APPENDIX H

TRANSCRIPTS OF TRAPPING INTERVIEWS

December 4, 2004
10:00 AM, Nanticoke Community Center
Oak Orchard, Delaware

Charlie Davis (Charlie) (Photograph H-1)
Chief Tee Norwood (Tee)
Tran Norwood (Tran)
Chris Espenshade (CTE)

SIDE 1: RECORDED INSIDE AT NANTICOKE COMMUNITY CENTER

CTE: One of the first questions I have is a very general question. The Nanticoke ... other group's names for the Nanticoke, the Nanticoke as sometimes referred to as "The Trappers." There is also another variation that means "those that cut logs across streams," making natural bridges to set traps on. I'm wondering, as you grow up, what were you told about trapping? Was this considered an important part of your heritage?

Charlie: Well, I'm the oldest. I'm probably the only one (present) who really goes back to the trapping period, to tell the truth. By the time I came along, the trapping was more or less for food for the table. Celeste Harmon, a couple of years older than me, and when we were in elementary school, he trapped for muskrats. Rob Hintons trapped for muskrats. Mr. Link Hintons trapped for muskrats. But most everybody else trapped for rabbits. A few people, if they caught a raccoon, it was alright. But most of the rabbit traps was too small for a raccoon anyway. And nobody trapped for furs particularly, except for the muskrats, the trappers that I recall. Now, we lived in this area. I was born in this area, moved to Philadelphia, and moved back in 1928. And from 1928 until 1936, I trapped during the rabbit season regularly. It started November 15th and ended on January 1st, so you only had a month-and-a-half of legal trapping. And we always used box traps for that.

CTE: What people call rabbit gums?

Charlie: Yeah. We never trapped for opossums, but opossums would occasionally be in a trap. We didn't trap for raccoons, because the traps were basically too small for a raccoon anyway. We didn't trap for foxes because it was illegal, and you'd have to be doing it for fur anyway. But we did trap for birds. Now, we didn't make a deadfall like you saw there. We took an old barn door and put it out next to a fodder stack somewhere in the wintertime on the sunny side where the snow melted first, on the way to hay stacks or fodder stacks, birds, particularly doves, would come there for gravel. You just used a wooden stake about one foot high and put it under the door at an angle, and have a long string and let it run over to the barn so then you could hide. Sprinkle cracked corn or something down in the space where the snow had melted, and the birds would soon learn to come there. One or two the first day, half a dozen the next day, and a dozen the next day. Then you just sprinkle the cracked corn so that it was underneath the door. When you see you've got a fairly large amount of turtle doves there, you snatch the string. And the door would fall down on them, and you just take them out one at a time, and kill them and pick them, and have a turtle dove pot pie or whatever. That's the kind of trapping that I grew up with. Now, Uncle Walt knew how to ... he trapped for a living. He didn't work, or if he did he worked very little, but he always had food for the table. He married my father's sister. Basically he lived off the land. He always had a route that he trapped too, but he used box traps, but he liked to use a hollow log. Take a hollow log, cut a section out along the top and fix it just like a box trap. Except it was more natural. He had better luck with inquisitive squirrels and rabbits and such than we did with a box trap, because a box trap was just made out of sawed timber.

Photograph H-1. Nanticoke informant, Charlie Davis.

But a hollow log was round, and you could fix the doors so it would slide down in there. We didn't use the weight-loaded trapping device, we always used a center piece that had a Y in it, that you stick down in the center of it, a hole in the back and a door in the front, and a cross piece that crossed over the Y with two little hangers on it. And the hole in the back, we used to use shingle, that would go down into the hole and have a little notch in it, and let it catch underneath of the top, and anything coming into it would just knock it back a little bit, and it would go up and the door would go down, and that's the way we trapped. We found that to avoid friction. But for bigger things, they had a treadle in the bottom of the trap, and the weight of it would press down. When you pressed down it pulled a little keyway out of the lid, and the lid would fall down. Those are the two ways we had. That was usually for something heavy. A rabbit doesn't weigh much and it worked better to let him kick it than his own weight. So, we never trapped for geese or ducks or anything like that, but I understand that some people years ago did, but basically we just trapped for rabbits and if we caught something else...

Now, I walked a trapline every morning during that period I was telling you about, and it was always a pleasant surprise for Mom or Daddy if I brought one or two rabbits in two or three times a week, you know. It was food for the table, and that was better than hunting with a gun, although I like to do both of them.

Tee: Didn't you set rabbits traps ... easier, had better luck near a hedgerow than you did out...

Charlie: Yes, any kind of place where we saw a rabbit run. A hedgerow, the edge of a field, the edge of the woods, on a woods road. You didn't just set them down helter skelter. You wanted to get them somewhere that the rabbit used. Or a briar batch. Where you've seen several run that they've made in those areas.

I was big enough by 1931 or 32 to live in Amos Hall's old house. My trapping route was to go across the road, go through the woods in front of Mr. Harry Mose's, and then make a right and make a loop that came out at Herschel Davis's, and then come back across the field by Steve's house – that was all young pines and hedge there – and back home. And I had to do that each morning before I went to school.

CTE: What kind of distance is that, do you think?

Charlie: That distance, half mile?

Tran: About a mile.

Tee: Half mile to a mile.

Charlie: And that was something you did every morning. That was before breakfast or anything else. Had a little .22 that I carried with me, just to feel like I had something to protect me. We never used a .22 on a rabbit if we caught it. Just hit it behind the head and that was the end of it. I just trying to think if there was anything more to it than that. Just about 6 weeks of it, that was all, about 6 to 8 weeks.

Tee: When you say hit the back of the head, nobody shot a rabbit in a trap. ***garbled*** Now somebody sent us back in here to check these rabbits traps. Of course, it was closed. And *** was a big shot, he's got a shotgun, and that one trapped, and he is going to show me how good a hunter he is. We took it out in the middle of an open field, where, you know, he was going to

have a good chance. We opened that thing and we had no rabbit. He shot at it, and it was gone.

Now didn't Uncle Walt make... wasn't it considered eel traps?

Charlie: Yeah, he trapped in the water. I never did do that.

Tee: Uncle Walt had crab traps and eel traps.

Tran: A lot of seining going on.

Charlie: Yeah, they did a lot of that. He lived on the water half the time and the other half he was in the woods. See Uncle Walt and Uncle Elwood were brothers. And Uncle Elwood was the one that usually made the eel traps. And Uncle Walt and Uncle Warren and them were the ones that used them. But, to make those traps, Uncle Elwood had a form that he used, that you started around a circular bottom with it platting. Then after he got the bottom made, then he had a form that surrounded it and you weaved in and out all around it to keep them down tight. The only thing I could never figure out was how he made his slats so even. I talked to Uncle Walt about it, but he said that he always split his wood to have pretty near the right width, and then just shave it straight down with the grain. And if it wasn't quite like he wanted it, he used a scraper to get the right thickness and all that he wanted. But he followed the form all the way up to the top. But when you get to the top, you had to... for the eel trap, he made the lid to fasten onto it, rather than as a part of it. That you could unlatch it. But the entrance to it was made so that the fish could come into it and couldn't back out. (A sketch made at this point, illustrated the funnel-like entrance). That's why he had to have that form there, to keep it uniform. But he had some big ones and some small ones. And he also could make baskets and stuff like that. But I don't know if I'm getting you where you want or not.

CTE: That's fine. With rabbits, did you ever know anybody to use snares for rabbits?

Charlie: Box traps was too convenient for us. I think Mr. Link Hennings and Mr. Joshua, I think they may have been familiar with snares and all. But that's a generation older.

Tee: I've heard old folks say that they did, anyway.

CTE: Is anybody trapping this area now?

Charlie: I don't know of a soul that's trapping now. Do you?

Tran: We do a little just for fun. And its basically to restock rabbits. Trap them and move them where you want them.

Charlie: Charlie Noah did that, when he was a manager down there. He would set traps for them down there and bring them home and put them in briar patches at everybody's house.

Tran: We went raccoon hunting *****Ridge and there was a lot of muskrat in Henley's Cove.

CTE: Muskrats, they're wading for that, they're not using boats?

Charlie: Hip boots.

Tran: Now they're metal traps, and you have to put them in muskrat runs.

CTE: Were there any species – obviously rabbit was eaten and opossum – were there any species that were not eaten?

Charlie: Actually, as far as I know, now I've heard old folks talk about it. All our rabbits always looked alike by me. Cottontail rabbit. But they did say at one time they had branch rabbit and marsh rabbits that were slightly larger, and traveled farther than the average household cottontail. But I don't know. Tran, do you know about that?

Tran: I've heard people say it, and then some rabbits have been introduced down along here, but that was in later years. You know, J.B. and Rick S, you know Uncle Walt's son.

Tee: There was one time, and it was somebody's pet or something got loose, but it was a jackrabbit. It was around your place, because I saw it one time. And I thought, I was going crazy, I ain't never seen anything with ears that long. And I heard other times. I don't know if anybody talked to you, but I believe Burrell's was one. Now whether somebody got this...

Charlie: Now I can tell you what the story is on that. When I was little. I say little. Early teens, 12, 13, something like that. I'm trying to think of their names. Old Man Littleduff and Ferris Ellensworth and two or three of the businessmen in Millsboro would always send out west and get jackrabbits and bring them in before Thanksgiving. And on Thanksgiving, that was only a couple of weeks after the beginning of the hunting season, on Thanksgiving it was tradition that they would have a big fox chase. And then after the fox chase was over, they'd turn one jackrabbit loose, and let the dogs chase him by sight. And they would do that, and sometimes the old jackrabbit would get away and be in the area. I've been with them when they did that a couple of times down to Uncle Ramsey's, Sam's, and up on that road. Now the problem was that the jackrabbits didn't know the territory. And when you let one out and the dogs get after it, it runs roads, runs right through chicken yards, up people's lanes and stuff like that. He's trying to get away, but he doesn't know our woods territory or anything, and most the time the dogs catch him. If they catch him right away, they catch him when he gets tired. They were running by sight. Sometimes, they go through a chicken yard and get away, and you'd see them around. Other than that, about the only thing I remember seeing other than our rabbits would be the tame rabbits, people would raise them and let them out, to train there dogs with and stuff like that. But that's how the jackrabbits got here.

Tee: I knew ... I didn't think I'd gone crazy.

Charlie: They run with their ears up and their tails down. Our rabbits run with their ears down and their tail up.

CTE: Trapping, was it strictly a male activity?

Charlie: I guess it was, excepting that women in the household were pleased when ... But I don't know of any women that actually trapped. Their husbands or their sons was the ones that usually did it.

Tran: I just wonder if Idie Simmons would be the exception.

Charlie: She might have been since she grew up in that family. She might have grown up with that as part of her background. So many in that family. I'd say if any of the girls did it, she'd be the one.

CTE: Did you ever hear of anybody trapping deer?

Charlie: We never trapped none. We never had any deer here until – let's see I'm trying to remember – 1953, 54 somewhere in there.

Tee: And then they were scarce. It was special to see a deer.

Charlie: I killed my first deer when we moved from Sage house over to Aunt Mabel's. I was driving Coris' school bus at the time and we had the 59 chevy. Went down to Tuttle's, down there, I'm trying to think of, on the right hand side, Pot-Nets, Pot-Nets. I went in by Freddy Burton's and walked up that way, and they drove from the other side and the deer came out that way and a killed one doe and brought it home. Had it in the trunk of this 59 chevy. I was kind of proud of my first deer, and Barbara looked at it and cried "Daddy, how could you?" And that was the end of the deer hunting.

Tee: Yeah, because when you saw a deer, you stood and watched. And they were mostly around the marsh, and rushes, and stuff like that. Now they're everywhere.

CTE: It sounds like we've already covered this, but were there set trapping territories?

Tee: For certain families?

Charlie: They trapped near the house, that's all. And you hunted everywhere.

Tee: Times have changed. Any woods, anywhere, nobody cared. Walk across their fields. Ride a horse across their field. Any of that. Now, if you get out the room, you're in trouble.

