

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 13, 1972

TRANSCRIPT BY RITA SWIDROWSKI

EDITED BY DELPHINE DEMAISY

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

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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. Lawson talks about his family and the importance that fishing has had in his life. He talks about his younger days when he went to school and occupied other positions before truly becoming a lobsterman. He talks about his buoys, their colors, materials, and how his sons reuse them.

Key Words: lobsters, scallops, boats, gear, fishermen, family, weiring, dragging, buoys, territory, materials, traps, buoys.

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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RS: Rita Swidrowski

EL: Edwin Lawson

START OF 10131972-Lawson-Edwin-Interview-WestTremont-MFC

[Start of Audio Part 1] & [Start of Tape 726.1]

[00:00:52.0]

Rita Swidrowski: The following is an interview between Rita Swidrowski and Edwin Lawson in his home in West Tremont, Maine. The date is October 13, 1972.

RS: Okay, I will start by asking you where you were born.

Edwin Lawson: Well, I was born right here in Tremont, on Seal Cove, that's up the line here about a couple three miles.

RS: How long did you live around here?

EL: Oh, [here the tape recorder failed to work on battery. The tape resumes again after I plug it in and use it on AC.]

RS: It was the battery.

EL: It was the battery?

RS: It was the battery. So, your father was a sardine fisherman?

EL: He fished weirs, build them off from the shores; fish go into them, and they have lines to pull them up to get them to go into the boats.

RS: And what did his father do, was he a fisherman too?

[00:02:20.0]

EL: No, his father come from England, he was a farmer mostly. He was shipwrecked down in Ship Harbor and that's how he happened to settle here, he and his brother.

RS: How old were you when you started lobster fishing?

EL: Well, I'm seventy-three now and I've been going for forty-nine years this time steady. And of course, I went quite a number of the years before that, I didn't really make a business of it. I had trips out when I was twelve years old.

RS: Who did you go with when you were twelve years old?

EL: Who did I go with? Alone, just myself.

RS: How?

EL: Just a small rowboat, I only had fifteen traps.

RS: Did you sell your lobster at that time?

EL: We used to sell them at twenty-five cents a piece. I did sell them, I guess some of them. The regular fishermen sold them to the pound but they used to buy off us boys; three, four, just for a few traps, bought ours twenty-five cents a piece.

RS: Who bought them from you?

EL: There used to be a boat come around they call a lobster smack, come from Rockland.

RS: Where?

EL: A small vessel, with the well in it too, keep them alive too you know, tight tank.

RS: Were the smacks owned by one person in Rockland?

[00:04:13.0]

EL: No, they was owned by the lobster companies the people that owned, the buyers, A.C. McLewn was in one. [They] used to come to Swan's Island from Rockland and they come from all [over]; from West, Boston, Gloucester, but most of them down this way, the buyers was in Rockland.

RS: I see, when did the smacks stop coming? They don't have them anymore?

EL: No, no it's been quite a few years since the smack were on. I don't know, well they might in some places, you know, around the islands, but on the mainland, they don't really, [they] mostly go by truck. They run them through to Boston or New York, wherever they're from.

RS: Yeah, were there more lobsters at the time you started than now would you say?

EL: Well, I don't know, I don't believe there's too much difference. Mostly there wasn't near as many fishermen then as there is now. There was no small outboards, no kids going, or part time. Now people that's got a good job, just as soon as they get through work, they go lobstering in the afternoon. They never used to think of it then, it's only been the last twenty years I'd say that they've – of course there wasn't any outboards. I had the first outboard around here anywhere; a little two and a half horsepower, I got at Sears Roebucks.

[00:06:12.0]

RS: How old were you then when you had that?

EL: Oh, I was about seventeen.

RS: How many traps did you have at that time when you were seventeen?

EL: Well, I probably had – I was working with my father around weirs and I take up time. I had perhaps thirty-five, forty.

RS: So that was on Swan's Island?

EL: No, that year that was Swan's Island and we had weirs on Swan's Island, we had weirs on Black Island and we had weirs down here at Mitchell's Cove and we had weirs at Placentia.

RS: Now, weirs are the nets actually?

EL: Well, the stakes drove them in the ground really and the net's around them. And then they take a seine and go inside and seine the fish out, and get them up so they can take them out. And then there is some of them has twine that's hung right in the stakes and, they pull them up and take the fish out that way, in small boats and the [unknown], we used to. But now, they take them up and bail the fish right into a sardine boat, big boat. But, there's no weirs, there's no weirs now, the sardine business is all down-hill as far as weirs go, some seiners – but the last few years that's been pretty well shot.

