

Interview from the preparation of

Fell's Point Out of Time



Steve Bunker Interview, December 7, 2003

Kraig Greff, Interviewer. Jacquie Greff, camera.

[Kraig]

Give me a little bit on the founding of Fells Point from the Bunker perspective.

[Steve]

[Laughs.] Well, I don't think anybody knows who the first person to settle in Fells Point, or East Baltimore, was. I don't think anyone's come up with any definitive answer to that. I did find an account here in the London Gazette for Thursday, June 15 to Monday, June 19, 1671. And it says, "From Lyme, June 11. Yesterday arrived here the providence of this place in 5 weeks from James River in Virginia, from whence she came in company of another vessel of hull. The master tells us that he layded here there at Wooten Creek in the County of Baltimore 12 leagues higher in the Bay than ever any did before." So at least in 1671, they were beginning to ship various products out of Baltimore -- I'm not even sure what they were -- it might have been tobacco or any number of things.

But, we do know that Fells Point essentially came into being with Edward Fell and his brother, William. William was a shipbuilder and was looking for an opportunity to build ships here in the New World. And of course, Fells Point, being a deep water anchorage, and the only real good deep water anchorage in the area -- that's where he chose to set up. So they were building small ships, probably sloops and small schooners, early in the 1700's, certainly by the 1730's and 1740's. In 1763, Fells Point as we know it, was laid out and essentially became a...

[phone rings]

So by the 1730's and 1740's, we had people living in Fells Point, or Fells Prospect I think it was at one time called, and were conducting business. Fells Point was really the deep water port for the Baltimore area.

[Kraig]

What's the closest deep water other than Fells Point in the Baltimore area, what surrounding city?

[Steve]

Well, in those days, you had a number of ports that no longer have the same relevance -- Oxford, Chestertown, Annapolis -- there were any number of ports up and down the Chesapeake Bay that were in those days considered deep water ports. Now they wouldn't be considered deep water

ports today. But keep in mind, you were dealing with ships that were usually no more than 100-150 tons and didn't draw, for the most part, any more than 10, 12, 15 feet. A place like Fells Point...

[Kraig]

What's a modern ship draw, to get a comparison?

[Steve]

35 feet, 40 feet.

So Fells Point was a real boon. Baltimore at that time, the Harbor in Baltimore, what we now think of as the Harbor in Baltimore, were mostly swamps and fens that tapered down into the water and were fairly shallow. It was a good many years before that area was dredged and was laid out as we see it today. Fells Point and Baltimore, an awful lot of what we see today, is fill. They actually filled in right up to the waters edge, and then dredged out areas for their piers and their docks.

[Kraig]

I've seen that before. Somebody showed me a map of Fells Point, and it was like ... a whole different geography along the coastline than there is today.

[01:04:02:15]

[Steve]

Fells Point was at one time known as "the hook" and you had an area known as the hook that stuck out into the harbor. Originally, it was thought of as being a place where a major section of the town could be built. It eventually became crimping dens and bordellos and sleazy bars. And the hook was a place that gained a bad reputation. You've all heard the word "hookers". I don't know that it actually came from Fells Point's hook because ...

[Kraig]

I was going to ask that because I heard that someplace before.

[Steve]

Well, hooks as a geographical feature are fairly common around the world in many, many ports. So it may not have come from Fells Point originally. But it certainly was appropriate to Fells Point in the early 1800's.

[Jacquie]

When you say the "Port of Baltimore" -- that was Fells Point in the early days?

[Steve]

Well, Baltimore still had maritime traffic, but they were generally skiffs and small schooners and barges and scows and flat-bottomed vessels that could come in "over a morning dew" as they used to say. They didn't require a lot of water. But if you wanted to bring in a real ocean-going cargo, if you wanted to bring in something of real significance from the mother country, from England or

Scotland, then you'd go to Fells Point because that's where a deep water ship could go. Deep water ships couldn't make it up into Baltimore Harbor.

And Fells Point in those days was separate from Baltimore; it was a separate town. There was Jonestown and Fells Point, which were really founded in very similar times. Jonestown probably came actually a couple of years earlier. Edward Fell was a partner in the founding of Jonestown. And he later switched his fortunes to the area we now call Fells Point.

But, any kind of deep water traffic would have to come in through Fells Point in those days.

[01:05:57:29]

[Kraig]

Let's talk a little bit about shipbuilding, something I know nothing about.

[Steve]

Well, one of Fells Point's earliest and best-known citizens, and indeed the fellow who really ultimately gave Fells Point its name, William Fell, was a shipbuilder in England. When he came to the new world and saw this deep water harbor, he immediately set up shipbuilding operations. And that was the mainstay of Fells Point for a long time to come. You were either going to sea or you were building ships that were going to sea. And that was how a living was made by most people in Fells Point right up until the Civil War, and even long after the Civil War.

But shipbuilding as we think of it today, major shipbuilding, really went into a decline after the Civil War. Ships were being built a lot larger. They were a lot more technically complex. They were building ships now in iron with big steam plants in them, and Fells Point was largely bypassed. The glorious time for Fells Point in shipbuilding was the time between the Revolutionary War and some time just before the Civil War.

[Kraig]

What was the date of the Revolutionary War?

[Steve]

1775 to 1783.

Fells Point began building its famous privateers at that time. A couple of hundred privateers came out of the Baltimore area during the American revolution. When you consider the size of Baltimore at that time and the size of Fells Point, that's pretty remarkable. Privateers and Letters of Marque were vessels, private armed vessels, vessels that were not Naval vessels particularly. They were merchant ships, but they were licensed to prey on enemy shipping.

[Kraig]

Legal pirates.

[Steve]

They were legal pirates. And Fells Point became famous for that. Their time of real glory in that field was the War of 1812. In 1812, Fells Point really hit its stride. They not only built many, many ships to go privateering, but they were great innovators. Fells Point had benefited from immigration in the late 17 and early 1800's. Not only were people coming over from England and Scotland and Ireland, many of whom were highly qualified craftsmen and ship builders, but you also had an influx of French refugees after the French Revolution and then the rebellions in Haiti under Toussaint Louverture and King Christophe, mad King Christophe... When Haiti fought for its independence and threw out the French, many French citizens panicked and ran to whoever would accept them. And a lot of Baltimore ships were trading in that area at the time...

[Kraig]

Whoever would accept them. France!

[Steve]

But you know, times were not good in France. In France at that time, not only did you have the effects of the French Revolution, but you had Napoleon. Anyone leaving Haiti and going back to France was very likely to be drafted into the army, or be put to work into some kind of national service. So many good craftsmen, many fine maritime craftsmen, sail makers, artisans, ship carvers, carpenters, came north and settled in Fells Point because that was a place that you could continue making a living and look forward to a new life in the new world.

