

Bill Jester
December, 1977

Interviewer: Karen Croner
Interviewee: Bill Jester
Transcribed By: Shirley Fauber
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Tape, Side A (1st Side): Prelude:

Mary Carrick: This tape was made at Nat Steelman's house on December 5, 1977. The two people who are talking through it are Nat Steelman, whose full name is Will Nat Steelman, and William Fowell Jester who told us he was seventy-four years old. He is the first voice that you hear on the tape, and the one that you hear mostly in the tape, Karen Croner, from the National Seashore, was also there and I was taping, Mary Carrick, at the same time.

Bill Jester: Okay Karen, next to the blind durin' the same shoot, now we killed us sixteen wild geese, Dr. Joe Gather and myself, that day and he snapped my picture.

Karen Croner: Isn't – and this was in the 30's you think, interesting. Where was this – where were you hunting at that time, is that right around Chincoteague?

Bill Jester: It was in Maryland, no, up in Maryland.

Karen Croner: In Maryland, I see.

Marry Carrick: On Assateague right?

Bill Jester: From the Maryland-Virginia line about three miles. They had a lot – they had about twenty-five hundred acres of marshland.

Karen Croner: Oh my.

Bill Jester: And we shot on it all together.

Karen Croner: (Tape stopped and started) Bill was showing old pictures of the take and ducks for one day at that time in the 30's.

(Tape Stopped and Started)

Bill Jester: The Smith fellow, you know L. C. Smith who made the Eska gun and the L. C. Smith shotgun and the typewriter.

Karen Croner: Oh yes.

Bill Jester: Well, that was one of his forty. That wadn't him but that was one of the forty.

Karen Croner: I see. And you took this party out Bill, is that what . . .

Bill Jester: The way it was, he was with a club that had the membership and each and every member took a date, and he brung his friends with him. It was more of a business proposition. Some of the great big deals were done there at Chesapeake. . . (tape stopped)

Karen Croner: Really.

Bill Jester: Was pretty well settled right there in that club Nat.

Nat Steelman: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: 'Cause I was comin' down one day and he and Wyle stopped by, Major Allen was there then, he was with the J. E. Reynolds & Company.

Karen Croner: Oh goodness.

Bill Jester: And he went ashore and he had a state drug commissioner of the State of Maryland with him. And I knew then that somethin' was a brewin' for him to be there.

(Bunch of people talking, inaudible)

Nat Steelman: Assateague up there to the Maryland line. He used to live there.

(Tape stopped and started)

Nat Steelman: . . . but it's been told it's what's been handed down; he floored me with one thing. Was a little narrow place you go through up there, he can tell you better than I can. And see it was a big Bay, he could remember when he clammed there and it's all growed up in trees now.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

(Tape stopped and started)

Nat Steelman: He said look, he could tell you where the old wreck that the – supposedly Spanish horses were supposed to produce 'em.

Karen Croner: Amazing.

Nat Steelman: He can go show you where part of her keel– he knows where all that is see. And so actually you would need possibly to say something to get ‘im on the right track of the area that you want.

Karen Croner: Right, right.

Nat Steelman: Something about – I’d have to get my information from him anyhow for clarity.

Karen Croner: Maybe if we have to start with just – if we ask you when you were born.

Bill Jester: Well, the way I’ll start saw it – I’ll deal with my Great-Grandfather.

Karen Croner: Okay.

Bill Jester: He was – his name was Kendall Jester. Kenny Jester.

Mary Carrick: I have to ask you before you start – we want to be sure that we get your full name and Nat’s full name on this tape. So that there is never any question. We will put a card with the tape too, but I want it right on the tape. Nat, you are Nathan . . .

Nat Steelman: No.

Mary Carrick: No.

Nat Steelman: Just Nat. But first is Will. W-i-l-l.

Mary Carrick: I see. Will.

Nat Steelman: Not William. Just W-i-l-l. And then N-a-t.

Mary Carrick: And then N-a-t.

Nat Steelman: I’m glad they give me that ‘cause you couldn’t put a nickname on it very well. Kept it short.

Mary Carrick: (Laughing)

Nat Steelman: And then Steelman. S-t-e-e-l-m-a-n.

Mary Carrick: Right, and this is December 5 isn’t it, 1977 that we are talking. And now I would love to have your full name Bill.

(Tape stopped and started)

Mary Carrick: Bill said that his full name was William Fowell Jester. F-o-w-e-l-l Jester. And that his family had always lived on Chincoteague.

Bill Jester: My Father before me. And my Great-Grandfather as far back as we know.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: Don't know where he came from but he must have been from England because Jester is an English name.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: He located on the upper end of Chincoteague Island on the northeast end. And he owned, I guess he owned very near thirty acres, I would say wouldn't you Nat?

Nat Steelman: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And he was one of the first ones who began to get these Assateague ponies and raise 'em. He had ponies. (Tape stopped) When I was a boy I can remember goin' up there and I would see these ponies. Naturally I would see one I wanted but they never would give it to me because I realize now I was too young.

(Laughing)

Bill Jester: And he accumulated in his time quite bit money. He was right well, what we would say, right well fixed.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Bill Jester: And there was another thing about 'im, I've always heard people say that he was a man of his word. That his word was his bond.

Karen Croner: Okay.

Bill Jester: And he used to own all this land up there where around the shores they had a lot a natural growth oysters in those days. The oysters grew big and he had a – one of his daughters married Capt. John Bunting down here. W. C. Bunting is the son of Capt. John Bunting who was my Great-Grandfather's daughter – married his daughter.

Nat Steelman: Susan.

Bill Jester: He would sail, he had a sailboat, Capt. John did. And he would sail the schooner to New York and carry the oysters while my Grandfather – my Great-Grandfather, he got the oysters together up here around the head of the Island. And in those days they got high as a Dollar a bushel for oysters.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: That's been a long time ago. My Father said to me once the first money he ever made he went out in Oyster Bay and he caught a bushel of oysters, he was nothin' but a small boy. His Father died when he was real young and he said he got a Dollar for that bushel of oysters, nice big oysters and they were fat and he got a dollar for 'em.

Mary Carrick: And they were all natural oysters, natural grown.

Bill Jester: All natural oysters, all natural growth oysters.

Karen Croner: And this was in – in the present Oyster Bay . . .

Bill Jester: That's right, Oyster Bay in Chincoteague Bay, around the whole – end – upper end of the Island.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: So that is the way he made his livin' and accumulated his money. Of course he would go down to, what we call goin' down the Bay, that was takin' a boat and goin' down around maybe Wachapreague and in that vicinity around them islands and places and they would catch terrapin. In those days terrapin brung a big price too.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: And he would do that certain times a year. I've heard my Father say he went with him when he was a boy because he raised my Father and my Father's brother and he used to take these boys with 'im. He said one time they were down there in a storm and his hat blew off. He would – these two boys were in the cabin of the boat – and he was up at the wheel tryin' to manage the boat the best he could. And he said he would pray. He would sing and pray. One time his hat blew off and he grabbed the towel that they had to wipe their faces with, and he put that around his head.

Karen Croner: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: And after a while they weathered the storm and they got back home safe.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: But that was their life. They were watermen.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And then after years my Father grew up and he moved up to Green Run. His Mother married again and there he began to shoot with a gun. He used to kill the fowl for the Green Run Hotel table. That was . . .

Mary Carrick: Oh, I don't know where Green Run is. Where is that?

Bill Jester: Green Run is about twelve or about fifteen miles above Chincoteague. Right up on the ocean.

Mary Carrick: Oh.

Nat Steelman: Wasn't that the Scott's Hotel?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Mary Carrick: On Assateague there was a hotel.

Karen Croner: I see.

Bill Jester: Pop shot fowl for Mr. Jim Scott. There's where he met my Mother. She was born and raised in North Beach. But when she was a girl her father moved down here, what we call Raggy Point. Now you'll see that on the map.

Karen Croner: Yes, yes.

Bill Jester: Well that's where they lived until her and my Father were married and then they – a little place above that they called Great Neck, it was a point of land that went out toward Chincoteague Bay.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And they had a little home there, that's where they lived until after a while when the railroads come and the boat came to Chincoteague they could ship their stuff to New York and different places. Then those people moved closer by the railroad. And then him and my Mother, after they lived there for quite a while, they moved back to Chincoteague here. And then he began to go into the oyster business certain times a year. And then he would shoot fowl in the wintertime for a living. But they didn't shoot fowl like these fellars do out here now. They didn't go out and try to kill 'em all in one day.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: He would lay around for two or three weeks to a month and he watched these flocks of redheads, get 'em usin' to a certain place, and then he would go there with the right kind a wind and he would shoot 'em. And he would kill enough maybe for to last him for a month or

two. Make that much money. They caught – in those days they got high as Three Dollars and Fifty Cents a pair for them redheads when they shipped ‘em in to New York.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: So that is the way that he made his living. And we children were raised right up into it. We had ponies. We’ve always had ponies up until I married and moved away from home. A many a time we’ve set to the dinner table and the pony would reach his head over and we’d give ‘im a biscuit from off the table.