[00:07:58.0]

RS: Did you make your own traps when you first started?

EL: No, I used to go around, pick up second hand ones from my brother or people that condemned them, just patch them up, mostly.

RS: How much would you pay for a trap at that time?

EL: At that time? Oh, I wouldn't know, I never really built many new ones when I was that age. Not very much, at that time, you couldn't buy traps, You could buy laths but you couldn't buy the rest of it, not until later. Now you can buy the bottoms, the frames, and the laths and the boughs. As today would cost about the material to build one, before you start in on it, cost around four dollars.

RS: You said you had gotten them from your brothers, did other people in your family go into lobster fishing too?

EL: Well, they did off and on.

RS: Who else?

EL: Oh, my oldest brother.

[ Next 20 seconds is a break from the interview because Mrs. Lawson's cat was inquisitively looking at the tape recorder. We laugh. Mrs. Lawson comments that he wants to see what's going on and I wait.]

RS: So, who else, your older brother?

[00:09:45.0]

EL: Yes, my oldest brother, my other brother next to me, in between, used to go lobstering off and on. He never made a regular business of it; go fishing in the summer and drag scallops in the winter.

RS: Who was the person who first taught you about lobster fishing?

EL: Oh, I don't know, I used to go with my brother when I was a kid; I suppose that's where I got it from. There's not much to it, just go and set traps, anybody can do that. When you get a lot of traps and make a business of it, that's a different thing, just like everything else.

RS: Do you remember any difficulties at first when you were young, that you had with it?

EL: No, I don't.

RS: What would you say is the first thing that you remember about lobster fishing, an experience or something like that?

EL: Well, I don't know, I used to like to go, but I didn't really go for a living, I just went to pick up a little money and to spend, same as kids will.

RS: What did you like about it besides the money?

EL: Well, I don't know, it was quite interesting. It always quite interested me anyhow before I ever got into it, to make a living out of it. Years ago, seventy-five to a hundred traps was a big string of traps and now, the big fisherman, they run up to a thousand traps. Probably five-hundred, six-hundred's just an average string. I used to run about five hundred or better, now I'm getting older, I only run about four-hundred.

[00:12:03.0]

RS: Is that how many you have in the water?

EL: Yeah, I have about four hundred; I haul a couple hundred each day.

RS: What is the average that fishermen have around this area, would you say?

EL: What, number of traps? Oh, I should say about, anywhere from two hundred to seven hundred, I guess something like that, according to the boat. Some of them have a man with them, I always went alone. When the boys were small, they used to go with me and help me, but I've been alone for just as soon as they got big enough, they wanted a boat and now they can either catch more lobsters than I can.

RS: So you have two sons that fish now?

EL: Yeah.

RS: Where do they do it, around here too?

EL: No, one of them, goes back; he goes out of this cove and the other one goes out in Bass Harbor

RS: So your territory is near your sons' territory, right down here?

[00:13:27.0]

EL: Yeah, well, we all fish in the same areas really. My oldest son fishes outside [Meaning outside Blue Hill Bay] I don't fish outside; I fish Blue Hill Bay out here, I only go about seven months a year. After [the] first of December well, it ain't worth while fishing here in this bay; they have to go outside. I used to take my traps up and go scalloping, drag scallops. I went scalloping about thirty-five winters, all together. I had a different boat, a little bigger boat, and I give that up, fifteen years ago I guess.

RS: How do you scallop, is that completely different?

EL: How do we drag them? Well, they have a big – it's an iron frame with a net in it, they drag along the bottom. They have a wire, a long wire, for the hoister. It runs for the – well some [are] hydraulic and some of them runs right off the engine clutch to hoist them up then. They're quite heavy, they're all iron frame. Some of them drag two; one on each side, the big boats.

RS: Is it as profitable as lobster fishing?

EL: Well, it is now. Of course, they have a closed season on it; the fifteenth, I think it's the fifteenth of April until the first of November it's closed, you can't drag.

[00:15:30.0]

RS: When you first started, what kind of traps did you use?

EL: Oh, we used softwood traps then, now everything's hardwood. Your soft wood trap didn't last more than two years, then worms get into them, the sea worms. And with the hardwood laths, they don't get into the hardwood laths. Well only in certain places that they'll get into them, but that's the only thing. We don't have much trouble with worms with hardwood traps, not unless they happen to be left out all winter, but summer, you haul them up and they'd be all worm-eaten, all gone. Some of them kill them, they soak them in some kind of a – I don't know what it is, Cuprinol I guess; it's preservative and it helps.