CTE: I was telling Tee earlier, where I grew up, you could walk out the door with a gun and in a mile be out in the woods and the fields. Nobody cared in the neighborhood, it was just oh there going off hunting. Nowadays, you step on the street with a gun...

Charlie: First it was the holly. You used to hunt holly and cedar anywhere. I guess before that it was poles for hay and fodder. You find a nice tree and cut it down for the center piece. Then it got where they didn't want you to do that. Then you'd cut holly, then they didn't want you to do that. Then you'd cut cedar, then they didn't want you to do that. Then they didn't want you to rabbit hunt on them, and now they don't want you to walk on them.

Tee: And I guess the important thing is liability now. People will sue ... Some of it.

Tran: I think its more selfishness than anything else, to tell the truth.

CTE: Do you guys have bear out here?

Tran: No.

Charlie: You have to get on over in Maryland. Daddy's got a tree back there, back of Maguns?? Myrtles, there's carved in the tree that he got a bear, but he says he was just a boy that carved that in there with a pocket knife.

We do have an occasional mountain lion and wildcat that comes down the corridor toward Lewes along the Ocean line. Down the Delaware River. When I was, in 1938, when I was up in Dover, I recall one of the dairy farmer's son's had gone out to milk the cows, and he used his .22 to kill a little wildcat that had come up around the barn there. It was one of the first ones they'd seen in this territory but we've seen a few since. Wes Ray used to tell all these kinds of tales about Uncle Elwood and the wildcats down in Angola. But I think he was just telling tall tales.

Tee: Knowing the source... he was good for a tale or something like that.

CTE: How about otters?

Charlie: Oh yeah, we've have otters. I don't know anybody that specifically tried to trap them, but occasionally they get caught in a muskrat trap. I heard Mr. Link Henson saying that he had seen them caught in muskrat traps down along the neck.

Tee: Is that where one was killed three or four years ago? Burton's farm.

Tran: Probably a beaver. I believe 2 or 3 beaver got killed there.

Tee: What's the other? There's a beaver, an otter ... and the other one that looks similar? I think it's a short name. It's similar to ... I think I just read something and people sometimes mistake it for an otter. You say the name and I'll recognize it.

CTE: A mink moves like an otter, but is a lot smaller.

Tee: No. I think this was smaller. I think they called it something else. Same family. Now that's where you're talking about, where they would catch the, Mr. Link Henson would cross along that same branch of water going up in there. Of course, beaver... when I was a kid, a beaver dam out there near Gussy Wright, Gussy Wright.

Tran: You know there are still trees on Tullis Golf Course that beaver chewed on. He left those. We located those, and he left them.

Charlie: I've seen them up there, trees they had gnawed on, up there at Brewton Farm. Felled a few but I don't know if they successfully ever dammed it up.

Tee: Well, I guess they vanished after development?

Tran: There's still a few around. They've reintroduced them from time to time because Al and those guys dropped two off at Art Summell at White Creek. And they wound up in my backyard. Because they followed the branch up. But they got hit. And that seems to be the problem with most stuff like that. Traffic.

Tee: We've got traffic.

Charlie: I was hunting back of Brewton's farm, almost to the development back there, and I saw where they had dammed up some of it back in there. And I had to walk across part of it to get to the dogs. I found an eagle in there that had got caught up in fishing line and had died, but hadn't completely decomposed. I don't know, I didn't handle it. I don't know how it got tangled, but obviously somebody had been fishing there and maybe that eagle swooped down and got it in his talons when trying to catch a fish or something like that. Pretty good sized eagle in there.

Tran: How long ago was this?

Charlie: 6, 7 years.

Trans: Because I believe the eagles have reestablished themselves in there on the other side of Gussy's. I think they gotten so where they may have moved up.

Charlie: Someplace else I had been hunting where the beavers had worked all in there. But you probably know about this. Gordons Creek, on the right hand side, all the way back. Almost up to the Almeedas. That branch that runs through the Cortwall's Farm. Back in there, there's a bulwark of some kind that kind of controls how the stream empties into it. Obviously, people go duck hunting in there because there was a couple of flat boats. That section, my dogs were on Almeeda's side, and I was on Hannapy's side, and I called them. When they got to me they was filled with mud from their eyes, ears, complete body. Evidently, there's a mixture of sand or quicksand in that section in there. It took them 45 minutes to an hour to get out there and come to me. And they just came one at a time. That's a bad place back in there. I don't know whether you ever...

Tran: There's a lot of white cedars back there when I last there.

Charlie: Yeah, there's a lot of white cedars. But anyway, that's a bad place. Don't try to cross a stream there.

CTE: Where there turkey in this area?

Charlie: We've introduced a few turkey, but they don't last long, do they? I don't if they can't raise the young ones or the hunters won't let them...

Tran: I think its traffic.

Tee: I've seen 12 or 13 lined up like soldiers, young ones following the old one around.

Charlie: They dwindle away.

CTE: Groundhogs. Do you get groundhogs?

Charlie: Oh, my god yes. But we don't eat them, although some people say the young ones are good.

Tran: Now this is a migration thing. If you're familiar with Route 1, as you leave five points at Lewes and head north toward Dover. There's the area of Clark Hill. In the 70s, that was as far south as they came.

Charlie: That's right.

Tran: In the 80s they weren't even in this area, that popular, but now I am not sure but they may even be across the river. That's a migration thing. When you think groundhog years ago, you would talk Delaware City.

Tee: I was with the phone company, and you'd see an animal flash, and the other guy would say "I didn't see it." You'd see the grass moving. I finally stopped one day and got close enough to get glimpse and know what it was. Nowadays, they're all over the place.

CTE: Have you ever heard of anybody trapping them?

Charlie: No. Most people I know just gun for them. Now Darcy's family, north of them, they was moving in there because there was a couple of their relatives come down from New York a getting groundhogs with a rifle, just for the sport of it. But they hadn't come down here yet.

The first time down here that I remember, Marshall Porsley had just moved into the house across the road there, and he called me to the house. Wanted to know what it was. He had killed it and it had harbored around his house there a bit, and he didn't know what that thing was. He was surprised... that was the first one.

CTE: Do you know, the guys trapping muskrat, what fur house they sold to?

Charlie: Yeah. They had somebody that came around and got the furs, didn't they?

Tran: Either that, or a lot of guys would take them into Maryland.

Charlie: Now I seen Sylvester Harmon, when was going to school together, he trapped every morning. Uncle Willy owned that island out on the other side of the Indian River, not the one we used to swim out to, the one all the way out on the other side of the river. That's 25, 26 acres over there. And Sylvester used to take his boat and go over there every morning, and walk the trapline for muskrats before he came to school. Two, three times a week he'd have some muskrats that he skinned and saved the furs for. Asked Sylvester about that, oh, when he was grown, and he and little Bessie took us out there. You know I forgot all about that. Whatever happened to that land over there? He said I don't know. I told him to look into it. Come to find out that Hattie Mill and Albert had sold without telling anybody, there on the other side of the river I never found out who they sold it to.

CTE: Was there any particular type of fur that historically has been important in terms of cermonial...

Charlie: No, not that I knows of. Not using any fur in the ceremony. I remember when they first had the Pow Wow, Uncle Warren has a skull cap made out of raccoon skin with the tail hanging down. That was in the 30s. I remember at the Pow Wow he would wear it. For dress maybe, for a part of their regalia they would use furs and all, but not ceremonies. I don't know of any. How about you, Tran?

Tran: I can't say I know of any.

CTE: The Lenni Lenape legend – I think you have the same legend – the muskrat played an important role in creating this world, gathering the dirt. Do you know of any other legends about furbearers?

Charlie: I don't know. As far as I am concerned, those are things that you read that somebody recited years ago, but never really been a part of my culture. Turtle. They've got stories about the turtle, formation of the earth. Stuff like that. But that's all historical.

CTE: That's pretty much my questions. I don't know if there is anything else you'd like to add.

Charlie: I don't remember anybody talking about using deadfalls or those sort of things, other than I was telling you about the door for birds. I suppose, at one time, generations ago, they probably did. Mr. Link Henson and Josh Higgins were probably the closest to nature.

Tee: Along with Uncle Walt and Uncle Warren.

Charlie: Elwood. Uncle Elwood. He had a place along there at Angola, down there where he went and fished for a month at a time.

CTE: Is it alright if I get a picture?

Charlie: Sure, take a picture of all of us.

Tran: I know Uncle Dorsey and them fished all the time. That's the thing, they lived the majority of the time off the river. ******garbled****** You got the legal season, the illegal season, the second season.

Charlie: You know like crabbing and all; that was all very important in our lives. Softshell crabbing, hardshell crabbing. Now, you can't use a net and you can't crab at night.

Tran: We used to pull seines down, with a pole. I mean, I remember I could walk that with my eyes closed. The sticks, the branches, and everything. Now all that's changed. What you really get into, I think, with the contact and the conveniences, it's not hard to go for the conveniences. You've got to know the Link Hitchens and Josh Hitchens, and there is a generation they are talking about – my great grandfather – that didn't have as much contact per se, and some didn't have the means. But then when the means came, and I know Pop Paulsen, he would be able to ... you know what I am saying .. it wouldn't be hard to change over in anything.

Charlie: Now Uncle Walt he never had money. He had enough to do what he wanted, but he lived basically off the land. When they lived down to Poplar Thicket, why he thought it was heaven down there, to tell the truth. There was ducks, geese, and rabbits, and everything you could want. And all he wanted was a little patch of corn for his mule, so he could have his garden, and clams and oysters, and he just ate on the water all the time. Now this is my father's sister's husband. And all she knew was to live in the style Uncle Walt had provided for her. She worked a little bit when they had the bag factories when the chicken came ...

Tee: And the bean factory.

Charlie: And the bean factory. That was the season.

Tee: Did they have a car?

Charlie: To my knowledge, they never did. The son had one, but I never know them to have one. They had a mule. They ended up buying a part of the Cleartop Davis' farm. But, with

some owners in between there, and they just went back home to it. I know I went there one day and he said "Come on Charlie, I want to show you something." We went out there to a repair shed, a workman's shed he had where he kept things in there. And he showed me vise, that you screw around and it was made out of two big oak – solid oak or hickory – planks. That when you turned it around it squeezed. Now we make the same thing out of metal anymore. But this was out of ... He said Russell Clark made it and gave it to him. I bet it's still over there in that shed and I bet that the people bought the home don't even know where it came from or the history of it, you know. But he was tired of it, because even the screw was wood and it was carved out by hand. So you could turn it, and it would squeeze in and hold it and all. Them folks, I guess it's like the old folks used to make pots out of wood, carve them out.

CTE: Did anybody you know ever have a muskrat shed, you know, a skinning house?

Charlie: No. Jason had a section down there that he would hang them on. But other than that, I don't know of anybody.

Tran: Probably just a portion of an outbuilding with multiple uses.

CTE: I know that there are a few surviving ones up near Port Penn.

Tee: I don't think they utilized something just for that. If they had an outbuilding and a south-facing wall, they'd just use that.

Charlie: Daddy told me, and I can't think of the name of it. Down there, right behind the school, between there and Link Higgin's, that section of wood, that he was with them when they took the timber out of there years ago. And there was a certain type of poisonous lizard. That was extremely big, and that was the last one that was ever seen in this area. And he told me the name of it. And when they were cutting the timber it went out, and several people working there saw it as it was getting away. They never seen one since. You ever hear of it?

Tee and Tran: No.

Charlie: It was some kind of poisonous lizard that was so much bigger than the lizards you normally see here. Now we see the blue-bellied lizard, stuff like that. And he told me the name of it, and that was the last one. And I thought to myself, if that is the last one, I wonder if it is the last one in the world. But he saw it, and I can't, for the life of me, think what the name of it was. But they was real rare in his childhood. My grandpop made charcoal, and stayed in the woods practically all the time. And my father was more than willing, and he stayed in the woods with him. They cooked back there in the woods, and they lived back there in the woods. They had a farm over here the girls stayed in, and they had somebody come in and take care of them, but lived in the woods. Mr. **** and a whole lot of people used to work for them, and each one had their own section they made their charcoal in. They had to take care of it, cut their own timber, rick it up, and sit back there and watch it, make sure it didn't burn out. So grandpop was used to living in the woods. And Daddy heard all those tales from him, and Daddy passed a lot of them on to me.

