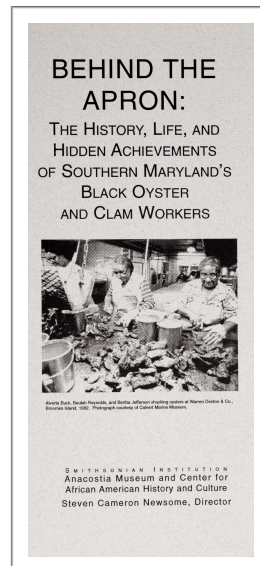




Smithsonian

Anacostia Community Museum

Behind the Apron: The History, Life, and Hidden Achievements of Southern Maryland's Black Oyster and Clam Workers



Anacostia Community Museum Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Anacostia Community Museum Archives
Title:	Behind the Apron: The History, Life, and Hidden Achievements of Southern Maryland's Black Oyster and Clam Workers
Date:	1997
Identifier:	ACMA.09-007.28
Creator:	Anacostia Community Museum
Extent:	1 Linear foot 12 Sound recordings (audio cassette)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Please contact the archivist at acmarchives@si.edu.

Biographical / Historical

African Americans have been an integral part of Southern Maryland's proud commercial fishing industry. Nowhere has their contribution been more prominent than in the seafood houses along the Patuxent River. Until most recently, in Calvert and other neighboring counties, the function of shucking oysters and clams was almost exclusively performed by African Americans. Black oyster and clam workers have brought dignity, skill, and a strong sense of community to a job that industry outsiders often consider "dirty work."

Scope and Contents

Behind the Apron oral history project documents the experiences of Black oyster and clam workers in Southern Maryland. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997. The interviewees include: Doris Harris, Conroy Butler, Mary Hawkins, Christine Gray, Blondell Mason, Mary Washington, Ruth Smith, and William Bourne. The interviews explore issues such as: the connection between land and water, between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- African Americans
- African Americans -- Employment
- African Americans -- Maryland

Types of Materials:

- Oral histories (document genres)
- Sound recordings
- Transcripts

Container Listing

ACMA AV005264: Behind the Apron Interview with Conroy Butler, April 29, 1997

1 Sound recording (audio cassette)

001327

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 001327

Language: English.

Notes: Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Conroy Franklin Butler talks about his experience working as an oyster shucker at the Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland) for 27 years. In addition to describing his enjoyment for the job, Butler speaks of some of the changes in the oyster shucking industry.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Dated 19970429 (transcribed from transcripts).

Behind the Apron Interview with Conroy Butler, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Behind the Apron oral history project documents the experiences of Black oyster and clam workers in Southern Maryland. The interviews explore issues such as: the connection between land and water, between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997.

Names: Anacostia Community Museum
Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

Topic: African Americans
African Americans -- Employment
African Americans -- Maryland
Oyster industry
Clam industry

Place: Maryland
United States

Genre/Form: Sound recordings
Oral histories (document genres)
Interviews

ACMA AV005265: Behind the Apron Interview with William Bourne, April 15, 1997

1 Sound recording (audio cassette)

003045

[Audio: William Bourne Interview: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 003045

Language: English.
Notes: Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.
Through an oral history interview, William Bourne talks about his family and growing up, and working on his family's tobacco farm in Calvert County, Maryland. Bourne describes his experience as an oyster shucker for 64 years at the Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland). He explains the drop in the oyster population and the changes over the years in the oyster shucking industry, including the changing demographics of the industry's workers.
Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Dated 19970415.
Behind the Apron Interview with William Bourne, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
Behind the Apron oral history project documents the experiences of Black oyster and clam workers in Southern Maryland. The interviews explore issues such as: the connection between land and water, between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997.

Names: Anacostia Community Museum
Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
Topic: African Americans
African Americans -- Employment
African Americans -- Maryland
Oyster industry
Clam industry
Place: Maryland
United States
Genre/Form: Sound recordings
Oral histories (document genres)
Interviews

ACMA AV005256: Behind the Apron Interview with Mary Dawkins, circa 1997
1 Sound recording (audio cassette)
003947

[Audio: Mary Dawkins Interview: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 003947

Language: English.

Notes: Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Mary Dawkins talks about growing up and being raised by her grandparents in Lusbee, Maryland. She talks about her enjoyment as a clam and oyster shucker and her ability to earn money to send her children to college. Prior to working for Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland), Dawkins worked as cook for Parrens and as a shucker for Lores, which went out of business. Dawkins describes her experience working as a clam and oyster shucker in detail. She explains the changes in the oyster, clam, and crab industries, particularly the oysters and crabs are smaller and not as plentiful, and the diminished African American workforce. She talks about working with Mexicans and the changing demographics of the employees working at Warren Denton Seafood House.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Undated.

Behind the Apron Interview with Mary Dawkins, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Behind the Apron oral history project documents the experiences of Black oyster and clam workers in Southern Maryland. The interviews explore issues such as: the connection between land and water, between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997.

Names:	Anacostia Community Museum Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
Topic:	African Americans African Americans -- Employment African Americans -- Maryland Oyster industry Clam industry
Place:	Maryland United States
Genre/Form:	Sound recordings Oral histories (document genres) Interviews

ACMA AV005263: Behind the Apron Interview with Christine Gray, circa 1997

1 Sound recording (audio cassette)

001619

[Audio: Christine Gray Interview: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 001619

Language: English.