RS: I see, how about metal traps? I heard that with metal traps, you do not have trouble with the worms, have you ever tried those?

EL: Well yes I had one, I didn't think much of it. I had it for – somebody gave it to me for samples. I don't know, I didn't catch much of it, they don't use them much here. We'd go out, the big boats that fish offshore, I guess, they use them all together; yeah, the big draggers, the off-shore draggers, lobster catcher. Wooden traps wouldn't last long, the way they have to handle them.

[00:17:32.0]

RS: What style trap do you like, the two heads or one head?

EL: I use a bow trap with, sometimes a spider with three heads and two side heads, two end heads, dummy heads they call them. And then I use some with just one head and a fishing head in one end, I can't see any difference.

RS: What are the dummy heads?

EL: Just, to liven up the ends of the traps they put a net over it, just knitted.

RS: Do you make your own traps now or any of them?

EL: Yeah, I make all my traps and knit all my heads.

RS: How long does it take you, would you say?

EL: Oh, I build anywhere from fifty to a hundred a winter now, you know, I don't work steady at it, I'm all done, well, before spring I have them all headed up.

RS: Do you lose many traps a year?

EL: Yes, what I lose and condemn that gets old, about fifty a year, I figure. I build fifty a winter and just about keeps me stringing up.

RS: What are the heads, what do you use, the nylon twine?

EL: Nylon, yeah; polyethylene.



RS: What did they use to use before nylon?

[00:19:12.0]

EL: Well, they used to use just cotton; cotton heading and then they used what they call manilla. They were heavier, that was better than cotton. With cotton, you had to head your traps up every year, but now, with nylon, they wear a trap out. The traps will be gone sometimes before the heads are so, you save a lot of money. It costs a lot more, the heads do, but in the long run it's cheaper.

RS: Where do you get your materials?

EL: From a lobster dealer, he gets it. You order it from him and he gets it from the mill where they saw out the laths and trap stuff, that's a big business now.

RS: Is that here on the island?

EL: Oh yeah, there's a number of them.

RS: So what kind of wood is it now?

EL: Oak, you can get spruce, but mostly oak.

RS: I see, how far is your territory? How far do you go a day, would you say?

EL: I go up both sides of Blue Hill Bay from Bass Harbor, up as far as Hardwood Island and across the bay and down on the other side, part way down; not clear down, but part way down.

RS: How do you pull up your traps?

[00:21:04.0]

EL: You have a hydraulic hoister. It's a – it runs off the engine, the big pump runs off the engine and the hydraulic motor. You know, the two big discs that's – well they're shaped like that [makes gesture with hands which I can't exactly remember] and the rope goes right in between them and pinches them. And it will haul in them a little thing they call a knife that goes under between the discs that cut that rope out. It don't cut it, it just disengaged it so it will drop down, so it won't wind clear up around. That's how I lost the end of that finger; I got it under the rope, it took it right off, just like a knife.

RS: When was that?

EL: Oh, about two years ago.

RS: Do most of the boats now have those?

EL: Yes, practically all of them.

RS: How heavy are the traps when you pull them out, are they waterlogged?

EL: Well, of course you're cement in them or rocks, you know, the ballast. Oh, I imagine, seventy-five pounds, probably. Some of them ballast heavier than others; I don't ballast mine too heavy, I think probably when they're soaked, some of them weigh a hundred pounds, fifty, seventy-five pounds.

RS: What is a good fair catch for a day, how many lobsters or pounds?

EL: Well, according to how many traps you're running.

RS: Say for you.

[00:22:57.0]

EL: Well, a hundred-fifty pounds is a good haul for me. Some of these outside boats, when the lobsters are running good, they take up [to] four, five hundred pounds, especially double boats. But there's no lobsters outside at times, whereas here in the bay, we get steadier fishing than they do outside, but they don't catch many lobsters really, as they do on the outside.

RS: What's the best time of year for the biggest haul?

EL: Oh, from September through October, November, right here in the bay. That's after they shed, no shell on them, they start crawling. Through the summer there ain't too much, they're under the rocks, shedding.

RS: In the summer?

EL: In the summer, yeah.

RS: You think they are livelier than in the fall?