Karen Croner: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: We all grew up together, the ponies, and my Father had about nine ponies. And we boys rode ‘em all around everywhere and you will see these pictures. Some of ‘em where – we used to keep ‘em round the Popes Island Duck Club and we would ride ‘em. We could wade ‘em off of that Island over onto the ocean . . .

Karen Croner: I see.

Bill Jester: On Assateague and then we would ride all over the beaches anywhere we wanted to. Sometimes we’d get froze up up there when I was workin’ for the club. And we’d take these ponies and bring the guests down here to Assateague and then rode across to Chincoteague in a boat and then go home from here. Where when it was froze over, see we used to get ‘em in boats and we couldn’t go across the Bay when it was froze over in the boat, we’d bring ‘em down the beach.

Karen Croner: I see.

Bill Jester: And these ponies we used them one to carry and the other to a road cart. We had an old ox we called Old Mike and he carried the luggage and the steer cart and that’s they way we came down from Popes Island Duck Club in the wintertime during the ducking season.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: When the Bay was frozen over.

Karen Croner: How did – all – for instance, how did things like oxen get here? Everything had to come by boat, is that right, originally?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Did people bring these things in their own boats? Did you use – was there a main boat that came between the mainland here, or did you have your own boats to transport your things?

Bill Jester: Well, in the beginning they had to have their own boats. But later then people – as more people began to accumulate, why then they – different ones saw where it would be a profit in to havin’ a boat that would sail back and forth at different times.

Karen Croner: Yes, yes. But that was later?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Initially this was just by individual . . .

Bill Jester: At first they used to have to market their own stuff.

Karen Croner: I see. Where did you go – now you were saying that you would get a month’s supply, was that month’s supply of birds for you and your family?

Bill Jester: No. What I meant by that, he would ship ‘em into New York.

Karen Croner: And how did he do that?

Bill Jester: And get money enough to keep his family for two or three months on that one day’s kill.

Karen Croner: Right. So how did he do that? For instance, where did he go to ship those birds?

Bill Jester: Well, he would kill ‘em up here around the head of the Island and there was shallow water up above Chincoteague. Called Giller Eye Shoal and it was a place where a lot of the steel grass grew. And it was great feedin’ grounds for ducks.

Karen Croner: Oh, right, right. And the brant . . .

Bill Jester: Of course the redhead’s brung more. Now my Father wouldn’t hardly shoot a black mallard duck because they only got a Dollar a pair for them and he didn’t want to waste the ammunition to kill ‘em. But the redhead ducks, why . . .

Mary Carrick: How much a pair . . .

Bill Jester: They were the ones they would shoot because it didn’t take as much ammunition – they come in a big flock and kill ‘em. I heard ‘im say one time they killed twenty-two out of one flock.

Karen Croner: Were these – were these - the redhead – the distinct redhead duck, this is not canvas back?

Bill Jester: No. A regular redhead duck.

Karen Croner: And they had more redheads here than canvas back or was it just that they were preferable?

Bill Jester: In them days we did. No, we never did have very many canvas backs here.

Karen Croner: Is that right?

Bill Jester: Because we never had the right feedin' bottom.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: They were more of a brackish water duck and they would come in the Chesapeake Bay.

Karen Croner: Yeah, right.

Bill Jester: But we did have redhead and what they called a blackhead.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Mary Carrick: Do you know in New York – was it mostly the breast meat or the feathers that people were interested in of the ducks?

Bill Jester: They were just interested in the meat.

Mary Carrick: Hum.

Bill Jester: They wanted to eat. I imagine the restaurants and the hotels and then people would give big dinners and have the bird for that sort.

Karen Croner: Oh yeah, quite a delicacy.

Mary Carrick: That's right, yeah.

Nat Steelman: They could to be corn fed and taste better.

Bill Jester: No. Yeah, they would be but in them days Nat they never corn fed those redhead ducks. I'll tell you about this eel grass we had. It was one of the most wonderful feeds we have ever had. The ducks ate the root of it. From the root of the eel grass, if you dug down in the bottom, it would a been something like you see these old wire grass roots, the little lumps along. And if you took that and take it in your mouth and chewed it, it was sweet.

Karen Croner: Oh.

Mary Carrick: Interesting.

Bill Jester: The wild geese in shallow ponds would go and dig it out where it had been in the cold of the bottom and get the root of it.

Nat Steelman: Root of it, yeah.

Bill Jester: And then naturally they'd cut the top of it off, and sometimes it would have a spear on it and I 'spect they (tape stopped).

Bill Jester: All the nitrogen and _____ (inaudible). They used to live like that. They would, you know, how they used to be on the water, they'd _____ (inaudible). The other fowl had cut it up off the bottom.

Karen Croner: What about brant Bill. Now we know now that the brant are especially fond of the ell grass. Were there many brant at that time?

Bill Jester: Oh, there was more brant I believe than any other fowl there was.

Karen Croner: Um.

Mary Carrick: There was more . . .

Bill Jester: Because . . .

Mary Carrick: Was there more then than there is now would you say?

Bill Jester: Oh yeah! Hundreds more.

Mary Carrick: Um.

Nat Steelman: Did any of them eat that string moss?

Bill Jester: Yeah, yeah, they never eat the string moss much I don't think Nat. But in that string moss there was a little black muscle or somethin' that they feed – and they would nuzzle in that and get them and eat 'em. But they would eat the eel grass, the blade of it.

Nat Steelman: How about the place you used to live up there, where you were showin' me on that ridge, I forget the name of it, there at Virginia Creek.

Bill Jester: Oh . . .

Nat Steelman: On the other side . . .

Bill Jester: Great Neck there. That bottom, yeah, Great Neck.

Nat Steelman: Explain to them where that is why don't you.

Bill Jester: It was a piece of land that jetted out from the regular point marshes.

Karen Croner: Oh.

Bill Jester: Out towards the Chincoteague Bay. It's on - the eastside of it was Virginia Creek.

Karen Croner: Oh.

Bill Jester: And on the other side was Chincoteague Bay. See it made a peninsula land, it went out. We called it Great Neck.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Bill Jester: And once in a time it was quite a few families lived there, quite a few families.

Karen Croner: That's quite far out isn't it. Now how did you – how – you went from the mainland to Chincoteague, for instance, by boat. You had to go from Chincoteague to Assateague by boat.

Bill Jester: That' right.

Karen Croner: Now was that your route or did you – when you left – ordinarily let's say when you left Assateague for something, did you make this stop at Chincoteague or did you go from Assateague like to Maryland. What was your . . .?

Bill Jester: Well, we would go to Chincoteague, right here to Chincoteague, right on up the Bay.

Karen Croner: I see.

Bill Jester: We didn't go on Assateague Beach at all when we were workin' with the club 'cause it was a mile off to the nor'west of Assateague Beach.

Karen Croner: I see.

Nat Steelman: But . . .

Bill Jester: But the way to this Island over to the Assateague Beach because the water was shallow.

Karen Croner: I see.

Nat Steelman: You spent years livin' on Assateague on that ridge.

Bill Jester: Yeah, yeah.

Nat Steelman: You might – a little bit there, but you spent years livin' there on Assateague.

Karen Croner: And when you lived there Bill, then what was your connection with the mainland, did you go from there right to the mainland or did you . . .

Bill Jester: No. They moved from there down here to Chincoteague.

Karen Croner: For supplies then.

Nat Steelman: No, she was asking you about you got supplies when you went back and forth.

Bill Jester: Oh.

Nat Steelman: You didn't get many did ya?

Bill Jester: No. We didn't get many supplies. The way they supplied themselves mostly was they'd get a barrel of flour in the summer time and they would have their own hogs. And they'd get some molasses and that's practically all they needed. They could kill all the fowl they wanted to eat.

Karen Croner: Did you grow vegetables there?

Bill Jester: They had their own hogs, all they had to do was turn 'em loose and get one. And if they wanted beef they had cattle the same way that ran loose on the beaches. Hogs and cattle both.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: And that's the way they lived. They didn't have to come to town but once or twice a year to get what they wanted.

Karen Croner: I see.