[Kraig]

The French that left Haiti ... these are dumb questions that cross my mind ... any of them go up through New Orleans?

[Steve]

Oh sure.

[Kraig]

Was that any part of the French, Cajun zydeco thing ... was that the beginning of it, or was that too early for it?

[Steve]

The earliest French migration to Baltimore coincides with the French migration to New Orleans from Canada. In 1755, the British passed a Removal Act to take what they considered enemy aliens, in this case the French, out of what was then called Acadia and ship them someplace else, any place else to get them out of Canada because they considered them a security threat. Scotts immigrants came in and settled in Nova Scotia, New Scotland. The French that were forced to leave went 3 basic places in the United States, what later became the United States. One was Maine. There are still many of their descendants living in Maine today. Another was Louisiana, where Acadians became known as Cajuns and are still there today.

But a third group, and a smaller group actually came into Baltimore. And when they came to Baltimore, they not only brought French language and customs, but they brought their skills. And, like the later refugees from Haiti, like the refugees from the French Revolution in the 1790's and early 1800's, they found a welcome in Fells Point. So Fells Point absorbed quite a number of people of French origin. Also, in Baltimore itself, the area down in the Harbor, down where the Lutheran Senior Citizens Home is now, was once known as French Town because there was a large French colony living there.

[Kraig]

You ought to do your own TV show called "Meet Mr. Bunker". You every week just talking about stuff.

[Steve]

We had a lot of immigrants. That whole area... Fells Point was ...

[Kraig]

Any of the immigrants bad, I mean that people didn't get along with, besides the British... Any of the immigrants move in that were kind of the black sheep of the immigrants?

[Steve]

I haven't found any notice of that in historic times. In recent times, there has been some controversy. I think there are some folks in Fells Point that would rather some of the newcomers had not come. But then, that's always the way it is, isn't it, when a new group of people come into town?

[Kraig]

It's like the old thing -- we fear what we don't understand.

[Steve]

Yes. And Fells Point and Baltimore generally is just like anywhere else in the country -- they've always had their problems accepting some folks, people that are of a different religion or a different color or a different creed of some way... And so, there has been racism. And there has been, in the 1840's and 1850's there was, of course, the know-nothing movement. There was a very strong anti-Catholic movement in, of all places, Baltimore.

[Kraig]

Wasn't it the first diocese? Strange place for it to happen.

[Steve]

Yes. It makes no sense at all. But, those things tend to level out, given time.

[01:13:26:01]

[Kraig]

Keep that thought in mind as we talk about Fells Point today. We're going to something else here... Something controversial. The Constellation that's sitting there in the Harbor. I notice through all your stuff, you've got enough ship stuff to build your own ships in the back yard. You kind of know ships. Is it the real Constellation, a copy, parts...? What's your take on the whole thing?

[Steve]

The original Constellation was built as a 36-gun frigate in Harris Creek, what was then known as Fells Point ... Harris Creek is virtually a drainage ditch now... It was built in 1797 in Fells Point, in Baltimore. It underwent many, many rebuildings.

Its last major rebuilding and redesign was in 1854. Most maritime historians today date ships from the time of their last major design change, not the age of the wood that's in them, but by the time of their last major design change. The Constellation that you see in the Harbor today bears no relation whatsoever to the Constellation of 1797, in design, form, shape or size. If you choose to accept the fact that the Constellation was built in 1797, fine. If you want it to be built in 1854, you're also correct. I believe it is an 1854 warship. It was built as one of the last major ships of its class, built without a steam engine, before the great change-over when they began building more modern ships. There may be pieces of the old Constellation in it. That does not make it a ship of 1797. I don't think there's any way around that.

[Kraig]

How much of the ship is left?

[Steve]

I think there is nothing, whatsoever, nothing at all from 1797. I think what you have is essentially an 1854 warship that was rebuilt in recent years in Baltimore. The ship that you see today would border on being a replica. It's a wonderful ship. It's a wonderful amenity. And it's a great piece of maritime history, and Baltimore should be proud of it. I do not believe it was built in Baltimore in 1797. It essentially was built over in Locust Point in the 1990's. There's nothing wrong with that. It's in the tradition of the original Constellation.

[Kraig]

OK. I think that's going to make everyone happy including Geoffrey Footner.

[Steve]

Well, Geoffrey and I have had this conversation over and over. We have talked about it. We've batted it around for over 25 years. I have Geoffrey's book. I was one of the first guys to get a copy of his book.

[Kraig]

Is that it right there?

[Steve]

[Laughs.] No, no. I've got it in there, and it's a wonderful book. No one has done the kind of in-depth research on this question that Geoffrey Footner has done. He's done a remarkable piece of work. And it's a piece of work that will stand for all time. And it's a real benchmark in maritime history research. His conclusion I disagree with. I do not believe it is a 1797 warship. It doesn't matter whether it has pieces of the old ship in it or not. A ship should be dated from the time of its last major design change.

The maritime historian Alexander Lange brings up an excellent point. The fact that Winchester Cathedral in England may be built with stones from a Roman temple does not make Winchester Cathedral a Roman temple. So what we have is an 1854 warship that we should treasure and take care of and maintain in the tradition of the great frigate Constellation of 1797. But it is not a 1797 warship.

[Kraig]

You go into Germany and a lot of the tiles they've uncovered, the Roman tiles, doesn't make it a Roman Coliseum. It's just some Roman tiles in Germany. I see your point. It's very good. Sorry Geoffrey, you lose.

[Steve]

Geoffrey and I have argued this back and forth. But his book is wonderful. His research is flawless. His research is on the money. His conclusion I disagree with.

[Cut - 01:18:28:22]

[Kraig]

More on the shipping, since you really know ships. [Reading from sheet] Impact of slavery and war on local feelings and politics. And you can go anywhere you want with it as far as...

[Steve]

The 1840's, 50's and 60's were a very, very troubling time for Fells Point and for Baltimore generally. Maryland was a slave state, but Fells Point was also home to what may have been the largest free black community in the United States outside of New York maybe. About half the African-American folks in Baltimore and in Maryland generally were free. There was a lot of feelings...

[Kraig]

How do you know a slave was free? A piece of paper?

[Steve]

Yeah. Generally they would have ... they would be given manumission papers to indicate that they had been freed. Many of them were born free. You had several generations, by this time, of free African-Americans living in Baltimore. Fells Point, in the area over by Bond Street and what's now Dallas Street, what used to be Strawberry Alley ... There were a large number of free African Americans who were artisans and craftsmen. They were particularly known for working in the

shipyards. Virtually all ship caulkers in Baltimore, the men who kept ships watertight, were black. The most famous of them had been Frederick Douglass, who in those days was known as Frederick Bailey, before he ran off to freedom in New Bedford.