Notes: Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Christine Gray speaks of her experience working as a clam shucker at the Warren Denton Seafood

House (Calvert County, Maryland). In addition to describing her enjoyment for the job, Gray talks about some of the fastest shuckers and changes in the clam shucking industry, including the changing demographics of the employees working at Warren Denton Seafood House.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Undated.

Behind the Apron Interview with Christine Gray, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Behind the Apron oral history project documents the experiences of Black oyster and clam workers in Southern Maryland. The interviews explore issues such as: the connection between land and water, between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997.

Names:	Anacostia Community Museum Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
Topic:	African Americans African Americans -- Employment African Americans -- Maryland Oyster industry Clam industry
Place:	Maryland United States
Genre/Form:	Sound recordings Oral histories (document genres) Interviews

ACMA AV005257: Behind the Apron Interview with Doris Harris, May 12, 1997
2 Sound recordings (audio cassette)
001322 001733

[Audio: Doris Harris Interview Part 2: Behind the Apron](#)

[Audio: Doris Harris Interview Part 1: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 001322 001733

Language: English.

Notes: ACMA AV005258

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Doris Harris talks about growing up in Lusbee, Maryland (Calvert County) with her nine siblings, and her parents' jobs (tobacco farming and housekeeping). Harris explains her work as a clam shucker at Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland) and the difference between shucking clams and shucking oysters. She also describes her enjoyment for the job, the experience of women oyster workers, and changes in the

clam shucking industry, particularly the diminished African American workforce. Both interviews - May 9, 1996 and May 12, 1997 - cover the same topics. The May 12 interview contains a bit more detail.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Dated 19960509 and 19970512 (transcribed from transcripts).

Behind the Apron Interview with Doris Harris, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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Names:	Anacostia Community Museum Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
Topic:	African Americans African Americans -- Employment African Americans -- Maryland Oyster industry Clam industry
Place:	Maryland United States
Genre/Form:	Sound recordings Oral histories (document genres) Interviews

ACMA AV005259: Behind the Apron Interview with Blondell Mason, 1997
2 Sound recordings (audio cassette)
001843 002348

[Audio: Blondell Mason Interview Part 2: Behind the Apron](#)

[Audio: Blondell Mason Interview Part 1: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 001843 002348

Language: English.

Notes: ACMA AV005260

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Blondell Mason talks about growing up in Baltimore City and then Calvert County, his children, farming, and shucking oysters. Mason describes his experiences working as an oyster shucker for approximately 30 years at the Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland). Mason was one of the fastest oyster shuckers at the seafood house. In addition to discussing why he enjoyed working as an oyster shucker, he describes the changes over the years in the oyster shucking industry,

including the changing demographics of the industry's workers. Mason also talks about a man who tried to form an oyster union to negotiate wages. Both parts one and two of the interview contain the same overall content, but different details.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Dated 19960417 and 19970417 (transcribed from transcripts).

Behind the Apron Interview with Blondell Mason, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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Names:	Anacostia Community Museum Anacostia Neighborhood Museum
Topic:	African Americans African Americans -- Employment African Americans -- Maryland Oyster industry Clam industry
Place:	Maryland United States
Genre/Form:	Sound recordings Oral histories (document genres) Interviews

ACMA AV005261: Behind the Apron Interview with Ruth Smith, 1997
2 Sound recordings (audio cassette)
001756 003227

[Audio: Ruth Smith Interview Part 2: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum

Technical: 001756 003227

Language: English.

Notes: ACMA AV005262

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Ruth Smith describes her experience working as an oyster shucker for 23 years at the Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland). She spoke of the fastest oyster shuckers at the seafood house, her participation in oyster shucking competitions, and the changes in the oyster shucking industry. Smith also talked about her family and growing up in Calvert County, Maryland.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. One interview is dated 19970530 (transcribed from transcripts) and the other one is undated.

Behind the Apron Interview with Ruth Smith, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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 African Americans -- Employment
 African Americans -- Maryland
 Oyster industry
 Clam industry
 Place: Maryland
 United States
 Genre/Form: Sound recordings
 Oral histories (document genres)
 Interviews

ACMA AV005254: Behind the Apron Interview with Mary Washington, 1997
 2 Sound recordings (audio cassette)
 001712 001013

[Audio: Mary Washington Interview Part 1: Behind the Apron](#)

Creator: Anacostia Museum
 Technical: 001712 001013
 Language: English.
 Notes: ACMA AV005255

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Some items are not accessible due to obsolete format and playback machinery restrictions. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Through an oral history interview, Mary Washington talks about her family and growing up in Huntingtown, Maryland; and her experience working as a clam shucker at the Warren Denton Seafood House (Calvert County, Maryland) for eleven years.

Interview. Part of Behind the Apron oral history project. Undated.

Behind the Apron Interview with Mary Washington, Behind the Apron oral history project, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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between farming and the fishing industry; the communal spirit and camaraderie amongst oyster workers; the experience of women oyster workers; and the changes in the oyster packing industry resulting in a diminished African American workforce. The audio interviews were conducted by Shelia Montague Parker in 1997.

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Interviews