Nat Steelman: How long would a Hundred Dollars last 'em?

Bill Jester: Oh my Lord, a Hundred Dollars would last 'em a year.

All: (Laughing)

Karen Croner: Oh dear.

Bill Jester: More than that. Jim Merritt and them fellars would sail out a Greenlet Inlet for Five Dollars a month on these schooners.

Nat Steelman: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Delivery oysters to New York and that's what they got.

Karen Croner: Five Dollars a month?

Bill Jester: Five Dollars a month. Five Dollars a month.

Karen Croner: Could they grow good vegetables on that soil out there?

Bill Jester: Yeah, they would grow a little garden. You can go up there now and see places where they banked around their gardens so that the saltwater wouldn't come in. I used to go over there and see where they had their old gardens and they raised different kind a stuff, corn and different things. And then there was a lot a things they could pick up on the beach. Like there was – what was that Nat – it was a sea cabbage that grew. What was that stuff called? They grew together just like you would out of the garden.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Nat Steelman: I don't you know better than I . . .

Bill Jester: Some kind of a bush that grew up that they cooked like they would a turnip green.

Karen Croner: I can't think of anything.

Mary Carrick: What could that be?

Nat Steelman: Corn was on there, they had big fields.

Karen Croner: Yes. Now is that the present farm field area at all, was that farm at that time. You know what we call the old fields?

Bill Jester: Old fields?

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: I don't think old field was ever farm because it was always, as far back as I can remember, one of the low places.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Like, of course, they'd fill each end of it up what the tide took in.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But it used not be – used to be pretty well dry.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But if you've been around the old ragged point house, they had a place out there, I guess to a acre or two that they had a garden.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And they had ponies around. They'd take these beach ponies and get 'em a small plow and then plow the land up with 'em. Cultivate it and they would grow their crops. Naturally they done most of it by hand and a hoe.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: They had hoed the corn and stuff like that. Didn't work like it like they do now a days naturally with everything way back there. And they didn't have no modern things back there.

Karen Croner: How many people would think were living on Assateague when you lived there for instance? How many families would you think?

Bill Jester: Well up that way I would say there was families at Ragged Point, it was about four families in what we called Great Neck and there was – there were two Popes Islands. A family lived on each one of those.

Karen Croner: Oh my.

Bill Jester: And then all the way up between here and Green Run there would be people livin' along in different places. Sometimes they'd be a mile apart and sometimes two mile apart.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And sometimes it would be one or two together. Just scattered around all over.

Karen Croner: Yeah, right.

Bill Jester: Because these people the way they made their livin' is with natural growth oysters.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And in the summer time they would go out in the Bay, them oysters grew all over the Bay in those days. The water wadn't like it is now, didn't have as many screw drivers and things. And the people would go out and tong 'em and if he got himself thirty-five or forty

bushel of oysters in the summer, when that schooner came into Green Run Inlet, and he'd load these oysters for New York, he'd get a Dollar a bushel, he had Thirty-five Dollars – that's all the money he wanted for the winter.

Mary Carrick: Isn't that terrific.

Bill Jester: 'Cause that's all they knew. And then they would fish a little bit in the summer. There was plenty of fish. And they would fish around.

Mary Carrick: Would they go clamming then?

Bill Jester: And then they would salt their fish for the winter.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And they'd have fish all winter, they'd be salty but that's what they would use.

Nat Steelman: You lived so different.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: You didn't need money.

Bill Jester: No, you – you had your resources here.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: You didn't have to come – even – you know, they didn't know what flour was part of 'em, they used cornmeal. And the way they got their cornmeal, they'd take their corn and sail it crossed over on the mainland and you haul it up to one of them mills and have it ground.

Nat Steelman: And that on a share basis.

Bill Jester: Yeah, that was on the share basis.

Karen Croner: Isn't that terrific.

Bill Jester: Very little money, very little money.

Karen Croner: Right. What was – at that time when you were living on Chincoteague, what was actually on Assateague? Was Assateague a town as we see a town now? Were there stores and things or what was there on Assateague?

Bill Jester: No, Assateague just had a . . .

Mary Carrick: You mean what was on Chincoteague?

Karen Croner: I mean on Chincoteague, I'm very sorry.

Bill Jester: On Chincoteague . . .

Mary Carrick: What was Chincoteague like when you lived on Assateague?

Bill Jester: Chincoteague was more of a town. It was populated more. And then when – see when the train come to Franklin City and the boat ran a crossed, why then those people they were so far away, then the boats quit runnin' oysters to New York and they had to ship 'em by train.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And naturally the people moved closer to the trains, closer to the depots where they could get their stuff there quick and with all the ease they could.

Karen Croner: What approximate date would you say that was you moved to Chincoteague from Assateague?

Bill Jester: What did you say?

Karen Croner: What – when was that that you moved to Chincoteague, approximately?

Mary Carrick: How old would you have been?

Bill Jester: Oh, back in 19 – 1910 or somethin' like that. 1915 along in there, just before the First World War.

Karen Croner: Right. And your own family decided to move?

Bill Jester: Yeah, they moved to Chincoteague.

Karen Croner: Right.

Mary Carrick: When – at that time was there families living at the south end of Assateague?

Bill Jester: Oh yeah.

Mary Carrick: At that time?

Bill Jester: There were families here on Assateague until . . .

Mary Carrick: The wildlife came?

Bill Jester: How many years – back when the war, just before the war.

Nat Steelman: _____ - was one of ‘em

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: (inaudible)

Bill Jester: There’s a book written about New Church and Horntown and Franklin City that tells you how Franklin City – Greenbackville was named Greenback.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: That was because of natural growth oysters. The people come down there with these railroads and things and began to look around and here was all these oysters. And I think a man came down and told ‘em he would give ‘em a Dollar and Thirty-five Cents a bushel and all they had to do was tong ‘em up, they belonged to ever body, and the land down there, that marshland, people began to build on it to be close to their work.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And it went up and what was it a Dollar an acre or somethin’ or nother. Sold it to ‘im.

Nat Steelman: A Hundred Dollars an acre.

Bill Jester: Somethin’ like ‘at. Anyway, the fellow bought it and he said – what was he said, he said, “No that’s money, that’s Greenbacks. (Laughing)

All: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: So it got the name Greenbackville. Right Nat.

Nat Steelman: That’s right.

Bill Jester: Yeah, that book if you could get it would be very interesting.

Karen Croner: Yes, I would love to read it.

Nat Steelman: It’s very good.

Bill Jester: It would give you some of the history of Chincoteague Island.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And it would give you some of the history of Assateague.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: In there, I don't know if you record this stuff or not, but anyway, . . .

Karen Croner: Yes, I'm recording what you are saying.

Bill Jester: There was a man and his family that lived on Assateague Island during the Revolutionary War. And he disappeared. He was out clammin' one day out here around these coves and things – see in those days there was two of 'em, Chincoteague Inlet and Assateague Inlet. Well this man was out here a clammin' and he disappeared. And so his wife and his children gave him up. You know, they were there but weren't many families around, no way to make a livelihood, so they decided they would move to Green Run. They were going – in those days they took what little furniture and stuff they had and put it in a pole boat and they poled from here to Green Run, about fifteen miles. And they had – they had give the man up and they started to go to Green Run. Well around there there was work for the women runnin' hotels and things and they had a better advantage to make a livin'. So they started up and they began poling. Well they got up here – when you get up here above Assateague woods then over there, that ocean beach is right flat. Nothin' but the sandy beach, just like a desert from the ocean to the Bay.

Karen Croner: Is that what they call the big levies now?

Bill Jester: I imagine so. Just above Assateague woods, what we called the levels, that's right.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And when they poling along up they looked and seen a man walkin' across – toward the Bay from the ocean. And so they looked and they recognized 'im - it was this woman's husband, the children's father. And when they got to 'im. . .

Karen Croner: Oh.

Bill Jester: He came and then, of course, naturally went back home. And he told 'em he had been captured, this – this British Man of War came in here and they seen this man clammin' and they rode ashore and throwed and naturally he didn't run from 'em or anything, and they took 'im and got 'im aboard this Man of War and kept 'im all this time.

Karen Croner: Isn't that amazing.

Bill Jester: And they had give 'im up for dead and then they came up here one day, well they set him ashore back on the beach. And he was walkin' home that day. That's how close they come to missin' 'im. If they'd a missed 'im, he'd had . . .

Karen Croner: Why yes.

Bill Jester: He'd a found 'em I guess after a while, but they would a moved on to Green Run.

Karen Croner: Do you remember any of the names of any of the people who lived on Assateague when you did? Do you remember any of the family names?

