afloat all winter. Down [in] Bass Harbor they can, but up here you, on account of the ice, you couldn't. This all freezes over lots of times, and then the ice comes in out of the bay and it freezes on one side of the harbor and takes boats back and forth. They used to leave them off here, years ago when they was scalloping, there was a big fleet off here but when it would freeze over you'd have to get out and go to Bass Harbor and wait until the ice went out. The ice is awful powerful stuff, it all froze over and the winds change, and it [would] start to go out, could take a whole fleet of boats right out of the bay.

RS: When does the ice start?

[00:43:56.00]

EL: It would start, on a Nor'easter, [over here] Northeast wind or an Easterly. It would freeze over, a Northwest wind when heavy cold and it keeps freezing in. It can't get out on a Northwest wind, that just backs right off and freezes right off from the shore.

RS: Do you ever think of painting your boat blue?

EL: Blue? Yeah, not me. [laughter] There's quite a few blue boats. My cousin's boy down at Bass Harbor's got a blue boat, I think there's three down there, kind of a bright blue. They paint them red, yellow, green, black, mostly white though, about all white with a buff top kind of thing.

RS: Is buff like a brown you mean?

EL: Kind of a brown.

RS: Does anybody have a reason why they do not like blue?

EL: Well, Jonah, they say it's a Jonah color; you never catch any fish if you paint your boat blue, I believe that's – I don't believe in signs, it don't bother me.

RS: I have heard green, too.

EL: I don't [know] green.

RS: Have you seen many Canadian boats around here?

EL: Well they use a lot of Canadian boats here, Nova Scotia boats, they use them up here for-they're cheaper. They're made cheap too, they're not as good as Maine boats. They don't last too long and a lot of trouble with them, and they age faster, they get old.

[00:45:52.16]

RS: Are there any special places on the Maine coast that you know of that are good places to get a boat? Good quality boats?

EL: Down East, they have good boats, over here in Southwest Harbor they have good boats. They build good boats there but, Prospect Harbor and down Corea, all, there's a number of them boat shops down there, there's one in Stonington, and there's one or two, one up [in] Blue Hill and I think there's one in Brooklin. Boat shop, I think they build boats, but they're building a lot of fiberglass boats now.

RS: Do they seem as good?

EL: I guess, no maintenance on a fiberglass boat, you know, after they get old but I don't know that. They haven't been around long enough to know what they'll be like after they get old.

RS: You said you had the first outboard around here?

EL: Yeah, I had the first outboard.

RS: How did you happen to want to get one?

[00:47:14.06]

EL: I was helping my father then over around – we had some weirs over on the island, this was Black Island, over across the bay here, we had weirs there, fish weirs. We used to camp over there in the summer, about every weekend I used to go down to Atlantic, that's down to Swan's Island, a little town, Atlantic town, stay over the weekend. It's only about a mile or two, I used to have that outboard to go down and come back. I generally come back Monday morning, that's before I was married, when I was probably seventeen, eighteen, something like that.

RS: So a lot of the other people did not have them yet?

EL: No, it's quite a while before they got to going.

RS: How did you learn, your father never caught lobsters?

EL: No, he never went lobstering, he used to go drag scallops in the winter. When he was younger, he used to go trawling, catch fish same as – haddock and cod and hake.

RS: Why didn't you stick with that and instead went to lobsters?

EL: That kind of went out, there's nobody around here that does that now.

RS: How about when you were young?

EL: I used to go trawling quite a bit, in between lobstering. In the summer, there wasn't much lobstering, I used to go trawling in the summer. A few traps, and I didn't go out in bad weather, used to haul my traps. There wasn't much money going then, old days. [If] you made a living you was lucky.

[00:49:15.12]

RS: When did the weirs start fading out?

EL: Quite a few years ago.

RS: Do you remember about what year?