EL: Well, they crawl more in the fall, coming up from under the rocks and going off, I suppose they're hungry. They've been in under the rocks shedding and getting new shells. You can do better to let those traps, run enough traps so you can let them set over, so that you haul them every other day. What I haul today, I won't haul until day after tomorrow; I'll haul the other half tomorrow, and sometimes three days is better.

[00:24:54.0]

RS: Can they crawl in and then crawl out again, after you set them?

EL: No, they can but not too much now, the way the head in the traps are made. If they set long enough, some of them might get out but the bigger ones will stay trapped; they stay trapped until you haul the traps. Sometimes in the spring, you get lobsters out of it that've been there all winter.

RS: Oh, really! Are they pretty active in the winter, during the day?

EL: No, no there's nothing here in the bay in the winter, they leave the bay altogether. I don't know where they go; whether they go outside or whether they just crawl and hide. [inaudible] But outside they fish all winter but they can't make it pay [the] last few years. There used to be pretty good fishing out there in the winter, but now, most everybody goes shrimping now.

RS: Why do they leave, is it the temperature of the water?

EL: I don't know why it is, but we got deeper water here in the bay then they have outside until they get way off[shore]. We have places here in the bay where there's fifty fathoms, three hundred feet.

RS: How many men fish in Blue Hill?

EL: Oh I wouldn't know, they fish from all up down Blue Hill and Swan's Island and they fish in the bay, right at the bay. Some of them fish outside, of course, but most of the people live inside the bay. They practically all fish in the bay, not too many go outside. But the Bass Harbor boats, like that in Southwest Harbor, they fish outside altogether, practically altogether.

[00:27:05.0]

RS: So they are out in the open ocean?

EL: Yeah, they're out in the ocean.

RS: How do they get along here with each other in the bay?

EL: Oh, pretty good. There's some feuding but there's not too much. [laughter] Oh, I never heard of every once in a while they have a spell somebody will – they think somebody's doing something to them, they'll cut their gear, but not too much. Since I've been going, I've never had any trouble, not too much. What trouble we have in the bay is we can't fish Sundays and that leaves Sunday for the – well a lot of the summer people do it, you know, campers like that. They've got the outboards and they'll haul your traps.

RS: Oh, really? What would you do if you knew who was doing it?

EL: Well if the warden catches them – it's quite hard to catch them, these outboards now, some of them go forty miles an hour and [laughs a little] they couldn't catch them if they wanted to, but they don't try to catch them. We've only got one warden here in this whole area.

RS: In the whole bay?

[00:28:30.0]

EL: In this whole bay and all along this coast here for part of the coast and Southwest Harbor to Swan's Island, I think there's only one warden. There's one up in the bay, one up in Blue Hill; that's one of our main troubles. We ought to have more wardens, with a trap, you don't have much protection. When you leave a trap [unknown] across the bay, around them islands, there's nobody [who] lives over there and these outboards, or anybody, can haul them if they want to. But we don't have much trouble amongst the fishermen, natives, like that so much as it is the outsiders, especially in the summer. This time of year, we don't have much trouble, that's why I say they ought to have a higher license cost; say a hundred dollars instead of ten. You can get a lobster license, now anybody can for ten dollars; kids, anybody. They ought to have it, if it was a hundred dollars, they could hire more wardens, they could put more wardens. And it would keep a lot of this part-time fishermen and kids out of it. That's one of our troubles here in the bay is part-time fishermen and the kids, all the kids, you know, going.

[00:30:12.0]

RS: How do...

EL: They say they don't, they don't make much difference with their lobstering because they only run a few traps, but you take fifteen or twenty with a few traps and that's a lot.

RS: Gee, well how do you establish your territory? And how do you say the kids go around?

EL: They all mix now.

RS: Oh, they do?

EL: Years ago it was more everybody had their own territory, so many boats, but people didn't come into it. But now they – a stranger can come right in and fish right with you and think nothing about it. I guess in places they don't dare to, but I know here in Blue Hill Bay, there's – I guess anybody can fish it that wants to, as far as I know, there's nobody [that] bothers them. They do a lot of talking but then, [laughter] they don't do nothing.

RS: They get pretty mad then?

EL: I guess out the west on the other side [of] the bay I guess they don't mix in with that crowd too much.

RS: Where is that?

EL: Around Swan's Island, Stonington, over that way; they don't talk to strangers too good.

RS: Just in general people know they should not go on in there. Are people fishing in your area, in general?

EL: Oh yeah, they fish right here; they fishermen, one or two every year fishes right along with us. It's just, if they fish a few days [unknown], just one of us, nobody bothers them.