Bill Jester: Well, mostly there were Joneses.

Karen Croner: Is that the Mr. Jones that is down at the hardware now?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Is he one of them down at Showard's?

Bill Jester: Norman Jones was. He just died a while back. And Bill Jones, they are descendants of these people that lived over there.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: But I don't think there's very many unless some of 'em's children is living now.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: Came from over there. Smiths lived over there and Joneses and different ones. The Merritt's – Merritt's lived over there at sometime. They had a case a smallpox Nat and the Merritt family died over there, that's where it was wadn't it?

Nat Steelman: Grover is still livin' idn't he?

Bill Jester: I guess he is.

Nat Steelman: He's got scars on 'im from that smallpox too I think.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Bill Jester: Yeah, Jim Henry had a lot on him.

Nat Steelman: Yes, he did.

Bill Jester: In those days they didn't have much medication for that kind of disease.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: I guess apparently most people died.

Karen Croner: Oh yes.

Bill Jester: Some got over it but those that did get over it why it left 'em with scars on 'em.

Karen Croner: There were Joneses that lived at the Tom's Cove area.

Bill Jester: Yeah, Joneses.

Karen Croner: On the right-hand side there.

Bill Jester: It was about – let's see, there was Billy Jones, Frank Jones and who was the others?

Nat Steelman: There was Romsey. Herman lived over there.

Bill Jester: Yeah. They were descendants of Bill.

Nat Steelman: Norman.

Bill Jester: There was three . . .

Karen Croner: Roland Jones.

Nat Steelman: Roland.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Yeah, they're all descendants of these Joneses over there.

Nat Steelman: Ernest.

Karen Croner: Lots of Joneses around, huh.

Bill Jester: But the first one as far back as I remember was Bill Jones that was old man Bill Jones. He was a – the father of our Great-Grandfather Bill Jones over here that's got the oyster place.

Nat Steelman: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And then Norman Jones was Frank Jones' son.

Nat Steelman: That's right.

Bill Jester: That was them, but there was another Jones there.

Nat Steelman: Romsey's wife, she's still around.

Bill Jester: Yeah, all of 'em, they were mostly Joneses over there.

Karen Croner: Yeah. What did you do to build houses? For instance, did the wood, now all of these houses on Chincoteague really are – were done with a sort of narrow – was this wood from Chincoteague and Assateague that they used, this was not from the mainland or was it?

Bill Jones: No. They used their fire and wood.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But it used to be sawmill here on the Island years ago.

Karen Croner: Really.

Mary Carrick: Is that right?

Bill Jester: Do you remember it?

Nat Steelman: Yeah, Hughdrows. And way back there, this was a lumber yard right where this house is.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Mary Carrick: And the lumber was from here?

Bill Jester: They had places over there – they had salt pits where they went in the land and they'd dig out and then they would make their salt.

Karen Croner: Is this Chincoteague or Assateague?

Bill Jester: That was over on Assateague, just below Ragged Point. And those that you were speakin' of in the upper end of 'em, you see this water would come in and dry up and after a while there was nothin' but a crust of salt.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And they'd go there and they'd get that out, dig down until the water would spring through it and then they would put it through some kind a process of – like a distillery or something and they distilled salt. That's where they got their salt.

Karen Croner: What's this mill that's up here? Is it Twilley Mill is it called or – what was this used for - up on Chincoteague itself, you know, up on Main Street, do you know what I'm talking about? The mill that is up on the water?

Nat Steelman: That's a chicken feed house.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: I see.

Bill Jester: Well that never come 'til real later did it Nat?

Nat Steelman: That's right.

Bill Jester: At one time here the poultry business was awful heavy on here. There was a hundred thousand chickens raised on six acres a land.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Bill Jester: This was wonderful poultry raisin' climate and soil.

Karen Croner: Um.

Nat Steelman: One thing we don't want to forget is about that Charles Wilson letter. Need to talk about that because he wants to . . .

Karen Croner: I don't know anything about Charles Wilson's letter, so you need to tell me from the beginning.

Nat Steelman: All right.

Bill Jester: Well, as far back as I can remember this same man we are speaking about up here, just below Green Run, from Popes Island, is called Middle Molar. Well up through that section there was a – some people who got this land surveyed and someday or another they owned it. I don't know just how it was done.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But anyway, it was called the Ocean Beach Land Improvement Company. I bought about eleven hundred acres of it for Wyle Maddox who lived here on the Island. But after a while the Park Service took it over. Well, when I was workin' to the club there was a man by the

name of John Stanford. He was from Baltimore, he was a Judge. Well he got this letter from England, this person over in England had bought this old pub they called 'em I think it was in them days. It was more of a place around near the waterfront where they had a beer joint and the sailors would come in port and they'd have so much money due 'em and naturally the people around them would benefit – they made a good livin'.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: Well, this man had bought one of these old buildings and while searchin' into it up in the attic he found this trunk. And in this trunk was this letter. This letter was from a fella had wrote to his brother, Wilson, wrote to his brother, and told him that over in America the second inlet above Chincoteague Island, above Chincoteague Inlet, on the northeast side between a couple knolls if I can remember and from Peter's Pump, they had buried so many bars of bullions, so many bars of silver and it was quite a fortune. It would be.

Karen Croner: My word!

Bill Jester: But they've never been able to find out where the second inlet was. Well, my Father, Judge Stanford, when he got the letter, he sent it to my Father. Well, we got it and looked around and we begin to try to figure it out. And we tried and we couldn't figure none of it because it wasn't an inlet that we'd known.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: It was another one here above the beach, it could be right up here on the upper end of Chincoteague Island because there's two knolls out there idn't it Nat>

Nat Steelman: That's right, it says north.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: So we just don't know where it is. People's been lookin' for it for the last hundred years I guess.

Mary Carrick: You were looking for in recently weren't you Nat.

Nat Steelman: I've never used it yet.

All: (Laughing)

Mary Carrick: He was gonna go out and see about what he can do about digging it up.

Karen Croner: Yeah, I would too, I would certainly think so.

Bill Jester: I don't know how long he had that letter, but you know how you'll do, you get these things and think it's worthless, and then first thing you know it's disappeared.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Just like the old spinning wheels. The old spinning wheels, they were worth a lot of money later.

Karen Croner: Oh my.

Bill Jester: So that's the way things happened and eventually – it comes out ever once in a while – it's come out in the paper around. But we never could figure out the second inlet above Chincoteague. But I'm like Nat, I just think it's right up here somewhere around the edge of Chincoteague Island.

Karen Croner: Oh my.

Mary Carrick: But it's – you don't know if it's on Assateague or on Chincoteague?

Nat Steelman: We think more . . .

Bill Jester: It's on Chincoteague.

Karen Croner: Um.

Nat Steelman: But it's – Bill it's _____ letter you read is it?

Bill Jester: I don't know. Well you see why is it handed down? All we know is the letter we got right there.

Nat Steelman: I believe this sounds like it Bill. She's gonna read.

Karen Croner:

“To my brother George. There are three creeks lying a hundred paces or more north of the second inlet above Chincoteague Island, Virginia, which is at the south end of the peninsula, at the head of the third creek going northward is a bluff facing the Atlantic Ocean with cedar trees growing on it. Each about 1-1/3 yards apart. Between the trees I buried in ten iron bound chests bars of silver, gold, diamonds and jewels to the sum of [Twenty Thousand Pounds]– Two Hundred Thousand Pounds – of Sterling. Go to woody knoll, secretly, and remove the treasure.” Signed Charles Wilson.

Bill Jester: That's about right. But here's one thing that was overlooked.

Nat Steelman: She read the original letter.

Bill Jester: In all a those letters, here's one thing that was overlooked. It says on the south end of the peninsula. And all the time I've read that letter and heard it I've never heard it until you read it then.

Nat Steelman: That would be . . .

Bill Jester: That would be on the south end of the peninsula – that's what would be (TAPE STOPPED – STARTED AGAIN)

Karen Croner: We all will.

Bill Jester: Getcha a Geiger counter.

Nat Steelman: I got it, right there.

Karen Croner: Oh, that one.

Bill Jester: Now down there on that property where I bought there, that little property, why people went all over (TAPE STOPPED AGAIN) . . . there was a lot a lumps though . . .

(END OF TAPE, SIDE A – START OF TAPE, SIDE B)

Bill Jester: . . . for a while here, why don't you help yourself. So – and he drilled that island and he couldn't find the oil but he told Wyle, he says well, as long as you give me permission I'll drill you a well. He drove a well 190 feet in the ground and water was salty. (Laughing)

Karen Croner: Oh!