CTE: If you'd like, we can look at these traps I have set out here, just for your general knowledge. They're not, obviously, the best examples. I haven't done this in quite a few years. And I'm not an expert carver or anything.

SIDE 2: RECORDED OUTSIDE AT NANTICOKE COMMUNITY CENTER

Charlie: I remember there was a hard freeze and a flock of geese landed out back of the barn, right next to our fodder stack. And, there were about four old buildings there, and I guess I was about as far as from that tree there [estimate 30 ft], hiding behind the barn. I must have been 12, 13, 14. They was just eating away in that gravel. I got about halfway to them before they realized I was coming. And they started running, and I was about this far (shows first reaching down with arms out, and then slowly reaching up with arms fully extended). Never got a feather. I was sure I could catch one. They was on the ground, and they was on the ground.

Tran: Have you ever eaten swan?

Charlie: No, I never.

Tran: Years ago, they say that used to be...

Charlie: Well, there's more body to it. I tell you what I did eat one time. I don't remember [the taste of] it, but I remember because it was a novelty. Fishing hawk. Not a fishing hawk, a regular hawk. When we moved down here in 1928, Daddy had some traps going out the creek, going out to the river, and a hawk got caught in one. And I remember, I was little, and Daddy brought it home, and says "I wonder if it tastes like chicken?" Ask Mama to cook it. She wouldn't have anything to do with it. He cleaned it and pulled the feathers off of it, and she cooked it. I don't remember what it tasted like, but I remember it as once in my life. That was probably around 1930, and during the Depression...

Tee: Anything goes.

Charlie: Anything goes.

Tee: Speaking of hawks, that was something I never saw the likes of on this last trip [his drive to Oklahoma and back]. I mean, sometimes every two miles you'd see one or two. They'd be sitting on fence posts or ... And it wasn't no... I usually see them here sitting in a high tree where they can see, but out there they'd be anywhere. It could be eight, 10 foot, a hawk would be on it. And it just amazed me to see so many of them. I can't remember now whether it was Ohio, which state it was, it was for, like, a couple of days. And then, you started getting closer to home, and it started dying down.

Charlie: Hey, did you know we might get a mountain lion down in this area now and then?

CTE: You mentioned it earlier. I know its... it seems like all over the place, up in Pennsylvania as well, there's a big debate going on. Are there any mountain lions left? But, the number of people who have seen them, it seems they're out there, there just aren't very many of them.

Charlie: Since I built a home over there, I used to walk through the woods there at Purcells, and got on the horse going over, and walked pop's land in there, to hunt. I'm trying to think of his name. Anyway, a couple of fellows used to meet me down there. We went into a period of time there where dogs that would run a fox, wouldn't run it. Dogs that wouldn't run a deer, or a raccoon, or any other animal, would run it. And we didn't know what it was. Didn't see it. Didn't know what is was. Some dogs would run it and some wouldn't. Turned out, that up at Little Africa, they had a small mountain lion that had gotten loose, had come down through this area, worked its way back up. And, according to the paper, lady in the house looked out, and it was

laying up in the tree eyeing her chicken yard. And she called the police, and the police came and ... didn't kill it ... what do you call it?

Tee: Tranquilized.

Charlie: Tranquilized it. And that's where it had gotten loose from. But I had a little – well, I guess it wasn't little – I had a Lueger from the War, and I was taking it with me. Got down there, I guess at your Dad's over there, saw a rabbit. And I said, I ain't shot this thing in years. I was close to it, too. Closer than that tree [estimated 20 feet]. I aimed right at him, he was sitting there hunched up, and aimed right between his eyes and shot, and he didn't even move. So, I said, well, I guess I shot too high. I'll look at his knees. So, I shot again, and he kind of drew up a little bit. Now that was the second time. And I said I don't know where to shoot. I guess I'll aim at the center of his bottom. I shot again, and he hopped up and went off into the woods. And that was during the time the mountain lion matter. Doris – that's my wife – said you'd have to wait til it came after you with its mouth open, stick it right in there.

Tee: Choke it.

CTE: It reminds me of a time we were heading out hunting, and passed a pond, and there was snapping turtle floating out there. And I had my shotgun that day, but my friend had his .22. He says "I'm going to get that snapping turtle." So, I say "You shoot it, and I'll swim out there and get it." I didn't think he was going to get anywhere close to it. That was back when we were young, and we didn't care anything about swimming in the winter. Didn't matter too much. Dry off and get on with it. And he said "Bam, I got it, I got it." The thing was still floating, but its head was down. "Damn, he must of got it." I start swimming out there, and I get about five feet away, and that head pops up. I turned right back around. "You didn't shoot it." "Yes, I did too." "Shoot it again." About the third time, he had shot it enough I guess, I finally went out there and got it. And we ate it.

Charlie: They used to say that if a snapping turtle ever fasten on you, wouldn't let go until it thundered, or you have to take a straw and put it up its nose and tickle it. Well, they can really shut down on it.

CTE: Anybody in the community do much turtling?

Charlie: Uncle Elwood did. My Daddy as a boy, they farmed right up the road here said that after a rain, Uncle Elwood would walk around the field next to the branch and look for trails, from where they layed their eggs along the shoreline. And they'd tried to get them that same day.

Aunt Beckie used to take snapping turtles and put them in a barrel and feed them for 30 days, or something like that, and then clean them and cook them.

CTE: Clean out there system?

Charlie: Yeah, a lot of people will cook them, but they didn't really go out and trap them. I think Aunt Beckie looked forward to it, because she had barrels in the barn for possum and for turtle. And she'd feed both of them.

Tee: I remember when were at Rowls???, we'd set rabbit traps and catch possums, which was just my little rabbit trap. And you catch more of them, take them over there, and she'd put them in a barrel. She fed them...

Charlie: Sweet potatoes.

Tee: We were over there and skinned one one day. We skinned it. Daddy held it and I skinned it. That was a awful job. An odor and a half. She got them running around [chasing each other in the barrel] and just reach down in there a grabbed one by the tail and busted it aside the house, the corner of the house. But you have to know, I guess, she could have been related to the devil.

But we never skinned no more. Couldn't take the odor.

Charlie: Yeah, times have changed with our folks.

CTE: I don't know if you guys do this here, but where I grew up in North Carolina, if you were dove hunting and you winged a dove, you pick it up by the head and flick it [with a downward movement. Head stays in the hand, body thrown to the ground]. The first time I saw that, it was "oh my God, how brutal is that?" you know. The next day I was out there, just getting it on. You never know.

Charlie: Daddy used to grab it by the head and swing it around, wring it right off.

Tee: We used to kill a chicken that way. I never did, but ...

CTE: That was one of those Southern things. Frog gigging was another. I don't know if you guys ever...

Charlie: Oh, yeah, frogging. I know people who have done it. Tran, you've probably done it.

Tran: Yeah. We advanced it to the .22.

Charlie: The boys over at Milton that I go fox hunting with, every year they go frogging. They'll have a big cookout with it.

Tee: We had one one night. Course, you know back then drank half beers up anyhow. Dempsey Darden worked with a girl, I think she was up at Townsends then. She had to be different. We got in some sauce, and they decided we had to get some frogs. By the time they got them caught, they caught quite a few of them, we were still sitting up on the bank, and they cooked them. And we eat more than the legs. They split that body. Now, there was a lot of bone into it. I don't know if it really tasted that good, or if it was what I had to drink before that, but ... It was my only time ever eating frog.

Charlie: Over there by Fol Boon is where I go fox hunting, and there's a lot of frogs in some of those places back in there. Smith boys, about four brothers, live in there and they go back there frogging or catfishing. They got some ponds they go into. Got some shallow ponds. They look forward to it.

Tee: Well, those frogs when you cook them, is like an eel. Never quits quivering. They've got frog legs for sale in the store.

Tran: It's a delicacy. And that's the thing Chris, we're kind of running out of people who even continue to eat that way. That's like in the summer, I'll catch an eel or two in a crab pot. Sometimes if you pull it up fast enough, they'll stay. But then you come to the decision, do you

want to dump it back and not have to deal with the slime? Because you have to clean them. I mean, the last one I cleaned, it's almost like an artificial skin you get on you. I did it, and Lakota helped, because when she was little she learned how to clean a fish, clean a rabbit, the whole nine yards. Now, she looks at it, and she doesn't mind it, but she looks more than she helps. But, at 5 or 6 years old, she knew how to clean a fish.

Tee: Now Daddy, Daddy always used a grass bag.

Tran: To hold them?

Tee: Cut him all the way around the neck to get him started, then take a grass bag to hold it, and then take a pair of pliers or something to skin him all the ways down. Now the old folks used to drive a nail through its head. Drive a nail through its head into a block or a piece of wood. It would hold it and kill it at the same time.

Tran: That's what I'm saying. A lot of the time its just easier to take your foot and kick it back in the water.

Charlie: Yeah, I caught them with a hook and line fishing, and they wrap all around that line. And you say Oh Boy, cut the hook off and let him go.

Tran: Now the Orientals love that. They'll take every one, they'll take every one off your hook.

Tee: Now that was big business at one time, wasn't it?

Charlie: Kimmy helped him. He's dead now. Caught them and shipped them.

Tee: Shipped them overseas. Made a fortune.

Charlie: I'll think of his name in a minute here.

Tee: I had never heard... but they're a delicacy. But Kimmy was making . . . Of course, all Kimmy ever wanted was something to drink. But he was making ... I don't think he could drink what he was making. When the eels was in season. But now, they're another thing that look like they turn back raw.

Charlie: You got to eat them when they're hot. Don't let them get cold on you. You never had it?

Tran: No, I have had it. But there's an art to it. You ever had that Chris?

CTE: I had it in Georgia, years ago.

Tran: Was it deep fried?

CTE: Yeah, batter fried.

Tran: Most the people pan fry them. And they're pretty skimpy on the amount of oil. I've seen it deep fried were its nice and floats, but the pan fry experience is a whole other experience.

Charlie: The only way I've ever had them was pan fried.

Tee: I guess as a kid, when I seed them cooking, I never cared much for them, because it never stopped quivering.

Charlie: As long as they were hot, I could eat it. Don't let it get cold.

Tee: Now Poppop made something for skinning rabbits – it used to be one would have to hold it and the other would have to skin it – I thought he made something out of a board.

Tran: A small ganvil.

Tee: He had something, he'd hang it up. He was sort of an individual, you know. Probably thought it was easier to build something like that than try to get youngsters to hold it.

Tran: And, Chris, I don't want to take away from what you're doing per se, but when did the shot hunting really become a bigger thing?

Charlie: Well, I think probably in the early 20s, around here. When they started raising crops, they get the crops out in the fall, and then they turn to rabbit hunting.

Tran: And at that time, just like right now, like they were talking earlier, you would have holly wreaths and cedar wreaths. About that same time?

Charlie: Yeah.

Tran: So they were getting contact and getting a lot of goods back.

Charlie: David used to take his gun and go holly hunting. Take a rabbit dog with him, and try to bring home a rabbit or two, and maybe get a bag of holly.

Tee: Maybe.

Charlie: Maybe. He and Harley Johnson and Mr. Sams, whole bunch of them, chase fox. Daddy used to ride a mule. He'd drop the reins over its head, and when they got back he'd still be in the same area. And if the dogs got after a fox, they'd be way out, Arthur Jacksons and sugar bowl. Somewhere out there. They'd ride the mule out there, or the horses. But the rabbit came first, and the cedar and the holly ....

Mom would fuss, where you been gone all day, didn't bring home any rabbits or anything. Or you brought me home a rabbit but didn't bring me home any holly leaves.

Tran: And back then, when a rabbit came home, who took care of cleaning it?

Charlie: Daddy skinned them and cleaned them, and Momma washed them, and seasoned them, and cooked them.