[Kraig]

A little-known tune, "Won't you come home Fred Bailey".

[Steve (to Jacquie)]

You're going to have a very tough time editing this, you know.

[Jacquie]

Well, like you said, I'll have to take clips here and there.

[Steve]

You're going to have to on this. When he does that, I don't remember where I am.

[Kraig]

I'm sorry. I'll get back to... I just couldn't help that one.

[Steve]

But, the ship caulkers in Baltimore were nearly all black. Many of the dock workers, many of the shipyard workers were African-American. At the same time, there was a feeling in Baltimore, particularly among the well-to-do families, that their natural affinities and their natural roots were tied to Virginia. A lot of the wealthier families of Baltimore wanted to see their daughters married off to Virginia aristocracy, and many of them had commercial connections with the south, tobacco and so forth.

The people of Fells Point were a little different. Fells Point and East Baltimore generally tended to be a little more pro-Union. When the Civil War broke out, the folks in East Baltimore, many of whom were immigrants, there were a lot of New Englanders, again a big free black community, tended to lean much more toward the Union. Where West Baltimore, where some of the "better families" as they would have said, lived, tended to be much more pro-South.

Maryland was caught up in the war very early. After the firing on Ft. Sumter, President Lincoln called for volunteers and immediately needed a volunteer force, a militia force to defend Washington, thinking that there might be an invasion from the South.

The earliest troops came from New England. Several regiments of Massachusetts militia headed South. In order to get south in those days, you had to come into Baltimore on the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad to President Street Station. You would then detrain from President Street Station and either take a coach or have your rail car towed across town because it was against City ordinances to run steam engines downtown. You had to tow your car across to Camden Station where you would connect with the B&O railroad, and the B&O would then take you to Washington. There were several other stations around town, but the one that was the most used

from the troupes coming down from Massachusetts and from New England was the President Street Station. The President Street Station was probably the 2nd passenger station built in the United States by a railroad strictly for passengers. It was built in 1849 and was something of a landmark even then.

The 6th Massachusetts Regiment was bound South for Washington. On the 18th of April, rioting had broken out in Baltimore. The ship Fanny Crenshaw from Richmond had come in and tied up in Fells Point and had run a succession flag up in its rigging. A mob from Fells Point attacked the ship and pulled the flag down. When the mob left, the ship's boy came up and put the flag back up. So the mob returned and tore the flag to shreds and threw the ship's boy in the harbor.

A pro-Southern mob had attacked one of the Turnverein German social halls. The Germans and many of the immigrants were living at that time in what is now Little Italy, what was then called Mechanics Row, over into Fells Point, and they tended to be very strongly union and strongly abolitionist.

[Kraig]

Is that why they called it Mechanics Row, because they were?

[Steve]

They were mechanics. They were artisans and mechanics. They were men who worked on the docks, worked in the steam factories and the steam plants, and kept Baltimore going in that sense.

So there had been rioting all through the 17th and 18th. On the 19th, the morning of the 19th, the 6th Massachusetts Regiment comes into President Street Station. The first few companies are towed in their railway cars over across town, over to Camden Station and they board the trains for Washington. But a mob gathers. They gather at the bridge where the bridge crosses over Light Street now and Pratt Street and they converge on the station. And they begin throwing rocks and bottles and breaking windows in the cars. The rail cars are being towed across by horse until they get up to the Pratt Street bridge. And the bridge has been blocked by anchors and paving stones and a bunch of other stuff that's been torn up and thrown in the way. The lead driver panics and unhitches his team to take his team around to the other end, the back end of the car to tow the car back to President Street Station. This emboldens the mob and somebody in the mob starts shooting. The soldiers go back, try and retreat back to President Street Station, can't really make it. They start going ahead to head over to Camden Street Station, and the mob has become uglier and bigger all the time. They've broken into a couple of hardware stores. Every hardware store in those days sold shotguns and old muskets and things for people to make their living with, to hunt with...

[Clock chimes over next few sentences]

So now there are guns in the street on both sides. Another mob forms in Mechanics Row. The mob in Mechanics Row is pro-Union. They come out and begin fighting with the pro-Southern Baltimore mob. The soldiers fall right into the middle of this. Somebody orders the soldiers to fire and they shoot. So the Battle of Pratt Street commences. When the battle is over, there are 4 dead soldiers and 11 dead Baltimoreans, several of whom were from Fells Point. Fells Point's response was -- a

group of businessmen got together and immediately formed a pro-Union militia and armed themselves. And Baltimore was very much in danger of being a divided city, a split city, at that point.

It all calmed down eventually. Baltimore went under martial law. A number of the leading citizens of Baltimore who had Southern sympathies were imprisoned in Ft. McHenry until things calmed down. But the Civil War was a very cruel time for Baltimore. It was hard on families because there were many families who were divided. About three times more Marylanders fought for the Union than fought for the South. Most of the Southern volunteers went South very early, usually in 1861. Very few went down South after that. But there was always a division of sympathies and a division within many, many families. It was a very tough time.

Also, areas like Fells Point suffered badly in the Civil War because there was an embargo on shipping and many of the products that used to sail out of Jackson's Wharf and Brown's Wharf and the various wharves that lined the Fells Point waterfront couldn't be shipped out of there. Instead, Baltimore merchants were having to send their cargo North to Philadelphia or Wilmington or New York or even Boston to get their cargo shipped properly. It wasn't until 1863 and 64, well into the War, that things began to ease up in Fells Point. By that time, Government contracts were beginning to get let for the shipyards. The Federal Government felt more comfortable about Maryland, were less concerned about Maryland succeeding, and were less concerned about the troubles that usually seemed to pop up in "mob town."

[01:29:05:21]

[Kraig]

Is that where the name came from? The fact that the mobs, or this one particular instance, or other....

[Steve]

No, no, there were many mobs. Baltimore was known for its mobs. That's why it was called "mob town." During the War of 1812, Robert E. Lee's father was almost killed in the streets of Baltimore because he opposed the War of 1812. He was badly beaten and never recovered, never really recovered from it. Edgar Allen Poe was probably a victim of another mob during the elections in the late 1840's. He eventually died up the street on Broadway at the hospital. The Civil War, of course, the 19th of April of 1861, a terrible time. So Baltimore had always been known for its unruly behavior, a tradition that I like to think we kept alive in Fells Point, at least until recent years.

[Discussion of whether to break or go on a few minutes. 01:30:26:03]

[Kraig]

Frederick Douglass, Isaac Myers and other African-Americans ... do you want to just say a few things about them and what they did, or any special take you've got on it?