Bill Jester: Pipe's still there in the ground just east of that house today.

Nat Steelman: Tell 'em about out there on that marsh. Way out in the Bay, that good water.

Bill Jester: Yeah. Yeah.

Nat Steelman: That's odd. You need to listen at 'im.

Bill Jester: Well, these fellas, these pilots goin' up and down the Coast here can tell – there's artisan springs that comes from the mountain and gets underground and they go clean out into the Atlantic Ocean.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Now you go down here to Oyster, Virginia, and down there Nat there was one or two of 'em. I've gone there a many a time and held a bucket underneath the spigot for spring water. Just think about it, all the time, never stop, day and night.

Nat Steelman: Uncle Nudge had one.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: And he . . .

Bill Jester: Well, Alexander went in there and dug that out and ruined one 'em.

Nat Steelman: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Well, there was one there. Then on up the Coast further, I don't know of any much between here – now there's one here under this Island. It goes out here to Assateague, you know, they had good water out here to Assateague.

Nat Steelman: They had one, that's right.

Bill Jester: There's one under my house, but I'm not in the center of it, I'm gettin' brackish water, but I drove down 108 feet and it's the prettiest kind a water. It was a little hard but you could use it. And plenty of it!

Nat Steelman: How about it under those marshes?

Bill Jester: Well, there's one that comes across there, under those marshes and goes over to the ocean beach right – Green Run, right below Green Run. They got a pavilion there now.

Nat Steelman: Good water idn't it?

Bill Jester: The State of Maryland put a pavilion over it. Maybe the Park Service did. I think they own that.

Karen Croner: Upper - Green Run you're talking about?

Bill Jester: Yeah, good water. Just above where the Bobbitt (?) Health Club was. Goes across there and used to be – somebody went there right – well it wadn't as far from the ocean as maybe little further than across the street - there was a point drove in the ground and you could go there and screw it – put your mouth pump onto it and you could keep pumpin' 'til you got water. It was as pretty, clear or fresher water as you wanted right there next to the ocean. Now see that was that artisan spring comin' out.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But Josh Bunting out there on Middlemore, he drove a well right down in the salt marsh and got the prettiest kind a water.

Nat Steelman: That's where I was talkin' about.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Mary Carrick: Well, is that the water that – is it the old Coast Guard Station on Assateague? Because I drink water right out of the faucet out there. It comes from what they call a dead well. Would that be what you're talking about?

Bill Jester: That would be out here?

Mary Carrick: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Yeah, there's a spring out there. They got good water there.

Mary Carrick: That's why I think that's the only place I think they can find out there.

Bill Jester: Yeah, that's good water. Well that's that artisan spring. We don't know how wide they are. Now on this Island, that's the only place that we found it is on Piney Island. We drove once, got a little bit of it, Wyle's wadn't as good as mine.

Nat Steelman: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: I was more in the center of it – smack right across – his passed right by mine and it might be some that would seep in. The water was hard but it tested good. I had it tested. It tested good.

Nat Steelman: But – but the remarkable thing is on them marshes that extend way out in the Bay – out in the middle of Chincoteague Bay. They found this real good water, out in the old marsh, way out in the middle of the Bay!

Bill Jester: Just like if you'd go out in the middle of these marshes here and dig a well, you'd get good water.

Nat Steelman: Right. Clear, clean, fresh water!

Karen Croner: Wow.

Nat Steelman: How deep was that one, do you remember Bill?

Bill Jester: I don't know deep they drove that, but I think they drove somewhere around 100 feet or somethin' like 'at – I don't remember – I've drunk it many days.

Nat Steelman: The gunnin' club?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: See, I'm not – I'm not used to up there. I've got Bill for my guide.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: He run me up there from time to time didn't you Bill?

Bill Jester: We went there and looked for the Green Run Inlet though.

Nat Steelman: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: I've been on the decks of the boats – see this Green Run Inlet that's where the people around Green Run . . .

Nat Steelman: Listen to this now.

Bill Jester: And from Chincoteague up to maybe Ocean City at the south point there was an inlet to Green Run. And these sailboats would come in this inlet. And these people that lived around Green Run, around Middlemore, often time they would have like a little house here and there and all over. Well that's what they done. Get Twenty-five or Thirty bushel a piece and that boat come there and they'd all go and load this boat with what oysters they'd saved.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: And she sailed to New York. Well they kept on until one time one of these boats came in there, I forgot her name, but anyway if you could find these old Coast Guard records you'd know her name, anyway she ran ashore in this inlet and the inlet closed up. The sand formed around her and closed up. Well, her old wreckage is there, I've been on it and I tried to carry Nat up 'ere and find it.

Nat Steelman: He walked on it.

Bill Jester: Nat we didn't go too far – far enough to the east of it. See the lad's made out. I talked with Jay Bunting later after we went up there and he says she's still there.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Yeah, she's back in 'em hills, an old wreck that closed this inlet up. Well when it done that, that fixed the people around Green Run. Because of their water situation. Now my Grandfather lived in North Beach.

Nat Steelman: Planted the oysters.

Bill Jester: And that was just above Green Run - between that and Ocean City. And one day he said one of the neighbors went out and there was plenty of clams, but this neighbor come in with his boat loaded with clams! They called my Grandfather John Eddie, he said, "John Eddie," he said "there's a float of clams laying right out on the bottom," says "all you got to do is pick 'em up." My Grandfather said "yeah," he said, "in a month's time ever one will be dead." He says, "the water has been salt and these clams is caught, they've grown up, and now the water is gettin' fresh and it's killin' 'em."

Karen Croner: Isn't that interesting!

Bill Jester: And that's what still in there until that inlet closed up Nat. All them people had to move from Green Run. They had to – some of 'em went across to the Boxiron, Maryland, and some around Girdletree, and a lot of 'em moved to Chincoteague and that's how we all come to be on Chincoteague.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh. Oh my word.

Bill Jester: We got to Chincoteague because the water got soft.

Nat Steelman: The clam – if it was too salt like when the inlet was – it would go down where it was fresher.

Karen Croner: Right.

Nat Steelman: And then that's the reason he come up was to get salt if he could wouldn't he?

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: See, they come to the top to get salt.

Karen Croner: And he was just laying right out there. Huh.

Bill Jester: Well, there's places where the clams were so thick, they were just as thick as a rock.

Karen Croner: What about the size of them Bill? Were they about the size they are now?

Bill Jester: All sizes.

Karen Croner: All sizes.

Bill Jester: From a small thing clean up to oh great big ones! Big as they grow.

Karen Croner: Yeah. Now what did your family eat? What – your family – what was your basic diet in the sense that you had the hogs and you had, of course, the oysters, and did you use the clams yourself?

Bill Jester: Oh yeah they'd eat clams!

Karen Croner: Did you use them for chowder kind of things, or did you eat them . . .

Bill Jester: We had chowder and fried and steamed, or . . .

Karen Croner: Right, in other words, any way that you could, right.

Mary Carrick: Oh I bet that was good eating.

(All talking – inaudible)

Nat Steelman: Clam pie.

Bill Jester: Yeah, there used to be a clam - just like you see a – a apple pie made well they would make a clam pie like that. They'd make an oyster pie.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: Oh, they're good, mmm.!

Karen Croner: Now did you have any game at that time on Assateague where . . .

Bill Jester: Oh yeah they had game the year round. After the duck season was over, they were pretty wise about these things – they didn't kill the ducks in the spring of the year because the ducks would pair off and begin to mate and they'd knew – wouldn't bother 'em.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But maybe in the summer when those ducks, young ones begin to grow up just about as big as a _____, they'd kill them and eat 'em. And then after the duck was over here come the birds. Yellow legs and paralews and robin snipe and calico backs on these beaches. You could sit there and shoot birds all day long.

Karen Croner: Oh my.

Bill Jester: And they got all the birds they wanted to eat.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What was the preferred bird?

Bill Jester: But the basic food they had was bread and molasses with fried side meat. Fat meat or side meat that was the basic food. And I'll tell you what you can do, you can work longer with that Nat than you can with any other thing. Now in these days you know how we'd eat it? Take your plate in your lap and break your bread off and sop it and have a cup a coffee.

Karen Croner: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: And slice a molasses – slice or two of bacon. Wouldn't be bacon, it would be side meat more fat that you was gettin' out of it.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And that's what we would eat a many a time I've sat there and eat that.

Karen Croner: Did you know anyone involved – who lived here or was involved in anyway, for instance, in the Civil War? Did you hear anything about this when you were young or anything? Was there any . . .

Bill Jester: Not too much, no.