Tee: That's how I remember Poppop. Sometimes I did it. That was the man's job. The cooking and seasoning was the woman's.

CTE: Did anybody ever do anything with the fur?

Charlie: No, we just threw the fur away. Now Daddy would eat part of the head. We got to where we would cut the head off and throw it away with the hide. But, the muscle in the jaw, and he'd pull it open and eat the brains out of it and stuff like that. Do that with a fish, too.

Tee: Mom would do the same thing.

Charlie: The old folks would eat down to the bone. Now they didn't waste nothing.

Tran: This a fishing story. If you want to get on a bad side, take a fish and fillet it and give it to one of the old timers.

Charlie: They don't like that.

Tran: I use what she wants to eat for bait, today, you know what I mean. It's a big difference.

Tee: The same way, they'd eat the feet of a chicken. I thought you were being punished if you had to eat the feet. And she'd make sure that she got them. I guess now, when you look back on it, it was probably a way to encourage you to eat it. Chicken feet make you pretty.

Tee: Daddy, now he come from a different generation. Daddy couldn't tolerate clabber. Milk. Sweet clabber, when it just turns, you know.

Charlie: Corn meal. Used to have corn meal mush for breakfast, two or three times a week. It was good.

Tee: It worked, didn't it? It made you still here today.

Charlie: Mom could cook it, make it something good.

Tee: She was an exceptional cook, now.

Charlie: Mix it with milk, and whatever else you had at the time. A mess of corn bread or corn pone. Steve, his brother, came to our house, and Mom told them "you boys help yourselves to that corn pone." He said "corn pone? Well, I don't like corn pone." So, after dinner went away, he'd been in that platter and pulled out a half a dozen pieces, and tapered off with it after his meal was over. And, Mom said "Steve, I thought you said you didn't like corn pone?" He said "I don't like corn pone." And she said "Well, what are you eating?" And he said "that's not corn pone. That's cake."

Tran: What kind of fiber are they using for cordage (for the snares)? Is it vine, woven, or ...?

CTE: For big species like deer, it's always hemp. For something like this, it is probably a root. They are probably working up a root. This is not an area I know a lot about, but apparently it was strong enough. Now later on, you get snare wire.

Charlie: We got vines around here that will work fine. Don't walk and think you are going to walk right through them. Catch one in the ankle and you can't get lose, and she'll throw you down.

CTE: These are pretty basic in terms of the carving involved. I've done it with stone tools before, but these are not. Just an old bait knife.

Tee: Ingenious.

Charlie: Yes, I've seen pictures of them, and I knew folks that could do it, but I never grew up in it. I never grew up in it.

CTE: Well, I certainly appreciate you taking the time today.

Charlie: I enjoyed it.

CTE: Good to get the information.

Tran: We'll really appreciate you coming down.

Charlie: Yeah, we appreciate that.

CTE: Like I say, I'll probably be back in May.

Tee: Far as I know, May.

Charlie: We'll have to make some of them, just for fun. Take them to the Pow Wow and demonstrate.

Tran: There you go. Even my box traps now have turned to stainless steel.

Tee: And I think this would nice at the May, because you get a lot of young people. Of course there are older people too that's not aware of it. But the young people...

CTE: I may get some better fiber before then. I've got to find somebody who is making traditional. Let me have some. There are a few people around who might be willing to do it. My boys think I'm crazy. "We've got to cut some stakes for a trap." "Trap? What are you talking about?"

It's funny, I tell people I trapped a little when I was growing up, and they're horrified. My God, you are some sort of ...

Tran: Sort of makes you into a Barbarian.

CTE: I tell them I mostly use these humane traps. And they're "Humane? How's that humane? You're still killing them."

Tee: Killing is killing.

Tran: I tell you the biggest trapping problem in this area right now is the fact that we trap more cats than anything. I means, it's just so many feral cats.

Charlie: ***name withheld**, I know he doesn't talk about it too much, he has traps up and down Vance and to the fire hall. One day he was out talking – I was out hunting – and he says he caught six gray foxes that year. Well, if he caught six gray foxes, he'd caught a dozen cats.

Tee: Now I think a gray fox is easier to catch than a red fox, isn't it?

Tran: Don't seem to be as educated. Red fox, he'll know your scent. He's so leery.

CTE: Do you guys have any friction between the fox trappers and the hunters?

Charlie: Not really. They're protected in Delaware. But some people still trap them. If they do, they have to take them over into Maryland to sell them. Because you can't even have a hide in your possession in Delaware.

Tran: The biggest thing you run into here, if you want to call it that, is the recreational rifle user. Alias poacher or something like that.

Charlie: Just wanting to shoot something.

Tran: Shoot something. That's what we all grew up with. You don't find that many... There's a guy I grew up with that traps as a profession, and he'll come in and trap out whatever people are having a problem with, whether it be possum or whatever. But he's state licensed and handles it in a different way. I think the biggest thing, killing-wise with fox hunters, is cars.

Charlie: Cars run over the foxes and run over the dogs.

Tran: And that's just like they were speaking earlier with the hunting in general, if you don't own a piece of land, for the most part, you don't have a place to hunt. Whether it be trapping or whatever. Most of what used to be good muskrat ground in this area, is now bordered by development on so many sides that you can't get to the marsh. You know what I'm saying? I'm sure, if you see me now, if I walk to Emily Stratford on a Jack Nickalaus golf course, I'm sure they'd be pretty happy with that. And you drag your knees through the marsh. No, I think those days are gone.

Charlie: Those days are gone.

CTE: It reminds me, I was talking to a guy years ago, had grown up on Hilton Head Island. A black man. By the time I talked to him, it was all golf courses and neighborhoods. All built up.

Tee: His world was shattered.

CTE: He told me, I could make a living of this island, year round if I had to. But now, if I walk out the door with a trap or a gun, some housewife across the way is calling the police.

Tran: See, that's the thing I think I'm saying. It was not about selling the furs so much, it was trapping for the table.

Charlie: A few people trapped for the fur trade, muskrat. If they got anything else it was unusual.

CTE: I guess they are saying now that the prices are so low for muskrat furs that they are getting more for the meat than for the fur.

Tran: It's not feasible for these fellows to even make a living. And that's a big thing on the raccoon. It used to be that you did make something on the raccoon. You talk now, every other week is a rabies scare, and you don't find the guys that even coon hunt like they used to. You've got the overabundance of raccoons plus the developments. You'd be surprised. You

could go right across the road into Summer Village and find somebody in there that's feeding, even the groundhogs. When I was surveying, there was a guy that was an engineer that was feeding groundhogs in Lewes. I'm like "sir, I don't know that that is something you want to do." He let me know it was ... I mean, he had stainless steel bowls and was buying lettuce. In a hedge row. I told the guy I work with, he's going to pay somebody to redo his foundation. Sure enough, what they did was move under the house. I saw him a few months later, after that, and he let me know that he should have taken my advice.

Tee: I ran across one working. I can't remember where it was. I thinking I'm doing them a favor, they don't know it. "You know, you got a critter living under your building." "Oh, I know, we feed it." He said that and there wasn't much sense in me saying anything else. But I don't think he knows as much as I think I do. I believe you're in for something. I know where it was at. Back there before the Winders, Bob Raley, one of them ****garbled*** where Shore distributors was, in that area. Because I saw them run under the building.

CTE: Up our way, you don't want them to get under the building because they'll affect the foundation, like you say. But the other thing is if they abandon the burrow, you're going to get a skunk move in there.

Tran: I think the fox move into a lot of the groundhog holes down here.

Charlie: They widen them up. You can tell.

Tee: Were you the one telling me? Is it the groundhog or the fox that brings the dirt out on its fur?

Charlie: I guess it's the fox. The groundhog pushes it out and piles it.

Tee: And its all real granulated. When he brings it up and shakes.

END OF NANTICOKE INTERVIEWS

February 27, 2005
2:00 P.M., Lenape Cultural Center
Cheswold, Delaware

Chris Espenshade (CE)
Chief Dennis Coker (DC) (Photograph H-2)
Ms. Anna Coker (AC)
Mr. Curtis Coker (CC) (Photograph H-2)
Ms. Phyllis Spiering (PS)
Dr. Cara Blume (CB)

SIDE 1

AC: Did you ever set any of these traps (snares and deadfalls), Curtis? I ain't never seen nobody set these, just Daddy did. You catch rabbits with them, or what?

CC: When I couldn't afford traps, I'd use a Figure-4 trap. Like those snares, but a Figure-4.

CE: I've got one here. I've got one of those as well.

discussion of phone numbers

CE: I'll string it up in a minute.

CC: It's just a different type of trigger . . . We used to use a log. 2 or 3 logs. Set it up in the woods, to where it would break their back.

DC: Log would fall on it?

CC: Log fall on it. You had to watch the ground, or they'd sink in on you. Lots of time you had to put a rock on the ground to set one.

****more telephone discussion****

DC: (helping to set Figure-4 deadfall) Voila!

CE: The bait went in back here. And, in theory (trying to trigger the deadfall) . . . If it was in the ground, it wouldn't twist like that (sound of deadfall crashing).

AC: **garbled about musk smell**

CB: Well, they do. That's why they're called muskrats.

****general discussion of unavailability of other informants****

Photograph H-2. Lenape informants, Dennis Coker and Curtis Coker.

CE: Well, we'll go ahead and start, I guess. I'm Chris Espenshade. I know some or most of you. I am an archaeologist for Skelly and Loy. I work a lot with DelDOT, Delaware DOT, these days. And, one of the projects we're working on is up near the Blue Ball area, north of Wilmington. I was having a walk around out there with Kevin Cunningham of DelDOT, and made an offhand comment, and it turned into a research project. He was asking "Well, what would people be doing out here?" There was a nice little creek and a wetland. When I grew up in North Carolina, I'd be trapping somewhere like this. And he said "Trapping?" And if you look at the literature, nobody really talks about trapping. Everybody is either out hunting a deer with a bow and arrow, or fishing, or . . . And I thought "now that can't be right" because I knew there were some traditional traps that were fairly efficient, so . . . So, they gave us some time and money to start doing research and background. And there are really 2, no 3, sources and you guys will be the third, the third class. First, there are ethnographic accounts from the Jamestown period, other early explorers. There are a few references to trapping, not very good detail. Enough to know that they were relying on it fairly heavily. For example, John Smith, when he gets there early on, they throw him a big feast and it's got all this venison. After they're done eating, Smith asks "how'd you guys get these deer?" And they didn't show him a bow and arrow. They start describing a snare trap for deer. And it turns out that was fairly common. They were actually snaring deer, which nobody thinks about nowadays, because nobody lets you trap deer. So, that's one class, period accounts.

The second group is, around the early 20th century, folks like Speck, Weslager, Cooper among the Seneca, went out and talked to people about traditional traps. They (the informants) would illustrate (demonstrate) traps for them. And, there is better detail on the technology. In some cases, they were still using the technology in that period. In other cases, it was remembering somebody that used it. Again, Speck recorded a couple of traps among the Nanticoke, the Oak Orchard group, and Weslager apparently . . . I've got a handout here … recorded traps in the Cheswold community, but later says the traps are Nanticoke. The exact same figure, but the caption changes. It's clear that there was a long tradition (of trapping). In fact, some of the group names, names other Indians had for local groups translated to "Trappers" and "those who put a log down across a stream to set a trap on."

AC: Well, we'd do that, too. If we had a ditch, we'd cut a log off pretty good size. Lay that down and that's how we'd cross it.

CE: There's a tradition there. And the third source is the folks down at Oak Orchard and talking to you today to see what you know of, in terms of whether you've seen some of these traps and what kind of trapping has gone on up through the twentieth century. How it changed. What you know of the tradition.

One of my challenges is trying to say how efficient these traps are. You can't really go out and use them today, can't do experiments. I guess you could if you got all the right permissions, but that would probably take me longer . . .

CC: There's guys still today snaring rabbits.

AC: I think those traps worked. If a rabbit got in there, he didn't get out.

CC: ****name** still uses snares. He's from West Virginia.