[Steve]

Sure. Probably one of the most distinguished citizens to come out of Fells Point in historic times was a young man by the name of Fred Bailey. Fred Bailey was born on the Eastern Shore and was brought as a slave to Baltimore...

[Kraig]

By who?

[Steve]

The Auld family, I think. I wouldn't swear to it. I don't remember that.

[Kraig]

I mean, not the Dutch or British or anything...

[Steve]

No, no, no. This was Americans. He came to Fells Point as a young man, was apprenticed as a ship caulker in the Gardner & Kemp Shipyard and several of the shipyards in Fells Point, lived in the Auld house, which is now gone from Fells Point. Most ship caulkers in those days, in Maryland and points South were black. It was a profession that African-Americans took great pride in. Fred Bailey was the top of his trade. But he didn't like the idea of being a slave. So Fred Bailey dressed himself as a sailor, and sailors were fairly common on the trains in those days, going from one place to another. If you were dressed as a sailor, they didn't question whether you were a slave or not. And again, half of the African-American population of Maryland were free at that time. So, no one questioned him. He took the train North. He ended up in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and changed his name to Frederick Douglass.

Douglass is a man that really goes beyond race. He taught all of us how to be free. He's a great revolutionary figure in American history. When the Civil War was over, both of his sons had fought in the Civil War as soldiers. One, his oldest son, was the Sergeant Major of the 54th Massachusetts, a famous black regiment. Another son was in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, a black cavalry regiment. And Douglass himself had become a central figure in the fight against slavery, and in the fight for civil rights for African Americans and for all Americans after the Civil War. He eventually came back to Baltimore, bought a piece of property in Strawberry Alley not far from where he had lived. He had gone to church in the balcony at the Strawberry Alley Church, which is now gone. Strawberry Alley is now Bethel Street, or no, excuse me, Dallas Street. He built what's still there, in the 1890's, called "Douglass block." That was his excursion into real estate. So he's certainly one of our more distinguished figures.

[Kraig]

How old was he was starting to do all this?

[Steve]

Well, he was a young man when he came to Baltimore. He was really a boy, he was a teenager.

[Kraig]

When he finally came back and got a piece of property?

[Steve]

I don't remember precisely when he was born, but he was an older man. I believe he was in his 70's when he died. So he was probably in his 60's or so when he built Douglass block. Off the top of my head.

Isaac Myers was a labor leader, a labor figure, an early proponent of civil rights for African American citizens in Baltimore and was one of the owners of the Isaac Myers shipyards, the first African-American owned shipyard in the United States that I know of. That was at the end of Thames Street down where the Living Classrooms Foundation is building their ...

[Kraig]

I've got a question that I've got to have answered by you. Right there where you talk about the shipyard, there's a building that's round ... they've torn it down ... is that because of the Africans with the fear of the souls hiding in the corners?

[Steve]

No, no. That's the sugar warehouse. It was just the style of building at the time.

[Brief discussion and correction that it was not the one that was torn down.]

[Steve]

That's the old sugar warehouse. When I first moved into Baltimore, that was a warehouse. It had been a warehouse for a ship chandlery for a long time and still had some anchors and chains and stuff in it. It burned in the early 90's I would guess. It caught fire and burned ... the top floors burned. We were afraid we would lose that building, but we fought to save it. Living Classrooms Foundation eventually came in and took over that piece of property.

I had proposed in the 1970's the building of an historic shipyard, the recreation of an historic shipyard. Because at that time, we were in the process of building the Pride of Baltimore. And we had the skipjack Mini-V and a couple of other historic vessels that were owned by the City. And I proposed building that shipyard to help maintain those ships and to maintain the crafts and the skills. That idea went by the boards until the 1980's when a group of people in Fells Point got together and thought this would be an excellent idea. Bob Keith, who wrote the fine book on Baltimore Harbor, and Charlie Norton and a number of other folks, had a number of meetings and talked about it.

The Lady Maryland Foundation, which is now called the Living Classrooms Foundation, was invited to those meetings and essentially picked up the idea for their own and went ahead with it. And that eventually we hope is what's going to happen there. I don't know that it'll be big enough to maintain a ship the size of the Pride of Baltimore, but they'll be building ships and maintaining ships, and have apprenticeship programs and educational programs down there. I hope they'll do that in conjunction with the community. We suggested early on that it be named after Frederick Douglass. It was only

appropriate being a citizen of Fells Point and being a ship caulker. It's pretty important that that heritage be recognized. An idea which, by the way, they will claim is entirely their own. [under his breath while Jacquie asks the next question] ... Sons of bitches. I got no use for them...

[Jacquie]

Isaac Myers is he the one ... he started that company because blacks couldn't get work in white-dominated...

[Steve]

After the Civil War, there was a tremendous competition for jobs in Fells Point, particularly along the waterfront. The shipbuilding trade had been badly hit by the Civil War. The embargoes early in the Civil War had hurt Fells Point. And Fells Point, even with Government contracts and the railroads and all coming through, Fells Point had never really recovered. So, there was a real competition for work. It had to be very tough for African-Americans to find work in what was at that time still a very prejudiced society. It was people like Isaac Myers who created opportunities for African-Americans, that opened things up and really helped bring a certain amount of social justice and diversity to Fells Point. The free black community would have always been a marginalized and poor community if it hadn't been for people like ... the leadership on a national level of Douglass and on a local level of Isaac Myers.

[Break - 01:38:30:29]

[Steve]

China Sea ... The China Sea was in Fells Point for 21 years. Some of our best customers were traditional ships and schooners and the older ships. Even occasionally we'd put things on tugs. So we would find odd-ball hardware and things that hadn't been made for 100 years that could go back to sea. One day this German seaman, young German seaman, came in with a little schooner and ... did wonderful knot-work. He had no money [laughs] ... he was trying to sail around the world. He had no money at all, so he needed groceries. So I said, well, there must be something you can do here... China Sea kind of became a way station for travelers, for wanderers. We always found something to keep them busy. So he started doing knot-work for me. He did that cat-of-nine-tails. The other cat-of-nine-tails I have came off the three-masted schooner Artemus of Rotterdam. Artemus was, as far as I know, the last working sailing ship, sailing with international cargo listed by Lloyds of London. And I was the ship's carpenter for a little while. She was a wonderful ship. She was built in 1903. And the boson actually made that cat-of-nine-tails as a joke. We never hit anybody with it. He used to walk around with it when we would put into port, he would walk around with it to terrorize the onlookers, the people on the docks who were looking at this colorful old ship. [Laughs.] We wanted people to know that we were not some pleasure yacht.

[Cut. Discussion of having a drink later.]