EL: It's been thirty years since there's been anything in weirs. It's all my wife's father done, he had weirs. There used to be good money in it years ago, but the seiners come in, that seine, and they've ruined the whole thing now, there's very few fish that comes into the bay. What fish they get now, the sardine factories, mostly come from Canada. They fish them hard there but still the fish seem to come. They get them just the same but not on the Maine coast.

RS: What were the weirs, last time you described them, but could you describe it again? I understand more now, it was a net and a stake right?

EL: It was a long spile, you call them, and they have a spile driver and they drive them in off from the shore, just so far off from the shore. They put out a long leader and then they have this round on the outside of it, then they put the net in it. They put brush on the leader to turn the fish off. The fish go around the shore and hit that brush, mostly small birch trees and they'll go right off into this pocket. There's a mouth in it and it's made so that it goes in and the fish go in there and then they keep circling around instead of coming out.

[00:51:19.13]

RS: Do they keep them for a few days? Before they pull it?

EL: Yes, general thing, sometimes they can sell them everyday but they have to shut them up about one day.

[A diagram is sketched out]

RS: Yeah, that's good, I was going to ask for a picture. What would that be? [referring to the sketch]

EL: Yeah, this leader, this goes off from the shore and this is all what we call brushed in. There's an opening right here.

RS: There is what, an opening right here?

EL: The fish comes around from these sides, see, and then they hit this and they will go work in here. That's what they call a heart, this is the outside part and this in here is where the net is, on this part, there's two parts. And then, if you want to keep them in there, there's a gate, you just put a gate down here, a net for a gate.

[00:52:15.01] [End of Audio Part 3]

[Start of Audio Part 4] [00:00:17.12]

RS: So this part in the middle, here, that is all open?

EL: Yeah, that's all open, this is what they call a heart, and this is a pocket out here. They go into this and the fish will circle it around and round this, then after a while, they'll find a way right out into this, out into this part with the twine on it. And then they shut them up, put a gate right across there, then they can pull that twine right up. There's rails around here and they can pull, they go around that and pull that twine right up and, that's the way they take them out. The sardine boat comes right in and lays right along side of this pocket, and they have a derrick with a big net on it, and they dip them right into that part, they haul them up. Nowadays they pump them instead of bailing them; hey have a big pump and when they pump them into these sardine boats, there's a big screen they pump them onto and they run into the hole in the boat, the fish hole. These scales go down through into baskets and the scales are worth really more than the herring, they use them to make artificial pearls, synthetic pearls.

RS: Do they still do that now?

EL: I think so, yeah.

RS: Did your father make his own weirs?

EL: Yeah.

[00:02:17.15]

RS: That is interesting.

EL: A lot of work to it; you've got to work with the tide, when it's slow water you can't do much on the highwater. When you start, you have to go in the woods and get all that material. Costs a

fortune now to build a weir, used to build up around seven hundred dollars, everything. Now, it probably costs three thousand or better.

RS: Did you ever build one yourself?

EL: My brother and I had three weirs, two weirs one summer.

RS: That you built yourself?

EL: Yeah.

RS: When was that?

EL: About 1923, 1924, something like that.

RS: That was before you really got into lobster fishing?

EL: Oh, yeah, I went lobstering a little, few traps.

RS: So your brother taught you a lot about fishing in general?

EL: Yes, a lot.

RS: He just showed you the different things and put you to work?

[00:03:47.13]

EL: I never worked with him too much, but he used to go vessel fishing out of Gloucester and Portland; trawling and sword-fishing when he was younger. Then he come home, he worked with father for quite a while in the weirs and then he went into this dragging fish, that come into. That's about the time that started, we had two or three different draggers. He was a good fisherman, he was one of the first around here to start dragging.

RS: That was around 1923 or later?

EL: From there on, yeah.

RS: But you just slowly got more and more traps yourself.

EL: Yes.



RS: Lobster-catching?