AC: That one there (Figure-4 deadfall), that hits a rabbit and he's dead.

CE: I have some accounts of trappers, and even when these steel traps came available, people would still use traditional traps. In fact, some Indian groups . . . I read an account from the Cree Indians, the trading post, and they were trying to, almost, to give these things (steel traps) away. And the Cree were getting all these other trade goods, but they didn't want the traps. They felt their own traps were more efficient. The other thing I stumbled onto is the Humane Trapping Movement, which is Russia, Canada, and the European Union. They're trying to outlaw, well, they have outlawed these traps (steel leg-hold). As part of that, they've done a study of trap efficiency, where are animals suffering. And among the traps they allow are deadfall traps and certain snares. They're efficient. They're working.

AC: An animal would suffer if it got its foot in one of those (leg-hold traps).

CC: That's why I quit trapping (coons). There wasn't any money in it, and to see the animal suffering. Now, muskrat's different, cause you could use that kill trap (Conibear® 110).

CE: They still allow these, these body traps. I'm not even going to try to set it. I've busted my hand so many times . . . This one, it's a bad example. I got it at a trappers' rendezvous. You've got to watch, the trigger's not really solid on it (at this point CC quickly set the Conibear®).

CC: You set it in the water. Set it like this here (spring to the side, trap upright).

CE: When I was growing up, we'd drop that down in front of a muskrat hole in the bank. Down in North Carolina, it's all bank, it's not houses.

AC: We have both of them here. Runs and houses.

CC: It's a lot of work. I was setting 200 a day.

AC: I mean that's the way you had of making a living in the winter.

CE: The first couple pf pages (of the handout) is different species and what groups trapped them. And just because a certain group doesn't show up, it doesn't mean they didn't trap, it just means that nobody bothered to record it. And the same thing with trap type.

AC: I do know the otter, that was trapped a lot.

CC: We trapped otters, using 220s (a two-spring Conibear®). That's a 110 there. The 220s was a little bigger, plus they were double springs. But they were killing a lot of coon hunters' dogs running through there at night. Rabbit dogs during the day. People'd see it (a dog in their trap) and then abandon it alongside the highway.

AC: How often did you sell them? Did you stretch them?

CC: Oh, yeah. I got metal one (stretchers).

AC: He (her father) had wooden ones.

CC: I had wooden ones too, but the wooden ones would get all slimy and stuff. I prefer the metal ones.

AC: Well, you put the fur side in.

CE: The third page here is a figure from Weslager. On the top there is very similar to the rock deadfall I've got here, except it uses logs. Which makes sense down here . . .

CB: There's no rock down here.

CE: Number 2, I've got an example of that as well. It is very similar to a Figure-4 trigger, usually with a spring pole, probably a sapling or a handy branch. The third one is just a basic static snare, which is just tied in place. The fourth one down at the bottom is a Figure-4, but it is a pen-trap for birds. The fifth one there is . . . you pull a string and the pen comes down.

And the last page here is two recorded down in the Oak Orchard community. You'll see that they're very similar to two on the other page here. Baited snares. At the time that Speck was down there, Weslager as well, most of these were being used for rabbit. That was the main thing being trapped at that point.

So, I don't really have a formal question and answer. I'll throw out a question. You have something that comes to mind, just jump in. I'm very flexible with this. I guess I would start by asking what were you told about trapping? Has it been something you've always done?

AC: It was something that was always done in the winter because once your stalks and everything were up from the corn, trapping season began. Of course, we trapped and we stretched them.

CC: Both types. Trapped coons and muskrats. And caught turtles.

CE: Turtles through the ice?

CC: No, summertime. You took a stick with a hook on one end and metal on the other end. And you'd see them bubble up, and took the end with the metal on it and run it down and tapped it around, until you heard the turtle. Hit the turtle's back. Then you turned your stick over, with the hook on it, and stuck that down in there. You probed around 'til you caught him in the armpit where the soft skin was, and then you worked him up to the top. That was like a job there. If you ever run across a good-sized turtle, they've got big feet on them and they're digging the whole time.

AC: Sometimes they were thin, so Mama would take a deep barrel, and put them in the barrel, and you slop fed them. Mama'd take all the table scraps and put them down in there. Daddy used to sell to restaurants. He has certain restaurants that he knew. He had no trouble getting rid of them at all. Once you get them fat. I forget what we used to do with the shell. We used to do something with the shell. I can't remember now.

DC: Basically, I think trapping was a means of economic subsistence, more than . . .

AC: Someone came around (to buy furs). I was asking Curtis. Sometimes here in Delaware, if I remember correctly, they might pick them up every two weeks. Then if the price was down, you held them. Until the price went up.

CC: Your muskrat, your hides around here was priced based on what the mink was. If the mink was really high, your hides wasn't worth nothing. No. . . If the mink was high, your hides was

worth more. If the mink was low, you wouldn't get nothing for your hides; they'd just buy the mink. Back when I was doing it, that is how they graded it, anyway. You'd always look at the prices to see if mink were high or low. They wanted those muskrats for inside of gloves, inside of hats.

AC: And I can remember that we used to have to hang them in the barn rafters, so the rats wouldn't chew on them. Rats would chew on them, wasn't any good.

CC: You get a hole in it, they'd knock off 25 cents.

AC: It was something that most farmers did in the winter. I mean, our farmers.

CC: All the farmers I ever grew up with done it.

DC: Lester B**** wasn't a farmer, and he did it.

AC: But he worked on a farm, somebody's farm all the time and he trapped in the winter.

CC: Muskrat was something back then. I remember a muskrat was 13, 14 bucks for a black. And a raccoon was $30. I was skipping school. You know.

AC: I do remember that the black ones was much higher than the browns. But you didn't catch that many of them.

CC: You catch 12 raccoons a day, for 25 or 30 bucks, you were doing something, buddy.

CE: Nowadays, they say the meat is worth more than the fur.

CC: Three, four years. Longer than that? Seven years. We used to sell out there . . . wasn't worth it.

DC: The meat?

CC: The hides. Used to get $2 for the meat.

AC: We got good money for the meat. Now them turtles were high. Get good money for them because people didn't fool with the turtles. There was a lot of work in them turtles. But if you were used to it. Daddy knew. He knew what to do.

CC: Where the market was. You take them to New York.

AC: Sometimes people used to take them (turtles) out (of state). Seems to me they used to take them to Philadelphia.

CC: That's where you took furs sometimes.

AC: I think we had somebody come around a get the furs.

DC: My mother's people, they lived out there . . . marsh, Woodland Beach area. So, they were on the marsh all the time, so I'm sure that they did an exorbitant amount of trapping out there, for those reasons.

CC: I can imagine what it was like back in those days, when they didn't have rubber boots. Can you imagine getting out in the marsh with hardly nothing on? I tell you what, I've been out there before, you had to take your clothes off and swim.

AC: Swim? When you go down to Woodland Beach, on the left there is the big ditch, that's where their hayfield was. That's where my Dad lived. Of course that's been a long time ago.

DC: I don't know that there are too many of us that even do trapping anymore.

CC: Let the furs (prices) come back, and I'll show you a trapper.

AC: I don't even know if the younger people in New Jersey do it anymore.

DC: The problem is that once you skip a couple of generations, and kids nowadays aren't interested . . .

CC: You'd be surprised. You go to Pennsylvania, and talk to the kids up there, they're still trapping. They've got a market. I don't know what it is. There's just no market around here.

CB: Yeah, I talked to Mark Gould, when we were talking about this, and he said there is just nobody over there doing it.

CC: There's some trapping here. But just for meat. Now the Lomen boys, I don't know if they're any relation to Mom, her name is Loman, and these guys down here are Lomens. They're from the Woodland Beach area, all up and down there. They still turtle trap, still muskrat trap.

DC: This is some fellows you know?

CC: Yeah.

DC: From Woodland Beach?

CC: You could ride out there in December, and on both sides you'd see them working. They still set traps out there.

DC: They're Lomens?

CC: Yeah.

AC: I'll tell you who they are.

CC: Friends of Herbie's. That's how I met them. Christy went to school with them.

AC: They're related to Marion. Marion's the first step.

CC: That's the one I told you got bit in the neck by a turtle. Out there on the marsh, turtle bit him on the neck. He drove all the way in, from Woodland Beach, drove all the way into Smyrna.

CE: Turtle still attached?

CC: Still attached. Got him into town there, and I was up there selling some . . . selling something. I was with Herbie, we was just riding around. These were guys that had a trapping place. We were just riding around. He had a turtle attached to his neck. The shell was huge, and it had bit him on the neck. They cut the turtle's head off, and got a tire iron and tried to pry the jaws open. They couldn't do that and they messed around trying to get it to break loose. Then they went and got two straws, coffee straws, stuff them up his nose, and lit a cigarette and blew smoke up the straws, and got it off.

AC: Now they're some that grew up, didn't know who they were. They were never told who they were. They're local. I talked to them a while back.

CC: That's all they know. They set fish pots still, traps.

AC: They were never told. I talked to a couple of them on the telephone. Marion Coker, Mom's Marion. I'm trying to think. Her grandfather and her father . . .

CC: They were the ones did all the fish pots. Who was that there? Wasn't that Marion's people?

DC: That was my Mom's people.

AC: That's Grandma, Effie. Cousin ***'s brother. He made fish nets.

CC: They've got one of them in the museum up there . . .

AC: In the museum up there in New York. At least it used to be.

CB: The Hey Foundation museum.

DC: I think trapping was probably pretty popular back during the Depression, just because there wasn't much to do, and it got you something to eat.

AC: You see, we ate . . . Mom cooked muskrat regular. They say muskrat and something else is the cleanest animals because they wash something before they eat it. They don't eat a thing they don't clean. They wash it.

CE: Raccoons is the other one. I was talking to them down at Oak Orchard, and they said the problem there is even if they have kids interested in trapping, it is getting so built up . . . You can't go walking through a golf course swinging your traps. The policeman will show up real quick.

DC: That's getting to be a major issue around here too.

two overlapping conversations

CB: They sell muskrats (dinners) in the Spring.

CC: They've got muskrat dinners and everything still over there in Maryland. Skinning contests.

AC: We had to take one time . . . in high school, we had to take something in for science. Daddy took a muskrat, cooked all the meat off it, and that's what I took in. The skull. And I was the only one had anything like that. I know I got an A. He put on the back of the stove and cooked all the meat off it.

DC: I know I never had much exposure to trapping, and Curtis, who's come along after me, just because he took an interest in it, did it on his own. It wasn't because Dad ever trapped.

CC: I just heard about it through her (Anna), talking about her Dad. And running up on the Lomen boys and Old Man Lomen, himself. He's like a historical legend around here. These people round here don't talk about trapping if they're not talking about him. Remember, they had a picture of him up there that place we went?

DC: Up there with Glenn.

AC: Now see we trapped. We had a farm right next to Uncle Eli's. Uncle Eli didn't trap, so Daddy trapped his farm.

CC: It was the Heards, the Lomans.

CE: Was it mostly muskrats?

AC: Muskrats, like I say, every now and then they'd get something else, and they'd sell it.

CC: Otters were hardly worth it. You found an otter slick, it took you so long to catch try and catch it. By the time you caught it, and the tide went down, and you had other people going up and down the same crick. They'd see him right there, and by time you got back, the trap would be set off and he was gone.

AC: You see, we didn't have no . . .

CC: Fox, you weren't allowed to do anything with him. DuPont took care of that. Gray fox, you could trap a gray fox, but you couldn't trap a red fox. The DuPonts run them with their horses.

DC: I know a lot of our people got into dogs, as a sport rather than the trapping part of it. Fox hounds, and rabbit dogs. And, they still had a connection with that livestock, and that was just probably an extension . . . you know, you can have a half-acre of property and have a pen and have 10-12 rabbit dogs back there, as opposed to having a beeve and some chickens.

AC: Lawrence did that. Lawrence always had a bunch of rabbit dogs.

DC: My next door neighbor, he sell three or four hundred rabbit dogs every year. He's 70 years old and he has developed the network.