Karen Croner: Not too much. I don't think that this area – I don't think Chincoteague and Assateague were involved so much in this do you?

Bill Jester: No, huh-uh.

Karen Croner: I think that it was – that it was more south of us and north of us that I think they were not, you know, quite so much. What happened if - for instance what happened if you became ill or what happened if you died? People were buried where at that time?

Bill Jester: Well they would have – what do you call them women – it's some old person, what would you call them Nat?

Nat Steelman: Midwives?

Bill Jester: When I was born they didn't have doctors. I was brung in the world by an old colored woman, Aunt Ester Blake. She nursed me, the first person ever in the world I've ever heard say was old woman Ester Blake, she was a colored woman.

Nat Steelman: Well, the white's used to do that.

Karen Croner: Yes, yes, right. What was Nat that you were saying?

Bill Jester: She was one of the family. We didn't – weren't no such a thing as civil rights and stuff, or colored people or segregation or nothin'. The colored people in the neighborhood when Aunt Ester Blake come to my house to take care of me ever mornin' why she had breakfast with us.

Karen Croner: Yes, yes.

Bill Jester: And sometimes she'd jump right in and help 'em cook it.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And they wadn't slaves, they were people that worked around that neighborhood.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: But we didn't know no difference between white and black, no. We didn't shun 'em.

Karen Croner: Did they live on Assateague?

Bill Jester: I played, my Lord, baseball with these wealthy Jackson – all these Jackson boys up here on (inaudible) oh we didn't know anything about this segregation stuff. We all lived here together. Lived in peace and harmony and worked together.

Karen Croner: Great.

Nat Steelman: Gray knew about segregation. He was talkin' about some of 'em comin' over here or somethin' or nother, got hot there one time.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: Anyhow, one of the little colored boys says, "if them niggers come over here we'll bust their heads."

(Laughing)

Nat Steelman: And he was colored.

Bill Jester: That's Taylor's grandson. He goes around with these white boys. And we had another one up Deep Hole, Elwood (?) Fisher.

Nat Steelman: Uh-huh.

Karen Croner: Can I ask you – of the sandpipers that you . . .

Bill Jester: You see, durin' the Civil War Chincoteague Island didn't go with the south. They fought with the north.

Karen Croner: Yes, uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And every since then, and Nat knows hisself, it's been a little contention by the people down the County even to this day.

Nat Steelman: A lot of 'em don't know what it is, but Bill's tellin' you the real reason.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Yeah, right.

Bill Jester: Right.

Mary Carrick: The sandpiper . . .

Bill Jester: They came over here, now they had a battle here. There's a place down here at Chincoteague Inlet called Gunboat. That's the part of the inlet down next to Wallop's Beach.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Where N-A-S-A is. Well where it got it's name from, the north sent a gunboat here to this inlet to protect this Island.

Karen Croner: Awe.

Bill Jester: And these people over here down at Wishart's Point and them farmers in all that vicinity gathered up all of the arms that they could find. And some of 'em had sides and hatchets and muzzle loader guns, anything they could get. And they were comin' over and were gonna destroy Chincoteague. And they were polin' over in pole boats. And they got out here about halfway over I imagine and this gun fired a bullet, this cannon, went back in the woods and hit a tree. And that scared those men and they retreated. (Laughing)

Karen Croner: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: And this is – this is so. It's kind a funny too. They only had one casualty. In those days they had log fences and one fellar run to jump over the log fence, stumped his toe and broke his leg. That's the only casualty they had.

(Laughing)

Karen Croner: Probably one of the more fortunate.

Mary Carrick: Before we give up – the sandpipers you were talking earlier. Can you just tell me which one you preferred to eat?

Bill Jester: Any of ‘em. Any of ‘em.

Mary Carrick: Any of them, they were all pretty much . . .

Bill Jester: They had these little tiny, what they called mud suckers. They’d get a great big lot of ‘em together and take a gun with a real small shot and kill a half a little flour bag full, one shot.

Mary Carrick: And they were all good to eat huh?

Bill Jester: They were all good to eat.

Karen Croner: And how did you use a small bird like that for instance.

Bill Jester: These old cranes, these old Blue Heron, man . . .

Mary Carrick: They’re good.

Bill Jester: Good as you wanted, one of them. Yes sirree they’d have a pot pie just like you see an old southern chicken and dumpling wouldn’t they Nat.

Nat Steelman: Good, yeah, yeah.

Karen Croner: Good eatin’ too, huh?

Bill Jester: I’ve fried ‘em. They’re good! Good, you can fry ‘em.

Nat Steelman: Uncle Bill used to fry ‘em.

Bill Jester: Yeah. Make potpies and . . .

Karen Croner: Bill, did you use decoys or did you not need decoys, did you use any kind of decoys?

Bill Jester: Yeah, we used decoys all the time. I mean for ducks.

Karen Croner: For ducks.

Bill Jester: And geese, but for old cranes – and they used decoys for birds. They would go with the wind northeast like it was a storm, a course it was rainin’, all night long. This ocean, they’d dig a hole in the sand and they had these robin snipe decoys, it was a red breasted bird like a robin only it was bigger than a robin.

Karen Croner: Red knot, uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And they'd fly up in flocks and you put your decoys out along – right in where the wash came up. You'd sit there and they'd come in right in front of ya, you'd shoot the bunches, get all you wanted to eat.

Karen Croner: Did you make yours?

Mary Carrick: How about . . .

Karen Croner: Did you make the bird decoys you used?

Bill Jester: Huh?

Karen Croner: Did you make these little decoys? Where would you get them?

Bill Jester: Yeah, they were handmade. My Father had a mess of 'em. We children played with 'em, let the dogs gnaw heads off 'em, and now they're worth Fifty Dollars.

(Laughing)

Nat Steelman: They're old.

Karen Croner: Did you make 'em out of pine that grew on Assateague or what kind of wood would you use?

Bill Jester: Well they would generally use a ripe wood, around some kind of white - in those days it was more white pine, soft wood, than there is today.

Karen Croner: Oh.

Bill Jester: And you'd find a lot of it along the beach. Now up to Green Run the tombstones were made out of dye wood. There would be ship loads of dye wood would come up the Coast and they'd lose some overboard a lot a times, or maybe that ship would get wrecked, was on there, and that's what they used for a tombstone was dye wood.

Karen Croner: Okay.

Bill Jester: And the old graveyard at Green Run, the last time I was there, somebody went in there and stole them.

Karen Croner: Yeah, I heard.

Bill Jester: But they were there and I went down there one Sunday mornin' – we had this place down the beach, Wyle Maddox and myself, and I went to Ocean City and stayed a long week. We could ride down in the – in the car. So one Sunday we decided we'd drive down and see how the house was makin' out and everything and look around. And we saw this – we came back up to Green Run and we saw these people. One of 'em was this Fox over here that's got that funeral home.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: They had a contractor or somethin' on the beach, anyway they got permission to drive through the reservation and come up that way. That's before the Park Service took it over. So we went there to 'em, we knew 'em, Will Merritt was there. Old man Will Merritt and his daughter, Edna. They're all dead now.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But they came up there and they couldn't find it. He was lost. You know it had been so long. He knew the land where either Merritt plot was on. He knew where that was. And then we went there and we carried him to the graveyard and showed him the old grave. And he says there lies my Grandmother and my Grandfather.

Nat Steelman: Where the hill is where the mound was.

Bill Jester: Yeah, where the mound was. Well the old tomb was there Nat. The old marker. But somebody – that must a been good wood because it must a been years and years it stayed there in the ground.

Nat Steelman: It was salted more than likely - that salt would last when it soaks it salt.

Karen Croner: Salt treated.

Nat Steelman: They said worms were gettin' in it.

Karen Croner: Let me ask . . .

Bill Jester: Well it was the wood they made dye out of, you know, when you dye your clothes different colors, that's where they got the dye. It was a dye wood and you could get some of it and you put it in the water and it would bleed right out – oh, you never seen the like of it.

Karen Croner: Um. Mahogany maybe?

Mary Carrick: I was trying to think what it would be.

Bill Jester: No, it was a soft wood, soft wood.

Karen Croner: Hum.

Bill Jester: And it would dry and you didn't think there was anything in it but you put in the water and by and by it began to ooze out just like blood. A whole lot of it come out.

Karen Croner: I can't think what it would be.

Bill Jester: It was called dye wood, I don't know what kind a tree it was, but that's what they used to freight this country from down in the lower – freighters from somewhere.

Karen Croner/Mary Carrick: (Talking to each other, inaudible)

Nat Steelman: Is it indigo wood?