[00:32:04.0]

RS: What colors are your buoys?

EL: Mine's orange and white.

RS: Is there any reason why you picked those colors?

EL: No, you've got to pick a color that's – there's so many colors, you got to pick a color that's easy to see; orange, and, white is a good color. Orange, especially on the water, is one of the best colors. There's more orange on buoys now than any other color, they've got them mixed in with red and green and marked up different.

RS: Is it bright orange?

EL: Yes, fluorescent orange.

RS: Yeah, you use wooden buoys?

EL: No, I use plastic altogether, foam.

RS: The styrofoam?

EL: Uh, uh.

RS: When did you switch, did you switch over recently?

EL: No, well I've been doing it gradually for [the] last ten years.

RS: Are they better?

EL: Well yes, they're really better because they don't soak up. Take a wooden buoy after they've been out for three or four months, they get heavy, whereas the plastic buoys; they never get heavy. They've all just the same, you can take them in one day and paint them the next whereas a

wooden buoy, you've got to dry them out for months sometimes before you can.

RS: Did you use to make your own buoys too?

EL: I used to.

RS: What kind of wood did you use?

EL: Cedar, they all – cedar's the best; lighter, they won't soak like spruce.

[00:33:55.0]

RS: How long is your line? Can you describe the buoy and the traps are set up?

EL: Well according to where you fish, if you're fishing on the shore, well I use fifteen fathom and then you go off a ways and you got to use thirty fathom, twenty fathom, thirty fathom to forty-five fathom here in the bay. Right now, after this time of year, the lobsters are moving off from shore; I use thirties, and forty-five fathom altogether, practically altogether, some fifteens.

RS: Is it called a pot warp?

EL: Yeah, that's nylon, dacron.

RS: How thick is it?

EL: Five-sixteenths of an inch, most of it, some of them use heavier, most of its five-sixteenths.

RS: Now there are two buoys?

EL: No, we use one big buoy on top and then about halfway down, part way down, we use what we call a toggle. It's just a small one that keeps the warp up from dragging on the bottom, catching on the rocks, and it helps the buoy float better when the tides running.

RS: And what is that made of?

EL: That's same; foam, styrofoam, plastic.

RS: Is it the exact same as a buoy?

EL: No, its small, smaller than a buoy, and that's underwater most of the time.

[00:35:53.0]

RS: When you first started lobstering, did you have a license then?

EL: No, I didn't have a license then; you didn't have [to], you had to have your name on the buoy, that's all. You didn't have to have a license, I think sometime about 1920, 1923 I think is when they started having numbers, I'm not sure.

RS: Numbers on the buoys?

EL: Yeah, you had to have a license and a number.

RS: How did the fishermen react to the fact that they had to get a license?

EL: Oh I guess they didn't say much about it, I guess they took it as it come.

RS: Did you think it was a good idea, then, at the time?

EL: Well, I don't know, I don't hardly remember much about that, probably there was a lot of kicking about it.

RS: Yeah, what kind of boat did you use?

EL: Oh, I've had three boats; I had one small boat, once about twenty-two feet, and then I had another one and she was thirty-one, and this one I got now is twenty. I had this one built, this one is twenty-eight feet. When I was seventeen, eighteen years old, you could have a boat built for ten dollars a foot, and eleven years ago, I had this one built, it was a hundred dollars a foot. And I imagine now it'll be probably a hundred and fifty dollars a foot, I don't know.

[00:38:10.0]

RS: The boat you had when you were seventeen, did it have a motor or not?

EL: When I was that age, I think I had about twenty-two, twenty-three foot; a single cylinder motor. That's all they used to use many years ago; single-cylinder, and then they started running the four-cylinder engines. Now almost everybody has got either a four or six or an eight and, well there's a lot of them got bigger boats and about all got diesel engines now. About a hundred, a hundred and fifty horsepower diesels. They run a lot cheaper. It costs me about six dollars a day to run. I got a gasoline engine, a hundred and thirty-five horsepower. And my son's got an eighty-horse diesel and he can run seven days for twelve dollars, that's quite a saving. Of course, the diesel costs more to start with, and the overhaul was more, but if anybody's going to make a business of it, well a diesel's the coming thing now. I don't like them, I'd rather pay a little more for gasoline. Gasoline engines' much quieter, and less vibration; the diesel's got a lot of vibration and they're awful noisy. Of course, they're quite smelly too but, you know, smell like kerosene, but I don't mind that part. I can't stand that vibration, the high compression and they seem to be rattling all the time.