CC: I saw him out there this morning at Willow Grove meeting some people.

AC: Kenny Munch, he stole them. Everybody knew. If he was coming down to Delaware, hide your dogs. Jersey people, they'd tell you, Kenny's on his way down.

DC: Call you up and warn you.

AC: You had a rabbit dog . . . I like him and he's ornery. But if he'd pull that stuff in a heartbeat…

DC: I know we had more discussion when I was young through Boy Scouts.

AC: It was just a way of life. It is what you did in the winter.

CC: Daniel Boone on TV. Moscoe, or whatever his Indian name was.

CE: Did you guys have any tradition of using rabbit gums, rabbit boxes?

DC: No, not that I'm aware of.

CC: For catching rabbits?

CE: Yeah, sort of like a modern box trap, except made out of wood. Originally they were made out of a hollow log. You put a bait in the back, and when it hits the bait, the doors slams shut.

CC: We had them (box-like traps), we made them in the summertime to catch groundhogs, we sold to the college down here for research. Charles, Charles was selling them. That's where he took the groundhogs.

DC: I don't recall . . .

CC: We didn't know where he sold them 'til I was old enough to sell some myself. They was taking them down there for research. The college, or someplace, wherever DuPont done it.

AC: Restaurants over home, they took them (muskrats, apparently) as fast as you'd catch them. Turtles too. Turtle's was expensive to buy, a meal, because nobody wanted to fool with them.

DC: Nobody wanted to go out there and crawl in the marsh to find them.

CC: They're the only ones I know that still do that. The Lomen boys. That's all they do, trap and turtle.

CB: They don't have any jobs.

CC: They don't have no jobs.

DC: I read that book that . . . Cara, what was that guy that lived out there, north of Woodland Beach, in that old house?

CB: Tony Floria.

DC: Tony Floria. The book that he wrote called "The Progger" and he talked about in that book that guy that lived out there on the marsh, just down past his house, down that lane. Which I guess was the old road into Woodland Beach before the big storm came in and broke the coastline. I often wonder whether my grandfather knew that guy, because they would have been about the same age.

AC: Where Grandpa and them lived, if you head down to the Beach, on the left is a great big clump of trees.

DC: Well, you see, this road goes right to that clump of trees. That's the old road to Woodland Beach.

AC: That's where their farm was.

CC: The next one down, just past it.

DC: It's right before the road makes a hard left. Before you get to the Duck Lodge. The Mallard House.

CC: The M & M?

DC: Yeah.

AC: That's where their farm was.

CC: There's a tower in there where you can jump out and look around. You get in there and there's a ride to the right . . .

DC: That's it.

CC: And there's a little house right there on the end . . .

DC: That's the house that Tony Floria lived in for a long time. And he talks about this guy that lives in a little shack down past his house, at the end of the lane, right up against the marsh, who turtled all the time. That's what he did, basically for a living, was go out there and get those turtles.

AC: We did that, too.

DC: But I often wonder whether my grand-dad knew that guy.

AC: He probably did, living out there.

DC: And I don't know, he probably may have even been one of our people.

AC: How many people have a barrel down in the basement, full of turtles, and you have to reach down in there . . .

DC: Pull that turtle out.

AC: They had a thing that . . .

CC: Herbie, that's what we call him, my buddy, we call him "Snapper." He was a friend I met through my brother Chris, who introduced me to the Lomen boys, and that's what they did. Herbie's just now had a job himself, in the last few years, for a living, that's all they ever did. Turtle trap, coon hunt.

DC: He lives down around Hartley's out there.

CC: He knew them guys. He knew the Lomen boys. From when they went to school. That's how Chris knew them. They had the nicest cars and stuff of anybody went to school together, but never even had a job. That's what kind of money they were making down in the marsh. Fish pots, turtle traps. They didn't go after them with probes and such. They used what they called a T-trap. About this wide, and this tall, from that wall over to about here. And it had another chute that come off the top, depending on how deep the water was (this chute allowed the turtles to surface to breath). Had flaps on both side which flip up, and then you put your bait in the center. Stake in down to the ground. Put your trap down in there. And you could tell when you had something in there. You come up in the boat, pull the boat up, and you could see the pole start shaking. But when they pull that thing up out of there, you wouldn't believe the size of them turtles. They would scare you. The turtles was so big, had me almost out the back of the boat. He'd reach in there and grab it by its tail and flip it over, and throw him in there on the floor, probably about that big around. And it would jump up and start hissing at you like a dog. His mouth, when he opened up, everything was cotton white. Had me up on the side of the boat. He had army duffle bags. He picked that turtle up and threw him back in there in the duffle bag, and tightened it up. And we started going to the next trap, and it was laying in the back of the boat. And you could see it just tearing that bag apart. I said "Herbie, he's coming out of the bag." Grabbed another bag, and throwed him in that bag. I said "this is the first and last trip." We checked 6 or 7 traps, and had the whole boat full. He had . . . he took a stick like this (about an inch diameter) and stick it in the turtles mouth, then wrap a string around it. Stuck a stick in his mouth, put a loop around it, and pulled it back around and tied it to his tail. They had little purses he called them. "Look at my purse" as he's getting out of the boat with them.

AC: Those are awful. They get a hold of you and they won't let go.

CC: Throw those little ones back. Won't get much out of them.

AC: You see, that's the size we eat though. Tender.

CE: They can stretch too. That neck and those legs.

AC: Oh yeah.

CE: We did a little bit (of turtling) growing up in North Carolina. I remember one time we had what they called a swimming lake, they had poured some concrete in a pond. We were out there one Spring turtling, and went to check it, and the turtles in there swimming around. In what they called the baby pool, maybe thigh deep. So my friends were "jump in there and grab him by the tail." And I was stupid. I was young and stupid, I grabbed him and I'm holding him up. I'm reaching out there trying to hold this thing up, and it was probably a 20 pound turtle. And his heads reaching for me. "Somebody better take this thing pretty soon." And they're all like "well, I don't know." I say "something's got to change."

CB: And letting go of him isn't an option either.

DC: Not unless you're slinging him.

AC: Lot of people think they can't move very fast, but they can move.

CB: They move a lot faster than people think.

AC: Uh huh, that's what I'm saying.

CC: That's about the only thing you've got missing from your list.

CE: Turtles?

CC: Turtles.

CE: No, I don't.

DC: Did you ever hear your grandfather talk much about trapping?

AC: No . . .

CC: That wouldn't really be trapping. That was more like hunting, the way they used to get turtles. They never had no traps like that, back then (for turtles).

AC: No . . .

CC: So that probably wouldn't be under trapping, would it?

DC: You never heard either one of your grandfathers talk about trapping?

AC: You see, I only knew one of my grandfathers. That was Mom's grandpop, Mom's Daddy. I don't think Grandpop ever did anything like that.

DC: Was he a farmer?

CC: You don't have fish on there. They had fish traps.

CE: I didn't put fish or eel on there because of where the site is located.

CC: That thing that, eels, that was a trap that Clem made, wasn't it?

AC: A fish net.

CC: No, that was like a trap. Had big wooden rings on it, with a neck, and the way it was designed in the front, when the fish swam into it, it couldn't . . .

CE: Like a funnel.

CC: Like a funnel. And the fish couldn't get turned around and come back out. They almost use the same thing nowadays, except that they set the nets up like this here (making a maze), and the center goes around and around and around in the center. And the fish come up, and they won't go backwards. They won't turnaround a go back normally. They'll just keep swimming up. Once he gets to the inside, he won't swim back out. You might lose a few, but most of the time they'll be sitting there in the center. Now they go in there with a net (to retrieve the fish).

AC: Carp, now we used to have carp. I don't know what they used to do with them.

DC: Fertilizer.

CC: I've heard of people eating them.

CB: I've eaten carp, it has really white meat.

CE: It's real bony, I think.

CB: Yeah.

AC: They used to do carp, but I can't remember what we did with them. They were big.

CB: Some people don't like to eat them, because they are trash fish, bottom feeders. Some people say they taste muddy, but I haven't had that experience. I do know that in New York, where they sell them a lot, they'll put them in tub of water. Get them live and put them in a tub of water.

AC: I know we used to have them. Daddy used to catch them.

DC: I wonder how much muskrat trapping, fur-bearing trapping that was did was because we ended up living in those low-lying areas. Some are right there with them (right against the marsh). As opposed to having high ground, where you wouldn't have those marshy areas.

AC: You see our people over in ***, most of them live on water. Oscar Lopez' farm, his whole farm was bound by water.

DC: And they did most of their tilling with tractors, no, horses right?

AC: Uh huh.

DC: You could still till that low-lying ground that you couldn't get through with a tractor. That's why they ended up with it. Cause once people got tractors, they abandoned a lot of that low ground, you know what I mean, because they couldn't get through it. With horses, you still could.

AC: Course, right around there's an awful lot of water anyway. The farm were working, that's where we trapped. That was the same as a creek. Run from Woolrich all the way to Ferrance.

DC: What's the name of that river?

AC: Cohensee.

DC: Cohnesee Creek.

CE: Was it always hip boots, you never did it with boats?

AC: Oh yeah, he had a boat. That's how he got across the ditch.

CC: You had to watch yourself. You didn't tie it off right, when you left and come back, you'd have to take your clothes off, jump in, and go retrieve your boat on the other side. Come back, and dry yourself off with a couple of your clothes. More of your outside clothes, you try to dry yourself off with.

AC: We never had a great big boat.

CC: 12-footers all I remember. Something that you could drag, too, because you had to drag her sometimes.

AC: He had a right good size . . .

CC: You go out to sell the guts, tide would go out, and you'd only have 3-4 inches of water in there. You couldn't actually board a boat, but you had 200 traps, you had to put the traps in the boat, and get behind it and push it to the water. Flat-bottomed boat slide right across the marsh.

DC: Did your Dad ever have hip boots?

AC: Uh Huh. I don't know if they were rubber or not, but he had high boots. Seems to me that they did have a yellow top of some kind.

DC: That would have been probably in the 40s?

AC: Let's see I was probably, 8 or 10. And I'm 71.

DC: And you were born in 31?

AC: 30.

DC: So that would have been around 40, late 30s and 40s.

CB: They've had hip boots for fisherman for at least 100 years. I don't know how far they go back.

AC: What were they made of?

CB: Probably waxed or oiled canvas. Even at that time they could have coated them with Latex. Rubber.

AC: You had to have hip boots if you were a trapper.

DC: This guy down there didn't have hip boots, the guy Tom Floria talks about. Walking through those marshes.

CC: Then again, he was in the summertime. He was turtle trapping.

DC: That right?

CC: That was a summertime activity. Trapping was wintertime.

AC: I don't know when it was. I know it was Fall. You got done the stalks and all that. Then that would be time to get your traps set.

CE: Did you have formal territories, or was it first come, first served?

AC: You would have your own farm land (to trap). A lot of farmers, like I said, Uncle Eli never trapped his.

CC: When I was a kid, I never knew whose farm it was.

DC: He was the outlaw trapper.

CC: If I seen a ditch, it had part of my traps on it.

CB: If they didn't throw you off. . .

CC: I started in the morning with foot traps, I had 50 or 60. I left the house in the morning, and I went out toward Harrison Lake, then went on out and made a circle, back around back through the woods, behind the house, and ended up back at the house. That way, you started in the morning, you went all the way around the circle, and you got done you were back at the house. Muskrat traps, you could carry them 25, 30 at a time from the house. Cause from where I lived, the nearest marsh was Harrison Lake, and could only carry 25, 30 at a time. 70 of them muskrat traps.

AC: Seems to me that they staked them somehow.

CC: You had to stake them. And you had to have your colors. Nowadays, the game warden sit in the marsh with the binoculars and watch. To see if you're poaching. If the don't have your colors, didn't match the colors on the end (of the stake), they could tell that you were checking somebody else's trap.

AC: We didn't have too much of that.