When I had ships, when I had schooners and sailing ships, I had a rule on the ship ... we ran a dry ship. There were no ardent spirits allowed on board. No alcohol of any kind. The only time I had liquor on my ship was when I had the Yankee Hero, we were a bum boat. We were probably the last bum boat to work out of Fells Point. And in the middle of the night, we would sail out of Ann

Street Wharf... She was 66 feet on deck, big 66 feet, last rebuilt in 1912. I had Beatles records, old blue jeans, cases of peanut butter and ketchup, electronics ... from Jerry over at Poptronics, I would buy these little, we used to call them Rasta boxes down on the Islands, boom boxes, and they had a 110 and 220 switch on them so you could play them aboard ship and overseas... And we would take this stuff out in the middle of the night, over at the anchorages, when one of the energy crises was going on, a lot of ships were tying up in Baltimore, were at the anchorages in Baltimore loading coal, so these guys ... half the time they wouldn't let them ashore because they knew they'd run off ... so we'd come along side at night and we would supply them with all kinds of strange things. The Poles liked peanut butter, American peanut butter for some reason and blue jeans. The Russians liked Beatles records. We had ketchup ... all kinds of crazy stuff. Stuff that you would never think would have any value particularly. And we would trade for all kinds of things. We would get ships salvage and extra tools and ring buoys and life buoys and stuff, all kinds of stuff. But in order to get up the pilot's ladder to get up on that ship, you have to bribe the boson. So I always had a bottle of Black Jack. That was the only booze I ever allowed on my ship, was one bottle of Jack Daniels. And that always ensured a welcome on board ship. [Laughs.] But I wouldn't drink it and I wouldn't allow anybody else on the ship to have it.

[01:42:25:27]

[Kraig]

All right. Let's talk a little bit about Fells Point ... You were there for a long time. Tell me some of the things you were involved in while you were there as far as the community ... I'll just shut and let you talk. Where do you think it's going since you've left and beyond.

[Jacquie]

And if you could start at what you were telling me before about the road and the reasons behind it and some of the dynamics, even though that's before you got there.

[Steve]

I got to Fells Point at the end of the road fight. I think that fight had pretty well been decided by the time I got there. A number of the folks that later formed the Preservation Society had come in and had had bought an awful lot of property down there, and fought against the road. An awful lot of those people were simply speculators. And while they certainly helped save Fells Point, they also helped destroy it. Many of those historic properties that they bought, they simply sat on without doing any restoration work and without maintaining, and those properties fell apart and were either very badly rebuilt or rebuilt to something that they never were to begin with. And a lot of money was made.

The City came in and in many cases I believe terrorized people out of their homes. They came in and they would tell older people, people that had been there most of their lives, that if they didn't sell their property to the City or if they didn't vacate their property, then the City would simply condemn it and they wouldn't get any money ... they wouldn't get anything that the property was worth. So a lot of people panicked and left. Right behind those people, speculators and folks looking to buy property cheap, would come in and say, "You know, the City's going to condemn your property ... you might as well sell it to me." Some of those people did good things... Folks like Roland Reed

settled down and made a commitment to the community and lived there and raised family there. Others lived in the suburbs and simply sat on the property or rented it out as slum housing to poor folks. I think that before we start throwing out too many bouquets about who saved Fells Point and for what purpose, we ought to consider all the facts.

The Preservation Society was in my mind in the early days was a little too concerned with the saving of property and the saving of structures and buildings and saving other people's investments. Today, the Preservation Society, like the community associations, thinks more in terms of people. Communities aren't buildings. Communities are people. It's community. It's people working together and pulling together for common causes.

One of the good things that came out of the collision of cultures that we had in the 70's, 80's and 90's in Fells Point was that those of us who took different sides of issues learned that there was joy in working together with your neighbors, even neighbors that you have differences with. Fells Point has always been a place where a diverse, and sometimes perverse, group of people have come together. There has always been a mixture of nationalities, a mixture of races, a mixture of economics, there have been very rich and very poor... When I first moved into Fells Point, there were people living in allies in cardboard boxes, there were people wondering the streets talking to themselves, there were folks that were absolutely unemployable. There were others who were buying property and were rebuilding it, and doing quite well for themselves.

[Jacquie]

There still are. All those things.

[01:46:42:10]

[Steve]

The Fells Point that we knew is gone. Most of what I knew as Fells Point, the Fells Point that I knew and loved, has to a large degree, gone. That's OK. I'm different. I've grown. I'm not the same fellow I was back in the early and mid 70's. So why wouldn't Fells Point change? We've all had to grow up a little bit, and sometimes that's painful. I miss some of the rowdy times that we had. I miss my rowdy friends. There was a real pioneering spirit in those days in Fells Point because most of us didn't have anything. And so we started out with nothing and we had to kind of pull together to get there. Artists and musicians and merchant seamen and longshoremen and immigrants and folks that didn't speak English and folks that didn't bother to check in with Government authorities when they got off the boat. Nobody turned in anyone for anything if they could avoid it. You never called the police for anything short of murder. And we didn't get murders. People didn't tend to hurt each other very much. It happened. It certainly happened. But for the most part it was a time of some innocence.

Unfortunately, a lot of those people that I new then died young. They spent a lot of their lives in the saloons, in the bars. And drugs became a factor. And it wasn't long before you began to see friends in their 20's and 30's who looked like they were in their 60's and 70's. People that didn't have families any more, didn't have any money, couldn't hold a job, and who died tragic deaths, early deaths.

[Kraig]

When you say Fells Point as you knew it was great but it's over, give me a few specifics. Maybe you're leading to some... Give me an example. As somebody that, I'm a newer resident ... I've been there 10 years with my wife, but I haven't been there as long as you have, and you were there at some of the critical crossroads, I guess you would call it... So, be kind of specific...

[Steve]

When I started my business... I think I had \$40 to my name when I opened the door of my shop at 817 South Broadway next to the Port Mission. I didn't know where the next few meals were coming from. But I thought this would be a good place to start. My rent in those days was about \$200 a month for my shop on the bottom floor, for my home, where I lived, my apartment, on the top floor, and a nice living room and a couple of extra rooms that I let out to wandering merchant seamen. I had a back yard where I could work. When I looked out my galley window, my kitchen window, I could look right out on the tugs. And in fact, it was funny because I'd get out of the shower in the morning. And sometimes I'd look out the window without a stitch on and the guys on the tugs would give me a toot on the whistle. We all knew each other. We were all good neighbors. Living was cheap, and it was good. We had lots of friends. A lot of folks that were just getting a start in life. And a second start in life.... You know, Fells Point was always a second start community. It was a place where people went that had lives in other places. And you didn't always ask questions as to where someone had been. You waited for them to volunteer it.

[Kraig]

Explain that a little bit. That's the interesting part. Some of the stuff that no one's mentioned yet...