Bill Jester: I've had pieces of it years ago but didn't put it in the water.

Karen Croner: What was the color? Was it a brown or what color?

Bill Jester: It was a light wood. It wadn't – well it could a been brown on the inside where the dye was.

Karen Croner: I mean what color was the dye?

Bill Jester: The dye was red lookin'. Not a real red, but a kind a dull.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: And I don't know how they would change that to some other darker color or somethin' maybe they mixed with it, but that is what it was dye wood.

Karen Croner: I wonder if cedar – cedar wouldn't do that would it?

Mary Carrick: I don't think so, I don't think . . .

Bill Jester: But most of the graves there were small, you know, they lost a lot a children, all those babies, they had some kind a rash or somethin' they got into 'em and they didn't know how to take care of it.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: And at that time, of course, I guess it's kind a how – where they got there water for the town of Green Run was a water hole they dug out in the hill. And they had a fence around it to keep the cattle out.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And they went and dug and they had typhoid fever there that was terrible.

Karen Croner: I believe it.

Bill Jester: You know they would get it out of that water hole. They didn't know.

Mary Carrick: What did you do about the mosquitoes?

Bill Jester: Mosquitoes?

Mary Carrick: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Kill 'em with smoke. If they got too bad, why they'd build a smoke that night and smoke 'em away.

Mary Carrick: Ah.

Bill Jester: They didn't . . .

Karen Croner: Would you try to straighten me out. Every time I talk to anyone here I hear something different about this matter of where people were buried. Who was buried on Assateague? Just the people who lived there?

Bill Jester: Just the people who lived there.

Karen Croner: And what is this – ever so often somebody tells me something about malaria victims being buried on Assateague. Was malaria here?

Bill Jester: Yeah. We had some of that too.

Karen Croner: When would that have been? Do you have any idea?

Bill Jester: Oh, that was back there I guess eighty or ninety years ago.

Nat Steelman: They used to have it bad here.

Karen Croner: Is that right?

Bill Jester: We've not had it for years, but they used to have it. My Father had it.

Karen Croner: And did he recover from this?

Bill Jester: Well, he recovered.

Karen Croner: Did they have bouts of it repeatedly, or was it just . . .

Bill Jester: Yeah, once in a while for quite a number of years after they once had it, they would have a reaction a few years later or somethin' like that.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Until after a length of time I guess maybe . . .

Nat Steelman: Worse in summer.

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Karen Croner: Yeah. And how was it treated, was there anything at all that you could do for it then or did you just . . .

Bill Jester: I don't know. We – we had quite a few old doctors around here, but the best doctor we had here on fevers was Dr. Smith over here. And he was with the Army in the Civil War and in the south they had a lot a that to contend with.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: He was very good on fevers and stuff.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: Right good.

Mary Carrick: On Assateague . . .

Bill Jester: But that's about the only thing.

Mary Carrick: Did you have plants that you went out and harvested for like if you got a cold, was there a certain plant or, you know, did you use wild medicines?

Bill Jester: Yeah, we – there was a horhome (?), I don't know what kind of weed it was made out of, they'd make that and they had onion – if you had a cold an onion, they'd make an onion syrup which was good for coughs. I've ate it a many a time.

Karen Croner: Huh.

Mary Carrick: I bet that was good for some things.

Bill Jester: Then they would make a thing to put over your chest that would clear you up. But yeah, they were all home remedies. A lot of 'em were good.

(Tape Stopped and Started)

Karen Croner: Now things like your clothes, were these made at home? Did you buy them, what did you do about clothing?

Bill Jester: They made most of their clothes. They would buy maybe later years. At first when they – years ago – they made most of their clothes from the sheep. They had sheep around here too. They had sheep over on Assateague – where they sheared sheep. And my Father used to have ‘em on Popes Island, a bunch of sheep on there. And every spring why they would shear these sheep.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And we used to, of course that was later years, send their wool to North Carolina to a factory down there and they’d make the blankets for us. And they would make the blanket and they would take so much of the wool.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And send us the rest.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Well they were really good but they wouldn’t last like a little bit a cotton into ‘em. A pure yard will not last like some cotton in with it or silk or somethin’ or ‘nother. But they did, they could go to the store, they called it muzzling, and they’d buy goods – we called ‘em goods then. And the cloth came in what they called bolts. A bolt of it – in all different kinds – in calico or whatever.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Went in the goods store and buy it and then they’d make their own dresses, yeah.

Karen Croner: Was that here on – was that Chincoteague? Were they able to buy these things on Chincoteague or did they have to go farther than that for something like that?

Bill Jester: Well, they didn’t have to go much farther than Chincoteague because in those days Chincoteague was just about as modern a little town that was around here because we had ships a comin’ in the inlet, sailboats. I’ve seen – in my day I’ve seen why two to three of these big two massed schooners layin’ here in the channel. They were loadin’ oysters then to carry ‘em.

Karen Croner: I was going to say was that oysters that they were here for? Why were they here?

Bill Jester: Yeah, that was Capt. Dan Whealton used to sail out a here. A lot of these old people here were sailors – had sailboats.

Karen Croner: Ah – Whealton. The Whealtons were here and then they left, is that what happened? I keep hearing about that fabulous house that they had. But they – were they originally from here? Were the Whealtons from Chincoteague?

Nat Steelman: 1909.

Bill Jester: I don't know whether they were originally from here or not. A lot of those people like the Raleighs, came from up here, they were in the oyster business up here around Girdletree and on up, like I say, up to Snow Hill I 'spect. A lot of them came that way. But the Whealtons, Whealton was from up in New York – Philadelphia.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: I think he was originally from there. D. J. Whealton. Come built a big home up here in town.

Karen Croner: Now why did he come here to build that big home? Why was that such a . . .

Bill Jester: Because of the oyster business. He came here, he'd been up there into it and he came down here maybe to intercede on this end about shippin' oysters.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Accumulated quite a bit a money. And then he owned a lot of property around here.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And he was right shrewd on any kind of a deal.

Karen Croner: How different was Chincoteague from what it is now as you remember it? Was it more wooded than it is now?

Bill Jester: Oh yes! It was all wood then.

Karen Croner: Was it?

Bill Jester: Yeah it was, it was all woods.

Karen Croner: Where did you – when you came here, where did you – when you came from Assateague to Chincoteague, where did you live yourself, where did you build a house?

Bill Jester: I lived on the upper end of the Island. We came to school down here where the school is over here. We walked up the Island, I guess maybe a couple miles or three, every mornin' and every night.

Karen Croner: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: And at first – now up until the third grade now we went on the upper end there where, you know where you go up there and see the turn tail where the old soldier's grave is?

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: Well that is where we had a school house.

Karen Croner: Awe.

Bill Jester: And that is where I went to school until I was in the third grade. Then when I went out of the third grade into the fourth, I came down here to this school. And I walked every mornin', walked me down and walked me back. We didn't have no such things as a ride, unless somebody came along with a horse and cart and give you a ride like that.

Karen Croner: Yes.

Bill Jester: We had to walk.

Karen Croner: How far up did you live, did you live up as far as the turnaround?

Bill Jester: I lived about maybe halfway between here . . .

Karen Croner: Would that have been at that time, would – how – where was the town of Chincoteague, was it out in the areas that it is now, like Ridge Road, or was it just . . .

Bill Jester: You mean the old school house?

Karen Croner: Well, the whole town itself. Had the town spread out to Ridge Road and like that at that time?

Nat Steelman: Not any houses on Ridge Road.

Bill Jester: No, there wadn't any houses. All – most of the houses were on the front. They were closer to their work.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: But later they begin to build back and then on the Eastside Nat, I think there was more houses on the Eastside than there was in the center of the Island.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Wadn't too much in the center of the Island.

Karen Croner: Yeah. Right, I see.

Nat Steelman: I would think a hundred or so.

Bill Jester: I would say the main business for the town was right out here.

Karen Croner: Right. What was it like, you know, like Christmas and Thanksgiving and things, what were your special days and what did you do for them that was special?

Bill Jester: Well, Thanksgiving here we didn't get many turkeys but we would have a wild goose or some wild fowl or something like that. Or we raised chickens and we'd have an old hen or an old rooster. The way they'd do, if the old rooster got too old and tough, they'd kill him. Have a pot pie and cook him if we didn't have enough to eat.

(Laughing)

Bill Jester: He had a flavor to him just like the chickens do today. But their mostly corn fed now. Yeah, they had their own fowl, except for turkeys. We didn't raise many turkeys. Now chickens we had – you had – like we have broilers now, you'd go to the store and buy 'em, but we called 'em fryin' chickens.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: But we set an old hen in the spring of the year and she came off and these betties grew up, big enough to eat, that's the only fryin' chickens we got.