CC: You probably used just a regular pole. Some people used bamboo. They grow bamboo, and they cut those stalks off when they're small. When you take wooden poles, and you've got 25 to 30 traps on your shoulder, and its wood and its going to get wet. You get 25 to 30 traps, with bamboo, and put it on your shoulder, you can go ahead and walk across the marsh, because you're light then. You start carrying more, I carry 25, 30, 40, you get a bundle. A bundle like this on your shoulder, and you're trying to walk through the marsh, mud up to your knees, jumping ditches that, you first look at them, they look like they're 12 foot wide, but they're 20 foot wide by the time you try to cross them. Got to crawl back up the other side. Getting down this side ain't no problem, because of the sliding. But to get back up the other side, you've got to hand this stuff up, crawl up the bank, go some more.

AC: It was work.

CC: Denny went with me one time.

DC: Yeah, it was work. That's when you were only coming back with 5 or 6 rats.

CC: That was before I found my poaching touch.

AC: There's some time in the moon they don't run. Is it light of the moon?

CC: Light of the moon. Some of the guys wouldn't trap then. Or when the tide was wrong. You had to get out there early in the morning when the tide was just getting up. Had to catch the tide. With me, I had a lot of coon hunting stuff, left over from coon hunting, so when the tide was down and it was during the night, I'd go out there early in the morning, say 1 or 2 o'clock, I'd go out there an tend my traps that way. When those guys weren't bringing any muskrats to the skinning house, I was still bringing muskrats. That's how I made my money.

DC: Well, you know, guys that had a regular job, he couldn't work the tide. You know what I mean, because he had to work all day, and if the right tide was 10 o'clock in the morning. . .

AC: You've got to know all that stuff, because you didn't want to be way out there, and the tide come in, you didn't have no way to get back. You wanted to make sure of that tide. I can remember that. Get stuck on the other side, then you were in trouble.

CE: Did you always take your catch, did you always skin it yourself? Did anybody in the community have a muskrat shed? A building dedicated to that?

CC: Yeah, Charlie Burress.

DC: No one in our community, that I'm aware of, did. Skinning shack.

AC: We always did ours in the barn, and Daddy would take and hang them in the rafters.

DC: Where'd you go to sell them?

AC: We had somebody come around.

DC: What he's referring to is somebody who worked in the local community, that had a little shack where you could take your stretched skins there. He would buy them from you.

CC: (showing a wire stretcher). Here's a muskrat skinner, that you pulled it over.

AC: Now we used the wood. Never had anything like that.

CC: Depended on what size your skin was. If you had him back here like this (skin stretched over entire length), you had something back then. You had something if he was back there in the back. But most of the time, the muskrat was probably about here (1/2 to 2/3 way down). About like that by the time you stretched him. Fur on the inside. And then you'd hang him up, of your ceiling. You might have a couple hundred of them if you were lucky.

I set these for muskrat traps. Used these (1½ or 2 jump traps) for raccoons. This is another raccoon trap. Used this one here for fox. A real light and easy trap for it to go off. Had a big pan. Cause you had to, when you trapped foxes you had to be careful with your scent. For one thing, you took tree bark and cooked your traps down with tree barks. Then you had to touch it all with rubber gloves. Then you'd have to take a box and you'd put screen on the bottom, and then put your dirt inside that, then you put your traps down on the ground. Then you put wax paper or something light over top of it. Took your box and sifted the dirt on top of it. I've got 75 or 80 of these. Who knows, maybe one day it will come back.

DC: Well, you know, I think the animals are coming back a bit. The muskrats have to be, because nobody's trapping them.

AC: You can go by the houses. If there are no houses, you're not going to get any muskrats.

CC: It's been about 5 years ago since I muskrat trapped. Been longer than that.

AC: There has to be houses, to have muskrats.

DC: Every time I go up to **, it's full of them. Lee Johnston, or Lee Brown, he still traps back there on the Texas road.

CC: He eats them.

AC: Didn't you eat muskrats? Lord, farmers, that was, you ate muskrat. That was good eating. Mama used to call it potting them down. Put them on the stove with some taters, some carrots, and potted them down. They were good.

CE: You mentioned beaver earlier on. Did you have much beaver in this area?

DC: Just starting about 10 years ago . . .

CB: They've really started coming back in here. When I first started working at parks, my first project was out at Lum's Pond. And they had one beaver family there that they protected and wouldn't let people go back there. Now they've got so many beavers, they're trying to give them away.

DC: They're an issue around here. Because they're just clogging up all the streams and all.

CC: They're not worth anything now.

AC: They used to make beaver coats.

CC: They're trapping them now with butterfly traps. Catching them live, moving them.

DC: I think they're good, because they create those ponds. You know, like over here at Fort Branch. That branch down there is probably 200 ft across down in there. And the little stream that runs right down the center of it, that may be only 10, 12 ft wide. Those beavers are putting those dams in there, and you could have a nice pond for wood ducks and stuff like that, going in and out of there.

CC: Down there behind the church. Oh, it's bad back in there.

DC: There's a big lake in there now. Those have become a big issue. The other thing is, I don't know why this is happening, it seems like otter is coming back in here. Found one in the Fall, just up here in front of the Cheswold fire house.

CC: Blade's got it. He was from the wall out to about here.

DC: He wasn't that big.

AC: Yes, he was.

DC: Maybe 3 ft.

CC: He's bigger, he's good size.

AC: His fur is so soft.

DC: Didn't have a mark on him. I saw another one the other day, saw it in the same spot. Back toward Brett's.

CC: You seen another one.

DC: The other morning, I was coming through there about 6:30 in the morning. Saw one.

CC: They're coming up the marsh. That branch.

DC: I don't know what they're coming up crossing that road for.

CC: They're curious animals. Otters are curious.

AC: Years ago, he said there used to be otters.

DC: When we got out crabbing in the summertime, out on the marsh, we see otters. Not regularly, but every now and then.

CC: We used a 220. You go up and down the marsh in the wintertime, and you're always watching the banks. The marsh edge, that's where the otter plays. He'll go up and down, back and forth, and they call it an otter slick. What you do, is break some sticks off, good size, and you stick them in on either side of the slick, on an angle to make sure he come through there (make a fence on either side). Put your sticks up on each side, then take your 220 and put it with a stick up there. And then he comes riding down the hill and right into the 220.

AC: Are they selling Curtis, otters.

CC: Yeah, they're selling.

DC: I don't know that it's legal to trap them.

CC: Had a 220 down there in the water. Had them sticks down there. And the 220s, they had locks. You'd set one spring, flip this thing over and lock it, and then you'd go to set the other one (220s had two springs), and lock it. Then you'd mess with the bait. I used to take old nylons from Momma, put your bait stick inside your nylons, and then close it up over the top of here (set the trigger). Well, they used to freeze up. I took them, they was sitting there set, and I thought I had this piece here across the top, and I reached down inside there, and when it went off it caught me sideways like this (jaws across his wrist). Caught me sideways just like that. And here I am out in the water, about 14 or 15 years old, bent over close to the ground, and it took your hand and both your feet just to cock one side.

AC: how'd you get out?

CC: I squealed like a baby for a long time. I was hurting. Especially when it went off. It had two of them (springs).

DC: The great Nessing in the Woods come save you.

AC: Who?

DC: The protector of the woods.

CC: I finally got it around to where I could get it off. It was painful. I was back up there a half hour, an hour. You've got no good movement. You get everything with your right hand, then try to get it with your left. Try to squeeze again. And look, I had to flip the trap around like that. Get the hook to flip over, the lock. So you could go for the other one. Then you had to flip it around. Try to get the lock to flip over the top of that one. It was pain, it was painful.

AC: Be my last time hunting or trapping.

DC: Well, I think you stick your arm in a trap like that . . .

CC: It was frozen. I was trying to loosen it up.

CE: We had these little ones. 110s. And we'd always try to get it set just so light and perfect. Invariably, just when you were pulling your hand out, the trigger would slip. And we'd have a bruise across here (across the back of the hand).

AC: Did they do much trapping down south (at Oak Orchard)?

CE. In the twentieth century, most of the trapping was for the table. Rabbit trapping. Rabbit gums. In the southern United States, that's real common. Everybody's got them. They put them out. They don't necessarily follow a season. They put them where they can see them. When they go out to check their fields, or whatever, they see one knocked over, set off.

AC: Do they have a lot of marsh hare down South?

CE: They did say the generation before I was talking to said there were some people who lived on the water. The same as you've been describing. Eel pots, fishing, turtling, trapping.

AC: Eel pots, forgot about them.

SIDE 2

general discussion about taxidermy

CE: You had mentioned snares for rabbits. Were they using wire snares?

CC: Yeah, that's what he used. Wire snares. If he still does it. He used to . . .

DC: Who's that?

CC: Vince. The kid just down the road from Virginia, West Virginia.

DC: Lives down past where Mom used to lived down there?

CC: Yes.

DC: I don't know too many people that did that (snaring).

CC: West Virginia. He had traps, did all that. He captured quail, out behind his house, then raised them.

DC: Survivor?

CC: Well, they did all that kind of stuff when they were kids. (They are discussing a non-Indian raised in West Virginia).

DC: Anyway, as our people become more affluent, a lot of these activities have trailed off, because there just wasn't a need to do some of that stuff anymore, you know. As they got better education, better jobs, started to enjoy the availability of leisure time, as opposed to working 24/7. My mother's generation, some of those people are still working from 6:00 in the morning or 5:00 in the morning until 8:00 at night on their little farmettes. They just have some livestock and stuff like that.

CC: She (Phyllis) doesn't have the livestock, but you'd swear she was a farmer.

AC: That's all they know.

DC: That's all they know, and the difference is that their children, who they were able to send away to get college educations in some cases, and then those people moved out of the community and some of them never come back. They went where the jobs were. So, out of the lack of need to do those things . . .

AC: At least my generation over there, I don't know a thing . . . My father kept ours. But lots sold their farms off, like to the electric company. Most of them aren't even farmers.

DC: They're not big landowners.

AC: I mean, these people worked on farms all their life, like your age. That's all they knew. They had to work. There wasn't no getting off the farm, and getting another job. You worked the farm. When the parents got too old, the electric company come through, and they bought all the farms down around the r******. Ride down there now, and there's not a farm house or a barn, where there used to be.

DC: The electric company bought them. For what reason?

AC: Big electric company come in there. I don't know why.

DC: Transmission, big transmission lines?

AC: Must be. I don't know.

DC: From Salem nuclear power plant?

AC: I don't know where they came from.

DC: That's the only thing I can think of down there as far as . . .

AC: They was using them for electric purposes, but I can't remember what for. Seems to me it came down from Atlantic City. Because there's Atlantic City Electric. Of course, those farmers, they were tickled to death. The young ones, it gave them so much money that they just.

****garbled**

CC: . . . and the young ones seen how much work it was. How much you going to give me for it? I'll take that. The farms gone, and they've got plenty of money.

DC: Farming's a tough existence when you don't have a lot of resources. Especially when all your kids are girls.

AC: My God yes. That was us. Had one brother. And Jimmy had two. Jack, he never done much. And my oldest brother, he had rheumatism when he was 14.

DC: Didn't take him long to learn.

AC: I mean, we worked. We were out in the fields at 6:00 . . .

CC: Had your kerosene rag wrapped around your head.

AC: That's right. The sad part about it is that we would have kerosene, and down along that creek . . .

CC: Now you're going to tell us how far you had to walk to school, rowing a boat from one side of the marsh to the other. They lived out on the island and had to row the boat to school.

AC: Gnats. We had to get up in the morning and go out and pick so many tomatoes before we went to school. School bus probably came at 8:00. Well, momma would tie this kerosene rag around your head, that's the only way you could be out there. Those gnats would be in your eyes. In your ears. Gods, they'd drive you up a wall. You would feel bad, but all the farmers' kids felt the same; came to school smelling of kerosene.

CC: I don't know how the Indians survived that.

AC: Greenhead, oh my God. . .

DC: They'd just coat themselves in mud. Bear grease.

AC: And those greenheads, and there was a big black fly, and they'd bite you in the bottom of the foot.