[Steve]

When I moved the shop, when my partner, Bill Oliver ... Bill owns the Wharf Rat now ... when Bill and I had moved the shop around from the Square, around to where the Maritime Museum is now, 1724 Thames, in the old car barn. It was just a wide-open filthy warehouse. It was a mess. There had been some guys in there working on cars and there was grease everywhere. The place was a disaster. The back half of the building was taken up by John Fergusson and Dave Gerlack, who were iron and steel fabricators ... very talented guys, sharp guys, good neighbors, too. So Bill and I set up a shop in there. And in the back, I had a forge for doing some blacksmithing. I would occasionally bring it out front and when the Street Arabs would come with their horse-drawn wagons, the wagons were always falling apart, and the horses were throwing shoes, and I would refasten shoes occasionally and fix iron tires on the wagons and so forth...

[Kraig]

You started as a blacksmith?

[Steve]

No, no, it was a ... an operation just like it is now. I sell all kinds of ships stuff. But we did whatever it took to stay afloat. If somebody needed woodwork, if somebody wanted an antique-type sign painted, I would do that.

[Kraig]

My father's family was originally trained as blacksmiths.

[Steve]

Yeah. I would do ships figureheads and name boards for some of the older ships, the older style ships, traditional work. And we had a stove in the back and on the stove was always a pot of chili cooking in the daytime. There was always a pot staying warm. So any time you wanted to take a break, you could take a break and go on over and there was a coffee pot and you could pour yourself a cup of coffee and have a little chili. Well people would come in the store who were just discovering Fells Point and they would walk in the back and we'd sit them down and give them a bowl of chili and tell them a little about Fells Point ... tell them if we knew there was an apartment available, or where they might find a job in a bar, you know, or if the tugs might be hiring. So a lot of folks got their introduction to Fells Point that way. Those were young and innocent times for Fells Point.

[Kraig]

That's the kind of thing I really love, and you're right about those things disappearing like that... That kind of thing where you can just come on in and "How you doin'?" My neighbors are kind of like that. We do that a lot.

[Steve]

The law as it applied to Fells Point was a little bit different it was in the rest of the city. People didn't always bother to get their zoning clearances and their building permits to alter their buildings... They'd ask their next door neighbor if it was alright and if it was alright with them then it was probably alright, they'd go ahead and do it. Again, you didn't call the police for anything if you could possibly avoid it.

I remember in the old days, the Cat's Eye was really two operations. You had the front room, and you had the back room. The back room of the Cat's Eye was run by a fellow that we all called Back Room Eddie. Sometimes we knew him as Easy Eddie. Easy Eddie was a big fellow, ex Marine, Vietnam vet.... Good guy. And sometimes at 4 or 5:00 in the morning I'd be walking by and I'd hear a little sound of music coming from the back room, you know, or I'd see a light under the door, and I'd bang on the door, and somebody would come out in front and open the door and lead me into the back room. And we'd be back there, we'd be drinking beer, doing things that were not always particularly legal. But it was your neighbors. We'd be telling stories, having a good time, and sharing time with each other. It was a lot of fun.

That won't happen again in Fells Point. Not down on the waterfront. It can't. It's too bad. And that's what I miss. But, you know, there is still some old Fells Point left. If you go back into the neighborhoods, if you go back up on Durham Street, and up through that area, up into the neighborhood, go on up Dallas and Bond, and through that area. There's a lot of artists still, a lot of working stiffs, a lot of the old timers, a lot of immigrants and folks that are fairly new to the area, getting a new start in life up there. And so, I don't think they'll ever be able to fully, completely eliminate old Fells Point. But most of the Fells Point that I knew on the waterfront back in the 70's and 80's, it's pretty well gone.

[Kraig]

It was people living and working and getting along, trying to build themselves. Now it's just ... a conglomeration buys a bunch of things and puts things in there...

[Steve]

A lot of us lived over the top of our shops. And that makes a big difference. When you live in your business, you make a real commitment to your community and your business, it counts. Even if you're a renter, that's something that really counts. It's the way you make your living and the relationship with your neighbors is important. And so, you tend to commit yourself to a neighborhood. You'll fight for it. You'll fight for it in ways that you wouldn't if you lived out in the suburbs or if you only slept in Fells Point and worked downtown. The folks that really didn't have much, that put everything they had into their small businesses, and their little entrepreneurial operations on Broadway and on Thames and even some of the back streets, they were folks that fought for that neighborhood. They weren't always the best of neighbors. They weren't always the politest of people. But they were people you could count on when the chips were down.

[01:56:41:09]

[Kraig]

OK, so now we see Fells Point moving from that into what? What do you see? Where do you see things going? If Steve Bunker were to move back there tomorrow, what would surprise him or what would he go, "Oh, no ... this is kind of nice but boy I don't like this ..." Just some things...

[Steve]

Well, I don't know.

Steve Bunker couldn't move back to Fells Point if he wanted to. I couldn't afford it now. The area that I love is working waterfront. That's what I'm used to. That's what I was born to. I've lived on working waterfronts all over the world and Fells Point is the one that I love the most. It's the one that I stuck with. But that waterfront that I knew is gone. I couldn't afford to live there now. Today, speculators have bought much of the property. They are often people that don't live there and have not made the same commitment to the community that some of the residents have, or some of the small businesspeople that have been there a long time. What they want is, they want their management company to bring them that check, wherever they happen to live, once a month. And they paid a lot of money for that property. So, there's no way you can rent that property at prices that you can make a living on. A lot of those businesses now will have to be hobbies for people. An awful lot of it is going to be people that have income somewhere else and so they're able to take a loss, but they happen to enjoy having a designer soap store or whatever they happen to have there. The day where a young couple or a young man or woman can come in and start a new business and create his dreams is largely gone. And that's what I miss. I really miss that about Fells Point.

Fells Point taught me a lot. It taught me the meaning of community. For the first time in my life, I had neighbors, real neighbors. People that really meant something to me. People that I knew I would be seeing the next day and the day after. Those are folks that I was willing to fight for and I

knew would fight for me. That's what's hard to find. You can't create community with historic homeowner tax credits. That's not how it's done. It's done with people.

[Kraig]

I agree with everything you're saying. There's no doubt about it. Where do you see it going? Let's say Steve Bunker doesn't really live there, but he's seen enough of the place. Where do you see it going in 5, 10, 15 years? Gimme 5, gimme 10, gimme 15, 20...

[Steve]

History is like the great wheel of life. It's just going to keep on going. For a while, people will make a lot of money in Fells Point. They'll speculate on the property. They'll do quite well. Eventually, people will not be able to open imaginative and interesting businesses. They won't be able to afford little working-class houses that were built in the 1800's for Irish laborers that now they're trying to make into little Federal Period palaces.