Nat Steelman: How about Dominique fryin' chickens, weren't they better than anything they got now Bill?

Bill Jester: Yeah, they were – they were something on the order of a broiler. We called 'em Dominique, I guess they were in that family. When I first started raisin' poultry, I used to raise about 14,000.

Karen Croner: My goodness.

Bill Jester: And that's what I used a bar drop, he's just like a Dominique. They were beautiful. See I used to get special on - around Easter, the Jewish stuff, people used someway in their rituals, these chickens. I'd send 'em to Fancy Rock into New York and they'd give you premium for 'em.

Karen Croner: When was this Bill about what years, how long ago would this have been that you were doing that?

Bill Jester: When I was doing that?

Karen Croner: Yeah, uh-huh.

Bill Jester: It would be about thirty years ago.

Karen Croner: Where did you have 14,000 chickens on Chincoteague itself?

Bill Jester: Yeah. (Laughing)

Karen Croner: Is that right? And what part of Chincoteague . . .

Bill Jester: And that was just me! I'll bet you there was 2 million on here.

Nat Steelman: Yes sir.

Bill Jester: This place over here, what they call it, Highland Park, that was nothin' but chicken houses there.

Nat Steelman: They call it Chicken City.

Bill Jester: There was Six Hundred Thousand (600,000) chickens raised right on Highland Park.

Nat Steelman: Chicken City.

Bill Jester: Chicken City is what they called it. Chicken City Road, yeah.

Karen Croner: Isn't that something.

Mary Carrick: And then through the years was it – the big guys bought out all these places and then the storms . . .

Bill Jester: Well, what happened to the poultry business is just like any other business. The big man come in. The big, after a while they got big dresser – dressing poultry, kept building up and by and by now if you were in the poultry business why – with Perdue – he would furnish you with baby chicks and you'd have to build your own house to his specifications. And then you'd use his feed, he had his feed and every thing. And he gives you whatever he don't want, I'll put it that way.

Karen Croner: Yeah, yeah.

Bill Jester: I had a cousin over here at Franklin City and his wife is well educated and he was raisin' em like 'at. And they were raisin' 'em on a certain percentage of food consumption.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: And the percentage of the mortality rate and then the percentage of the weight you get on this food consumption and what you lost. And he had done extra good.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: For now they can raise a chicken over four pounds in nine weeks. Used to take us sixteen weeks to raise a three pound chicken. Three pounder.

Karen Croner: Wow.

Bill Jester: And so he – he dealt with these people and they come took his chickens out and they figured his money, they're about Nine Hundred Dollars short.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: So he goes back over to 'em. He tells 'em and they said no indeed, we are not. He showed 'em his figures. Now he said, "What you gonna do about it?" They said, "Aint nothing we can do." "All right" he said. He thought about it, he said, "I got thirty thousand of your baby chicks in my house." He said, "If you don't pay me that money," he said, "I'm not gonna feed 'em." They come across with the Nine Hundred Dollars.

All: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: Yeah.

Nat Steelman: Was that Leroy?

Bill Jester: That's Leroy now.

Karen Croner: He was fortunate that he had a way of dealing with them. Were most - most of the chicken raising was on the Eastside, or was it all over the Island?

Bill Jester: All over the Island practically.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: Across the Island and all over here on what we call Highland Park and around different places people – it was one of the nicest cities I ever seen. All you had to do was have a piece of land and put a house on it for you, feed your family and they'd furnish your favorite chicks and feed and ever thing until they were saleable.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: Then, of course, you had to pay up. It was a pretty business for people to get into. It didn't take a whole lot a capital.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And they made money on it. Some of 'em made a lot money at it.

Nat Steelman: Wyle got a good start.

Bill Jester: Yeah, Wyle Maddox got a good start. He got to buyin' poultry and takin' 'em to New York and – there was money into it.

Nat Steelman: He was pullin' in some money.

Bill Jester: Yeah, and by and by he got to sellin' big - and see you had a perishable product.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: Just like these fellars out here catchin' these clams and oysters. They got to sell 'em. And the buyer, well he gets loaded, he's got to put it up somewhere, he says I'll give you so much and that's it.

Karen Croner: Um.

Bill Jester: Well just like with poultry. When you – when you got poultry up to their feet you can keep right on feedin' him and he will go right back and you would lose ever thing you had, all the profit and all if you kept it too long.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And that's what they knew. And you were at their mercy.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh. How did they get all these – the poultry off the Island, was it all by boat?

Bill Jester: No, the bridge – the bridge was a crossed here then.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: When they started it. I don't think they ever had to boat any off.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: 'Cause I believe they started – I don't remember that, do you Nat?

Nat Steelman: No.

Bill Jester: I think the bridge was already here.

Nat Steelman: That was after.

Bill Jester: That was the old wooden bridge to start with. 'Course the state took it over and built a nice bridge.

Karen Croner: Where did the wooden bridge go, was it – did the wooden bridge go where this bridge goes or was it in a different place?

Bill Jester: Yeah, practically the same place.

Karen Croner: Awe, the same place. What did you do, for instance, at Christmas? Were you able to have Christmas trees? When you were really young I'm thinking of for instance, did you have . . .

Bill Jester: Yeah, we had Christmas trees.

Karen Croner: They were evergreen?

Bill Jester: We'd go out and a nice cedar or sometimes a nice shaped pine.

Karen Croner: Right, right.

Bill Jester: And we would, naturally they'd get little trinkets to put on to it.

Karen Croner: Yeah, yeah.

Bill Jester: But if we wanted, like you have tinsel, why you know they'd take a whole lot a popcorn and they'd run a needle through it and twine and put the popcorn on there.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: And you could eat the popcorn later when you took the tree down. (Laughing)

Karen Croner: (Laughing) When you think back, you know, as a young kid growing up here, what do you think of as the things you really enjoyed the most yourself. I mean what were the times you like the most as a young kid?

Bill Jester: Well, I think I like mostly the summertime because school was out and we boys went around here. All you had to do was have a pair a pants and a shirt. Didn't wear no shoes all the summer and wade around in these glades and caught all the crabs you wanted along these shores. And we were swimmin' all the time in the water, just like ducks know about it. And I think that was the best time every year. Of course, we looked forward to, not Thanksgiving so much, as we would Christmas. But you didn't get much.

Karen Crone: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: You got a little bit a candy and maybe an apple and orange and some kind of little thing.

Karen Croner: Yeah.

Bill Jester: And, of course, some children got more than others naturally.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: But – oh today, I go up and see my grandchildren and see what they got.

Karen Croner: I know!

Bill Jester: And I think my gosh they got more in one Christmas than I got in twenty-five.

Nat Steelman: You didn't expect it in them days.

Bill Jester: No, you didn't.

Nat Steelman: You were economical . . .

Bill Jester: In the wintertime you got you an old pair a skates and you'd tie 'em on your feet, didn't have no straps. Skate up and down the glades and that was one of the nicest things we had was skatin'. We could – I ice skated from my house, where I lived was about a mile up to the old school house, why we'd skate right up them glades and all. It was a ridge and a glade, ridge and a glade, all the way across the Island. Well there was a glade right in front a my house and I'd go get on that glade and skate right on up to the school house.

Karen Croner: That's great.

Bill Jester: 'Course now a lot of 'em been filled up. And I remember one time when I was goin' to school down here in town. Why we had a sleet. It only stayed here about a week or two days and I could skate right down the road, right down the highway. That's the way we come to school. We'd skate to school.

Karen Croner: Now there was a little school over here wasn't there, near _____ now?

Bill Jester: Well there was a school there but since then they've moved it off and they'd built a new brick school.

Karen Croner: Right. What was – what – would that have been a grade school that was over there or was that the whole school that was there? I never thought about that, that was gone before I came.

Bill Jester: No, that was – well it was a grade school from the fourth to about the eleventh.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And then you got your other school up to the middle school.

Karen Croner: Right.

Bill Jester: I think they had one down the Island and one up the Island.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And you went until you were in about the third or fourth grade.

Karen Croner: Uh-huh.

Bill Jester: And then you had an A-B-C class, like first reader, second reader and so on. Yeah. And then listen, when you were in the third grade you could read. That's right.

Nat Steelman: That's right.

Unknown: (Laughing)

Bill Jester: These old dead-eye Dick stories, you may – Sunday or the weekends . . .

(END OF SMALL TAPE – NOTHING FURTHER ON BIG TAPE, SIDE B)