CC: When you'd work out in marshes, they'd be so bad. They had those greenheads. And when you did that (slapping thigh) to kill one, by the end of the day your pants would be so green, that stuff smeared on them. That's how bad they were.

AC: I think that's why a lot of the younger farmers, down there along that creek sold, because, it was bad.

DC: Harsh conditions?

CC: Oh yeah, it's bad out there. Ask Phyllis. We broke down in the boat out there one time. Wasn't the greenheads bad? They about ate us up, didn't they? I had to take my shirt off and put it over her head, they was that bad.

AC: I mean, they are bad. And a big black fly. And gnats. In your eyes, oh lord.

DC: And you know, back in those days, the drainage was probably a little more clogged up than it is today. They've opened a lot of that stuff up, and allowed it to drain.

CC: That's where they made a mess up, when they opened it up. All that soot (silt). I could talk to people who live out there, out to Willow Grove, and some of those guys, 80 –90 years old, they could tell you about the bay, when it had sandbars out there big enough to have trees growing. Little islands all up and down the bay. The water was so crystal clear you could look down in there and see fish. They say you go out there now, it's pitiful. I have never seen a crystal clear day out there where I could see a fish.

DC: Ain't never going to see another either, I don't think.

garbled

CC: It's all the wash off, the ditches they dug.

AC: The WPA came through in the thirties and dug ditches. And they dug them down here, too.

CB: They did it for mosquito control, but it didn't work. Because they did it wrong. So, like in Delaware, they have a program now that is trying to correct all that. They actually made those conditions better, or worse. Better for the mosquito.

DC: Well, we helped you out any?

CE: Yeah, this has been great. Were there any particular traps here that you wanted to see, or that you're familiar with?

DC: I wish I had brought my son. He'd have enjoyed seeing this.

CC: What's this thing down here (referring to trip-stick deadfall)?

CE: It's kind of screwed up because I had to . . . it should be pounded into the ground. So, I had to put it in concrete, so it's not quite aligned the way I would prefer. This is just a log dead-fall. It's called a trip-stick deadfall. Ideally, this (the stationary cross-bar) would have been higher up. And like you were saying, you'd build a little stake fence and a pen back here to put your bait in. The idea is . . . it would have been a little wider too . . . so, as the animal passes through here . . . This may fly up when I do this, so watch yourself. When they step on this (sound of log falling), the weight comes down. Now you'd put another log on this, like this. But, you know, this is just a little basic piece of string, you know, cordage made out of a vine or

something, could take a whole lot of weight. Because it is not really holding all the weight. It is really ingenious the way it uses the friction, so that not one piece has all the stress on it. You can put a lot of weight on here and still. . .

DC: So, you could actually add another heavier log on the back?

CE: You also see them sometimes they have logs on both sides. This is not a really good example; it's clumsy. It just to see the basics of how it works. I have a picture . . . I don't have it with me. It will be in my report. Of an Ojibwa one, and there they have to almost make like a cave back here, cover it up, to keep the crows or something flying over from seeing the bait.

DC: From stealing the bait?

CE: Right. So it almost looks like a mound of vegetation, but the animal can still see it through the front there. The Seneca had this version, and they had another version that I can't make here, but basically had a stick came down, which balanced on another stick that went back. I can sort of mimic it maybe. That's not going to stay. But basically it's the same thing. Gets back here messing with the bait, and it breaks loose. You set it up on a little pebble or a knot of wood. You could use this set on a trail as well.

CC: That trap works well. All those traps he has work excellent. You just had to have them walking underneath. . .

CE: Like I said, they apparently are pretty efficient. Effective.

CC: Most of those traps there you had to use on lines (trails).

DC: Or a trail.

** garbled about trappers using scents to draw in prey**

DC: Beaver trappers, they used scents.

CE: This is a real basic . . . it's kind of tangled now. Again, you go to a spring pole. And this would probably be a trail. You'd put your snare this way (vertical) across the trail. After it got in the snare, it would knock this loose, pull him up.

DC: Yank, pull him up.

CE: This is found throughout America.

DC: Real popular one, hey?

CE: It's basic and very effective. One of these two, they call it the Poacher's Snare. Over in England they call it the Poacher's Snare, because, again, it's very simple. This one . . .

DC: What holds that (the trigger stick) on the side (of the Nanticoke baited snare)?

CE: It's got a little notch on it. And, let me string this really quick. (some delay here). A lot of this is just getting the angle right. Which is hard (with artificial spring pole).

CB: Once you get practiced at it, there's nothing to it.

CE: It's not going to stay. It's basically, the pressure helps keep . . . Once they move it . . .

DC: SO, it's this notch back here that's holding on this side.

CE: Again, the bait stick probably would not have been this long. You'd have your noose down on the ground below your bait stick. Like I say, in Europe they call this a poacher's snare. But it was known here before the Europeans came. It's just very highly effective. It's hard to freeze up. It works well. If something gets the bait, you are going to catch it. The same thing, this is a variation, that was recorded both in Cheswold and down in Oak Orchard. It's another one . . . just getting the angle right. But again, this would be the snare down on the ground below, and when it got to moving this (sound of snare springing), it would lift up and catch them. The spring pole, you can either use a sapling or a balance. You'd get a big log, and you'd rest it on a log or something. And these (triggers) would essentially tie it down, fight the gravity, and when it triggered it would tip up and lift it (the prey) up in the air. It won't necessarily kill them immediately, but their struggle. Being up in the air, they struggle.

***garbled discussion of restroom door**

CE: I've made these (Figure-4 dead-fall) before, when we were up in the mountains, in a cabin that sat vacant all winter, and was full of mice. We made a bunch of these out of pencils?

DC: Is that right?

CE: Pencils and bricks. And all night long, it was slam, slam, slam.

DC: Catching mice.

CE: We caught a bunch of mice.

garbled discussion of pranks

CE: This one (Figure-4). Like I say, there is some discussion whether this is an Old World borrowing or not. A lot of Indian groups were using it. One of the experts, the guy that did the study among the Seneca said that no, it wasn't a native invention. But, a lot of these other forms that definitely are native are very similar, in terms of operation. I don't see that . . .

DC: How they wouldn't have thought of it.

CE: Exactly. It's the same thing. It's got a snare on it instead. You could make the same thing with two or three logs together here (instead of the rock). (sound of rock dead-fall triggering).

AC: That would kill a rabbit.

DC: Rabbits, I mean, you could scare a rabbit to death. You know what I mean. Slap your hands together really loud.

CE: We caught a few possums that way growing up. Run at them so fast that they just ball up.

AC: Yeah, they play. Wait for you to leave, and then they'll run off.

DC: I don't know what is going to happen to the trapping. There may be some rare individuals that take a liking to it and continue to do it. You know, in this day and age, the need is not there. Get an education, get good jobs, to where you can afford to live, precludes you from going out there.

CE: The only way I think you can make a living these days, is to combine the fur trapping in the winter with nuisance trapping the rest of the year. Problem animals.

DC: Then you're really not going to make too much of a living. You're just going to provide some kind of service to somebody.

CE: Right, you're still kind of stuck.

DC: Nobody's going to pay you big money to trap a groundhog when you can put a .22 bullet through its skull.

CE: I think a lot of people are feeding these groundhogs, not realizing that they are ruining their foundations.

DC: Digging up underneath them.

garbled

DC: So, up there at the Blue Ball, you found extensive evidence of trapping? Or it was just a supposition?

CE: It was more like this looks like a good place. What we had was a series of what looked to be really short-term visits. At Blue Ball, the reason the site is important is because it's never been plowed. These are pretty clear, where somebody sat down and did something. And I was thinking, at least from the evidence, it wouldn't have taken more than an hour, to make these (loci). Somebody's out in the woods doing something short-term, and moving on. There's differences between them. One area has a lot of scrapers, and the other end looks like they worked a cobble of quartz down to a few good flakes or something. One of the things we started talking about was, what are these short-term activities people were doing in the woods? Should we really be expecting to predict them? Modeling them. You know, archaeologists love to be able to model everything.

CB: They didn't come out there just to hammer rocks.

CE: They are doing something in the woods, and they are coming sort of to the same place. Probably 20 or 30 times for the whole site. We only excavated 4 or 5 of those areas. It's not something definite. The tool kits are not the same, so it's not like they're coming back, thinking "we're going to the hickory grove to process nuts." So, that's what got us to the discussion that there was a lot going on in the woods besides the classic – they were either gathering nuts or shooting deer. That's certainly unimaginative. And, that sort of led into this whole thing. I mentioned trapping, and it was "what are you talking about?"

DC: I guess in the course of trapping, you could . . . You say there was evidence of only 20 or 30 visits, to an area, over a time that spans a couple of thousand years?

CE: Yeah.

DC: That doesn't really show much significance of a particular activity that the area was conducive to, providing the resources for.

CB: Well, see, some of these activities don't really show much of a signature in the archaeological remains. What's left. Mostly in archaeology, we're not even going to find the bones.

AC: What were they doing between setting the trap and checking it?

CC: They made more traps while they were out in the woods.

CB: But, they were doing something besides setting traps and going to collect whatever it was they trapped.

DC: So, they sat down and make some points or process. . .

CB: Or they make tools so they could scrape them. After they get them, they're probably doing the whole process.

CC: The rock scrapers they got, they sometime work better than metal ones.

CB: They don't cut the hide the way the metal ones do.

CE: We just kind of got into a whole, the whole idea that there are a lot of things that went on in the woods, and you think of somebody's life, and they're spending a half-hour or 20 minutes at a site. That's insignificant. An example I use in the report, if I go hiking with my wife, we stop for a rest, my wife and my kids. I like to stop in the shade. My wife likes to stop in the sun. And the kids don't care if it's sunny or not, they want to find something to climb on. How would you model that behavior, 2,000 years later, when you look at it archaeologically? A lot of these decisions are so far removed . . . it's not like where are we going to plant a field of corn? Everybody'd have the same answer.

DC: A nice flat area.

CE. A flat area, well-drained. Good soils. This type of decision is so minor compared to that, that it's really hard . . . I think it should be really humbling to archaeologists to say "we probably aren't going to be able to model this." We're going to make some educated guesses and give up at that point. We're trying to do some stuff with tool edges, look at what they were working with. Hard materials, soft materials. And we're trying to lay around with some blood residue on tools. Whether it really works, presence/absence. And whether you can determine species. If we're getting rabbit and muskrat, that's going to tell us one thing, if we're getting deer it's going to tell us another. I don't know, right now that doesn't look like it's working really well.

DC: Is that right?

CE: The whole idea is that we had this really nice location, but it was used so lightly. It gets into the whole thing, that there are so many uses of the woods that left no site at all. We'll never know . . . there are also a lot of spiritual uses in the woods. We'll never touch that. We'll have to say, "Well, okay."

CB: Those same wetland areas where they were trapping would also be a place where a lot of the medicinal or just plain herbs would be found.

DC: Would be gathered.

CE: Same thing, a lot of the cattails for making mats, would be in the wetlands. It's interesting.

DC: It is, and it's such a daunting task to make sense of it. You know, especially when you're dealing with organic that just doesn't survive very long.

CE: Let me make sure that I've got everybody's name here. I'm terrible with names.

DC: Anna Coker. Curtis Coker.

CE: I'm sorry. Anna is your Mom?

DC: She's my mother, yes. Our mother.

CE: Right, you're brothers.

DC: Phyllis Spiering. How do you spell your last name?

PS: S-P-I-E-R-I-N-G

AC: I'm her mother-in-law (laughter).

CE: Alright.

DC: You guys are common law by now. (more laughter).

PS: Going on 13 years.

AC: There you go. Common law twice. You've only got to be there seven.

CE: Could I ask one last thing? Could I take a photo of you with a couple of the traps, for the report? Would that be okay. I really appreciate you guys taking the time to do this. Like I said, when the report gets done, I'll get you a copy. ***garbled** camera sound**** Alright, you going to make it down to MAAC?

DC: I'll be there.

CE: I'll have these set up down there, as well.

garbled discussion of MAAC, and then pictures on the wall**

END OF LENAPE INTERVIEWS