[00:40:09.0]

RS: What color is your boat?

EL: It's white and the – well it's kind of a brown trim on deck and on the house.

RS: And, how many years have you had it?

EL: This one, this new one, eleven years.

RS: Eleven years, do you have to display your colors on the boat?

EL: Yeah, we have to have our colors on top of the house so they can see them.

RS: Are there any accidents that you've heard of around here?

EL: Well, yes there's a boat [that] burned up, just up the bay here, about last week. Fiberglass boat, they're using a lot of fiberglass boats now.

RS: What happened?

EL: He backed – I think it backfired and he was right near the shore and he beached her and she burned right up. And he got out, and he wasn't hurt. That was a nine, ten thousand dollar boat.

RS: Oh, are there any drownings that you have heard of?

[00:41:48.0]

EL: Well, there was one here this summer; part-time fisherman, he was camping down to one of the islands, down Blue Hill, Black Island and he was out in a small boat. I guess the outboard stopped and it was rough, and he went back to clear something out of the wheel, she filled over the stern, she was a small boat with a big motor on her. Well, he had to, there was a woman with him and she swim ashore. She held him up as long as she could, he couldn't swim, I guess. And they got his – they found him the next day, and he was a contractor here, one of the contractors. He had all kinds of machinery too you know, road work, like that.

RS: Do you know how to swim?

EL: Well, I don't know, I used to [laughing]. It's been a long while, I could swim some but I was never too much at it.

RS: Would you say most fishermen know how?

EL: Well, it's a good – I'll bet half of them can't swim. It was pretty hard to swim, if you'd go overboard with your oil clothes on and boots too, to get them off to swim.



RS: What do you wear on a day when you go out?

EL: What do you mean, oil clothes? I put on my oil clothes when I get aboard the boat, of course, and I wear boots and high boots, and just the clothes, just the same as I got on now. This time of year, I put on a heavy shirt under my oil clothes.

RS: What are oil clothes?

[00:44:04.0]

EL: That's just like rain clothes, you know. I don't know what they call them; neoprene I guess, I think they're made in Norway. There's pants, [they] come up and strap to your shoulder and then there's a coat, they're waterproof. Some kind of fabric, I don't know what it is, its nylon. [With] some kind of coating over it, I think. Years ago, there they used to have [them], it was made out of cotton and oiled. They put something in the oil so the oil stayed on the outside of them, made a coating, but they wasn't near as good as they are now.

RS: Would they make them themselves?

EL: No, no, you could buy a whole suit for about, well I can't remember when they was a dollar a piece, two dollars, now we have to pay twenty dollars a suit.

RS: Where do you get them now?

EL: At the dealers, that's where we sell lobsters, they have all that stuff.

RS: How long do they last?

EL: Oh, they last about a season, pretty near a season, if you don't happen to have a hard luck and tear them.

RS: What, and then they wear off after?

EL: Yeah, yes, the stuff wears off [of] them. I say they'll go for around six months maybe, sometimes not so much.

[00:45:58.0]

RS: How about the boots? How long do they last?

EL: Oh, I can get about a year out of a pair.

RS: When you were about seventeen, what did you use to wear then, when you would go out fishing?

EL: Oh, I don't know, probably just about the same; boots and oil clothes.

RS: You have done other jobs besides lobstering?

EL: Yes, I've worked in the spring, in the fall I used to work up in a summer place up shore here a ways, I worked up there for about seventeen and eighteen years off and on. In between the lobster and scallop season when there wasn't much doing. Then, I was down South one winter on a yacht.

RS: When was that?

EL: 1919

RS: What did you do on the yacht?

EL: I was lance man, I run the lance, the help lance. They used to take the crew ashore on their leave and get groceries and like that. Then there was a couple of years I was chauffeur, between Mans, over here to Manset. And Worcester, Massachusetts, and Pasadena, California, that's where the cottage was, in California, all around the southern part of California.

RS: When was that? When did you go to California?

EL: About 1922 I guess, somewhere around 1922, 1923.

[00:48:10.0]

RS: So, after you did the other work you came back to lobstering?

EL: Yes, since I was married, that's all I've done, lobstered and scalloped.

RS: Do you like it more than the other jobs?

EL: Yes I like it, of course, I can't do same as I used to, I used to go from daylight to dark. I can't do it now; I leave here before daylight, and after two, three o'clock I've [laughing] had enough.

RS: Did you ever want to do anything else for a living when you were younger?