Eventually that string is going to run out. There will be economic hard times in this country. That'll reflect in the prices of properties. Eventually things will go back down again to a more reasonable level. There will always be a circle. It's history. It simply continues. It probably won't happen in my lifetime, but in the lifetime of our children, Fells Point will once again become a place where people will come to start again. Where they'll look for a break. Where they'll open small shops and businesses, where they'll look to build new lives. And do so in an affordable way. I wish I could be around for that, but it's not going to happen.

[02:01:02:02]

[Kraig]

You make good sense. You think some of the gentrification now is going to... it'll top out at some point and then maybe there'll be an abandonment... For instance a lot of people park their cars down there to go to the ballgame. And people come down there because it's just the trendy place to go. Upscale restaurants were never Fells Point.

[Steve]

But if you look at Fells Point now, you'll see that the trend is changing again. For a time in the 90's it was where all the kids, all the drunken college boys, all the silly sorority sisters would go and misbehave. They would do things in Fells Point they would never think of doing in their own homes or around their own neighborhoods. And they thought that Fells Point was the place to get away with it. Just like sailors in the 1930's and 1920's, 1910's had put in and had chased hookers and done crazy things and misbehaved, which they couldn't do in their own home towns. That's changing already. Now suddenly people are discovering Canton. They're going to find other venues. Every neighborhood that has trendy bars and kiddy clubs always runs in cycles. It's a 5, 6, 7 year cycle. The place that was new and interesting and dynamic this day will change and it'll be old hat the next. Americans' attention span is about that long. And so, when they choose to do something else, when they find some other place to go, some other new trend, they'll do it.

I remember just a couple of years ago, cigars were the big thing. And we had a couple of cigar operations in Fells Point. And all these guys would come down from the suburbs, from the Washington suburbs even, and they would buy 3 and 4 dollar cigars. And on Sunday morning, you'd look in the gutter and there were 2/3 of a \$5 cigar laying in the gutter. Because it was a very popular trend, and so that's what they were following was this popular trend. It looked very macho. Arnold Schwarzenegger had his picture on the cover of Cigar Aficionado, so a lot of guys thought that that looked neat. But they really weren't into cigars, so the cigars ended up in the gutter and the money was up the spout. The cigar places are gone now. That's the nature of things, and it's the nature of Fells Point. History is a great circle. It'll just keep changing.

I'd love to be here for another hundred years. Because I'd love to see Fells Point and see what happens.

[Kraig]

I wonder if my clothes would fit after 100 years....

One of the points I'm kind of getting to... Nob Hill in San Francisco, Beacon Hill in Boston, those places, it's just kept on going.... Downtown London for instance... It's just out of control. Now what's the difference between that.... I don't see those really being connected. But you know the history of all the other places better....

[Steve]

Yes, but ... Well, here it is...

Baltimore has never had, and does not now have, nor will it probably have in the future the kind of economy to sustain the kind of real estate boom that's happened in a place like Fells Point. Prices are not going to just keep going up. It's not going to be Elfreth's Alley in Philadelphia or Beacon Hill in Boston. Those places have stable economies and a very solid business base, financial base that people can maintain the value of their property. It's unlikely to happen in East Baltimore. East Baltimore may never go back to the poverty that it once had, thank god. That's the good thing about gentrification, is when people see things that are better, when they see neat, clean homes, when they see people taking pride in the appearance of their community, they like to stick with that. But, you're not going to be able to continue to try and rent out property at the outrageous prices that some of the businesses are renting for in Fells Point today. It's simply not gonna happen because it's not sustainable. Eventually, that will go back to the point where people can afford it. It's those people that can hold out will be the beneficiaries of that.

That's not going to be me. I'm too old for it. I'm too far down the road. And frankly, I'm content to let the old Fells Point that I knew and loved live in my memory, and it always will. I'll always treasure it, and I'll always owe a tremendous debt to Fells Point and to Baltimore for allowing me to grow and to learn the meaning of community and to mature. I appreciate its forgiveness.

[02:06:11:05]

[Kraig]

Do you have any words of wisdom for Fells Point? ... Watch out for this, don't do this, look at this, things you've seen... Taken on the fact that you're also a historian and you look at Fells Point as not only a place you live but also a place that maybe could fit into a pattern as other cities could fit into a pattern... I noticed that you just compared Philadelphia and Beacon Hill in Boston. Any words for Fells Point in that ... don't fall into this pattern or this trap or some things that you see just stepping back and looking at the whole situation.

[Steve]

One of the things that we did in Fells Point in the 70's, 80's and 90's is we learned to fight for the things that we believed in. And we learned to pull together to do it. Fells Point is the kind of place that's wide open to exploitation. Political exploitation -- there was a time when every developer that wandered into town with an expensive suit was promised a piece of Fells Point by the city administration. They never met a developer they didn't like. Some of these guys were absolute con men. And they would come in with the most outlandish schemes, schemes that took no interest whatsoever in the well-being of the people who lived in Fells Point. They proposed 28 story tall condominium towers for Brown's Wharf. They proposed all kinds of outrageous development that would have destroyed Fells Point as we know it. It would have forced out people on fixed incomes. It would have forced out elderly citizens. It would have prevented young people and immigrants and the folks that make up Fells Point from ever being able to create the opportunities they did. Many of the residents that live there now, folks that renovated their homes and took pride in their homes, would never have been able to stay. And the neighborhood that would have been created would not have been the kind of neighborhood that anyone would want to live in.

If it weren't for local people, the people of Fells Point, fighting those battles and insisting on justice, changing their city councilmen when it was necessary, disciplining the city administration, testifying at meetings at Annapolis as well as downtown, if we hadn't brought pressure to bear on the powers that be, Fells Point would have disappeared. And what we would have been left with would have been a series of towers, huge white elephants, that no one would want to own. Instead, they would have been strictly rental properties and would be half empty most of the time. Fells Point will always be open to that kind of exploitation if people don't learn to stand on their hind legs and voice themselves and demand justice from the city administration.

If a neighborhood has a philosophy, and it's the most important thing it can have, it has to know what it wants to be. It has to make a decision. It has to come to some kind of consensus as to what it wants to be... In Fells Point, we decided we wanted a residential community with a strong business element. We didn't want to run off all the bars. We didn't want to run off the small businesses. We wanted to have a combination of things. We wanted to have our grocery stores. We wanted to have our bars where we could socialize. But we wanted also to have residents where people could be left in peace and raise their families and live decently. We wanted to have life on a livable scale. We had to fight for that. That didn't just come because it just happened. We had to fight for that. We sometimes fought each other. It was very difficult at times.

[Kraig]

That's like the old thing, freedom isn't free.