EL: I used to go trawling quite a lot in the summer, I didn't have too many traps when I was first married. First of November, I'd get ready to go scalloping, dragging scallops though, there was more money in that than there was in lobstering then. I had two scallop boats, draggers. I wore them out and I quit, it got so there wasn't too much in it. But now, last few years, the scallops has picked up again and the price is big. I think the scallops are going to start at a dollar and eighty cents a pound, now, this year. They start first of November, I've caught scallops for eighteen cents a pound. [chuckles] There wasn't much money in that, you go out and clear seven or eight dollars you, you was lucky, ten dollars; gasoline was almost as high as it is now.

[00:06:05.19]

RS: That must have been hard. How about the price of lobster? What was it in 1920?

EL: About twenty-five cents; twenty, twenty-five.

RS: Did fishermen ever go on strikes or anything? I heard of one strike.

EL: Well, they had – you could call it a strike, some of them stopped, some of them didn't; made quite a lot of trouble. Some people wanted to go, they didn't think it would make any difference on the price and I never stopped, I kept right on going. Nobody ever bothered me, here was some of them, they'd go aboard the boats and take part of their engines off and throw them overboard or something like that and something that didn't amount to too much.

RS: You mean the strikers did that?

EL: Yeah, some of them thought that it was going to make the price higher, but it didn't make any difference when the lobster started. Wanted to go up when they wanted to put them up; it was the supply and demand.

RS: Where was it, all along the Maine coast?

EL: Yeah.

RS: When was that?

EL: Oh, must have been twenty years ago.

RS: What price did they want?

EL: We was getting thirty-five cents and they dropped them to thirty cents and some of them went to a quarter, and they wanted a higher price; they couldn't go for less than thirty-five cents a pound.

[00:08:05.11]

RS: How did Mr. Rich react, that you sell your lobsters to?

EL: Yeah, I sell them.

RS: Were you selling them to him at that time?

EL: I sold them to his father before [him]. His father sold out and went over to Southwest Harbor to buy and he let his son run this place down here. His father did buy over to Southwest, he died about five, six years ago.

RS: Do you know him very well, personally?

EL: Yes, he's a nice man, he's accommodating; anything you want, he'll get it for you.

RS: How many people does he work with?

EL: He runs practically all himself, he runs a crab factory too; he picks out crabs and he has help, sometimes he has two or three men there, off and on, not steady. Now I think he has mostly boys, weekends and nights, high school boys help him, hard to get anybody.

[sounds of grandson David age 9 and Mrs. Lawson and her daughter Jeanette]

RS: I heard that a lot of fishermen have their own, special way of fastening their warp to the trap?

[00:09:58.28]

EL: Well, some are different, most of them about the same. Yes, they have different ways of tying the warps together the lines, and tying it onto their buoys. Practically all the same way, but not too much difference.

RS: How many traps do you have to a warp?

EL: In deep water I have two, some of these two around the shore, but I don't- kind of a nuisance to me. When you get tangled up with people, why, you get more snarl that way than you would if you had single ones.

RS: When you haul up your traps where do you put your lobsters on the boat?

EL: I generally put them into a pail or something until I get a chance to plug them, put the plugs in the claws, and then I put them in – We have square crates that will hold about fifty pounds and, with doors on, we put them in that and that's what we keep them in, put them overboard at night when we come in.

[00:11:21.2] [End of Audio Part 4] & [End of Tape 726.2]

[00:00:37.0] [Start of Audio Part 5] & [Start of Tape 726.3]

EL: The boats going out of Bass Harbor, they sell every night. They don't car them up, what we call carring. They sell every night so they don't have them on hand.

RS: How long do you car them for?

EL: Oh, about three days generally, three to four days.

RS: If you had a big rainstorm would the fresh water affect them at all?

EL: Well, if it's awful heavy it will sometimes, I don't know as [if] I ever lost a lobster that way. They will sometimes lose them, especially where there's a brook [that] runs out, and near.

RS: Do you leave them right down here? [Referring to his wharf in Goose Cove]

L; Yeah, off where I keep my boat, over on the other side of the cove.

[00:01:32.0]

END OF 10201972-Lawson-Edwin-Interview-WestTremont-MFC

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