EL: Well, I thought I did when I was younger, I went to a YMCA automobile school in Boston one winter, and I went to commercial college two winters in Rockland, but I found out that I [laughs] wasn't cut out for [it], I guess I wasn't smart enough. [RS: laughs lightly] Oh I was alright on the automobile business, I got my diploma in nine weeks, in automobile school. I liked that but, I guess, went to commercial college to pass the time away anyhow, I guess.

[00:49:35.0]

RS: Do you have any special time in your life that you really enjoyed lobstering, any best years?

EL: Oh, when I first started in, It wasn't – we had it pretty well to ourselves. Here two or three [fishermen] in the bay and you could fish where you wanted to and nobody would bother you. They wouldn't chase you around, you know, same as they do now. I've been so long that they [younger fishermen] think I know the bottom a lot of them, same as an old hand will and well, [they will] kind of follow you along. But, it wouldn't work if you – when I started in, if you done that, well you were liable to lose traps but, nowadays they don't.

RS: If you followed other people?

EL: Yeah [laughter] if you mixed in with some of these, of the fellows you do, they didn't think much of it. They'd cut you off, but now they don't think anything of it, they must mix in with everybody.

RS: When you were twenty, what did most other young men around here do for a living?

EL: Well, in the summer, a lot of them used to go yachting. There used to be a lot of yachting jobs in the summer and then there was a lot of work over here on the park. At that time, Rockefeller had a big job; he employed a lot of men. And different jobs, there wasn't too many who went lobstering, not when I started in.

RS: Why do you think you did?

EL: Oh I guess just because I was always on the water, I thought it was an easy life.

RS: Is it a good feeling being out on the water?

EL: Oh yes, in the summer I see the sun come up from across the bay about every morning, and I plan on leaving here before daylight, every morning. Now it's getting bad weather, well days are shorter and we don't leave so early.

[00:52:15.0] [End of Audio Part 1]

[Start of Audio Part 2] [00:00:19.0]

RS: Does it ever get lonely out there when you are in the boat?

EL: No, [laughing] I don't get lonely in the boat. [laughter]

RS: Do the summer people ever really get in the way now?

EL: No, no they don't bother much. Like I say, on the weekends, that's when we have a lot of traps bothered and of course we'd lay to the summer people, like that, but of course there's a lot of natives that will do it, you know, on picnics. They don't make a business of it, sometimes,

some weekends, they don't bother, but you never know when they're going to.

RS: Has anybody ever cut off your traps?

EL: Yes, I've had traps cut off, sometimes you mistrust [meaning "suspect"] who's doing it, and other times it's pretty hard to tell. I never accused anybody but, lots of times in my own mind, [laughter] I know who did.

RS: Do you think most of the men are pretty honest?

EL: I think so, yeah they never – that is around here that I fish with a good bunch, can't complain.

RS: What did you use to do around here when you were not fishing for fun?

[00:02:11.0]

EL: Oh I don't – I've always been fishing since I've been around here [laughs], and outside working ashore in the spring, fall, I used to lobster until [the] first of November. Then, I went scalloping until the season ended and then by that time, I got my boat painted up, it was time to go lobstering again, I just kept going right around. Now I don't go scalloping [mumble]. About all I do in the winter is lobster [in] December. Just build traps and perhaps paint my house a little bit or something like that, I don't work very hard.

RS: Well, how about when you were younger, did you socialize with the other fishermen and go to dance or anything like that?

EL: No, I never went to dance; I used to go out to dances but I never danced.

RS: Did they get together around here, the lobstermen?

EL: Oh, I guess they do, I don't know, I don't go out any.

RS: So your father lived right up that road? [meaning going right from Mr. Lawson's house]

[00:04:00.0]

EL: No, my father lived right across this church up there in that yellow house across this side. But, well when he was first married, that was my mother's home when I was born, up there in Seal Cove. This way, going to the right and then we moved down this same house now, but he didn't own it then, I guess he just rented it. And then he owned a place down, farther down on the point and then we went from there to Swan's Island and then he moved back off of there, I guess it was only about seven or eight years and then moved down to Bass Harbor. And then, from there, he bought another place in Mitchell's Cove. Then he come back up here in this house, here this was the last house he owned up here by the church.

RS: The yellow house?

EL: Yeah.

RS: How come he moved around?

EL: Oh, I don't know, he was just taking advantage of shore fronts and tab locations where he was. See, he could make a little money one way and he shifted around. He used to make good money weiring but the last of it, the weiring was bad and he didn't make much the last of it going.

RS: How many kids were in your family?

EL: Five.

RS: And there are just two other brothers?

EL: Two, two brothers and two sisters I had. My oldest brother and oldest sister died a few years ago.

[00:06:02.0]

RS: Do you like it around here?

EL: I like it here as well as anywhere, as long as my work is here, I wouldn't like it here if I wasn't working here. But it don't make any difference to me where I am, wherever I'm working. I got quite a lot of land, I can run around on my own. I own pretty near over to that white house over there, over to this one, right down the shore, all this land in here, I bought it a few years ago. We got a wharf down in here, there's a creek up in there, we got a wharf there, that's where we go from. I just put a new road in, that road right there that goes just down across from right there you can see it, we put it last winter. [Pointing out the living room window which faces the shore. The road is across the street and to the right of the house.]

RS: That goes down to the shore?

EL: That goes right down to my wharf, my son and I put it in together.

RS: Was it a big investment to build a wharf?

EL: That road cost me eighteen hundred dollars. My son's building a new wharf down there, I've got a wharf down there but he's building a new one right alongside of it.

RS: That's where your boat is, right down there?

EL: No, we have to keep our boats off from the harbor. The tide runs out here so, drive in low at water. That's the worst trouble with it, we have quite a long ways to row in the morning, [and] night.

RS: Oh I see, how far do you have to row?

EL: Oh, it must be, I don't know, a quarter of a mile out there, I guess.

[00:08:05.0]

RS: What harbor is it now, Bass Harbor? [I was not thinking of cove and harbor as being synonymous]

EL: No, this is Goose Cove, this is West Tremont; the post office is West Tremont but this is Goose Cove. And there's a cove up this way, Seal Cove and the one just below it is Duck Cove, and the one there is Bass Harbor. And then you go out around the point from Bass Harbor until you're in Southwest Harbor.

RS: Oh, I see! I will have to look at a map of it; I know it by the roads, but not from the water. So you just keep a rowboat down there?

EL: Yeah, we have two or three rowboats down here, my grandson goes, he got a boat, he goes a lot.

RS: How old is he?

EL: He's about twenty, twenty-one, I guess.

RS: So he fishes as a regular full-time thing?

EL: Yeah, yes, he's got a boat, yeah. He was just married here, about a month ago.

RS: Do you have a lot of grandchildren that are fishing now or other relatives?

[00:09:16.0]

EL: Yes, my other boy's got a son that's fishing. He's just come out, he's been in the Navy. That's the only two I got down this way. I got one, lives in Lynn, he just puts out a few traps in the summer, Marblehead, somewhere down that way, just to fool around with. When he comes down here in the summer on his vacation he's got quite a big car, he takes some of my old traps that I've condemned and patches them up and takes them back up there [laughter] and fishes. I give him old buoys and ropes so they don't cost him anything. In Massachusetts, where he goes, he can run ten traps I think, for ten dollars a license. And the regular fishermen there have to pay a hundred dollars for a license and that's what it should be right here in Maine. And they ought to put a limit on the age limit, I think it ought to be sixteen years old anyhow before they can get a

license.

[00:10:42.0]

RS: Now would that be legal if he takes your buoys down there, with the colors?

EL: Oh yeah, he has to paint them over you know, and as long as he's got his number on them, his license number, that's all right. Mostly old wooden buoys that I don't use, he takes them.

RS: Did you teach your sons?

EL: Well I suppose so, they went with me ever since they was that high, you couldn't keep them ashore. Just as soon as they got big enough to go for themselves with a boat they just left. A big help when they were going with me. When you do it all alone, it slows you down. A lot to it.

[00:11:52.0] [End of Audio Part 2] & [End of Tape 726.1]

[Start Audio Part 3] [00:00:33.0]

RS: What would they do to help you?

EL: Plug lobsters and bait pockets, like that.

RS: What do you use for plugs?

EL: For what?

RS: What do you use for the plugs? Wooden?

EL: Oh, I use wooden plugs. Some of them use elastic bands and some of them use plastic plugs. Elastic bands are really the best, because they have the little, like a pair of scissors, that open the bands, they put them on over the claws and the lobster can't open his claw. The other way you've got to stick that plug right down into where the joint in his claw. And after they do that, they car them up, to hold them up.

[Here the tape ran out. We continued to talk about lobster plugs for a while and then moves on to a more general conversation.]

[00:01:54.0]

END OF 10131972-Lawson-Edwin-Interview-WestTremont-MFC

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