[02:10:01:17]

[Steve]

There was a tremendous collision of cultures in Fells Point at one point. It's happened at other times in Fells Point's history. In the 1790's and early 1800's, there were a lot of very well-to-do people living in Fells Point. A series of plagues had swept through. In this case, we know it was yellow fever and malaria from the fens and from the bogs, from the mosquitoes living in the low grounds by the shipyards. People didn't know that at the time. So the well-to-do families fled. And what was left was sailors and immigrants and poor folks. And that collision of cultures was very painful.

It happened again in the 70's and 80's and 90's. Well-to-do people coming in from the suburbs, professional people, well educated people, were buying homes in Fells Point and were fixing them up. They met resentment from a lot of the older people who had been there, because they saw a threat to their being able to stay there due to rising property taxes. For the folks that had come in themselves, the poorer folks, the artisans, the sailors, and so forth, they saw the collision because their way of life was much looser. They weren't particularly concerned about historic homeowner tax credits. They didn't worry about where to park their car. They only had one car. They could park it on a back street. They didn't care. Many of the families coming in owned two and three cars and their houses were only 17 feet wide. So they insisted they had to have a place to park. These were issues that had to be resolved amongst ourselves. And it was very painful. Those of us that led organizations and led groups in those days took a lot of blood. We gave and took. But in doing so, we learned the meaning of community. And we learned how much more worthwhile it was to work with our neighbors, to work together and to pull toward common goals. Because we had so much more in common than we had apart. And as soon as we got over the marginal differences, we really made progress and we really helped create the Fells Point that you see now.

Some of us really kind of created our own exit strategies without meaning to. I couldn't afford to live in Fells Point now, not where I lived. And I wanted to live on the water. I've lived on the water all my life. That's what I do. That's where my roots are. That's where my background is. I've been a sailor and a dock worker all my life.

[Kraig]

You don't really have it too bad here.

[Steve]

Oh, I love Maine. No complaints. My ancestry is here. I was born and raised in New England. This is where I came back. And I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in the city. I knew if I didn't leave when I did, I'd probably never leave. So I had to go. But I think about Fells Point a lot.

[02:12:59:14]

[Jacquie]

Talk about some of the organizations and the conflicts. You were telling me some of these stories earlier.

[Steve]

Back in the late 80's, Fells Point really didn't have community organizations as we later had. Dick Feint had led the Fells Point Improvement Association for some time. He was a wonderful man. It was an organization principally made up of older residents and folks that had been there a long time, working people. But Dick really was the lifeblood of the organization. And that was often the case. Organizations often were led by 1, 2, 3 people. And much depended on what they did. When Dick Feint died, the Fells Point Improvement Association really disappeared.

The only thing left was ORRA, Owners, Residents and Renters Association. Most of the long-term residents that had belonged to ORRA no longer were going to the meetings or no longer belonged. The organization had really fallen into decline and had become a small social club made up principally of people who were relatively new to the area, folks that had moved in from out of town or from the suburbs and had their own vision of what Fells Point would be. They had invested a lot of money and a lot of time and a lot of their dreams in their homes. And they envisioned a somewhat cleaner and more orderly neighborhood than Fells Point was at that time.

In order to achieve that goal, I think they made a very tragic mistake. A number of people within that small group began calling city inspectors -- health inspectors, housing inspectors, bar inspectors -- anybody who had an inspector suddenly descended on Fells Point. And sea widows who were renting rooms as mail drops to merchant seamen suddenly were being hit with fines for not having a smoke detector or not having a fire escape. And these were people that didn't even know such a thing existed. And the people who rented the rooms were merchant seamen, they weren't there three days a month. They just wanted a place to get their mail. Restaurant owners and bar owners were suddenly being hit for health code violations they'd never had to worry about. The police were sending in cadets to see who was being served and who wasn't (the age limit).

There was a lot of this going on. Some of it is necessary, and some of it was certainly warranted because Fells Point was pretty wild and wooly. But at the same time, they came down with a very heavy hand on a lot of folks that didn't deserve it. And people began to get upset. A lot of the old timers in Fells Point, a lot of the working people, the guys on the waterfront, became pretty worked up about it, the restaurant owners and bar owners.

So, a large group of us decided to join ORRA. So one night we all walked into the meeting -- and there was about 70 of us, which frankly surprised me. I didn't know there were 70 people who agreed on anything in Fells Point. But they did. And out of that 70 people, there was probably 5 or 6 waitresses from bars, 2 or 3 bar owners, there was at least 1, I suspect 2 prostitutes, a transvestite who we all loved very dearly, a lot of small business people, a number of folks that didn't have any fixed address but seemed to live from place to place in Fells Point ... and they joined. They were all Fells Pointers. An election was eventually held and I was elected President. This put me on the firing line, and I certainly never intended to be in that position, but there I was.

The group that had been there, that thought we were all a bit too rag-tag for their taste, formed their own group, the Homeowners Association, and didn't want to have anything to do with us. I frankly had friends in both camps. Some of the folks that joined the Homeowners were dear friends of mine. And it was very hurtful to me, and I know it was hurtful to them to find ourselves on opposite

sides of the fence. We had a little civil war going on. It was exacerbated by a couple of acts of violence. Some idiot threw a small gasoline bomb at somebody's window and that was ascribed to some political motive. Eventually, everybody in Fells Point knew who did it ... everybody but the police. There was \$12,000 in rewards out for the perpetrator and yet the police said they couldn't even get a crank call. [Laughs.] We all figured out who did it eventually. It had nothing to do with the neighborhood. But it was very painful.

Our organization, ORRA, eventually changed its name to the Fells Point Community Organization and along with Nelson Adlin and the folks in the Business Association formed this group, this coalition. We reached out to Canton and Highlandtown and to Butchers Hill, to Little Italy, and formed the Waterfront Coalition because all of us had similar problems. All of us felt that the city was giving us short shrift. And so we came together with our various philosophies of our neighborhoods and what the future should be and we fought for each other. And it was extremely effective. We eventually replaced the deadwood that we had in the City Council supposedly representing us and the course of Fells Point and East Baltimore generally was...

[Break - end of tape - 02:19:00:06]

[Kraig]

We've talked a lot about Fells Point history, and now the spicy part I guess, just some Fells Point anecdotes, little stories... One of the ones you mentioned was, people in Fells Point, talk about their nicknames and why they had nicknames and things like that with different nationalities.

[Steve]

OK. Fells Point, as I've said, is kind of a place where an awful lot of people got their second start. And a lot of people didn't want to give out their names, their real names for one reason or another. And some people were perfectly willing to give out their real names, but their real names were either too foreign or too difficult to remember or were too similar to somebody else's name, so they ended up with a nickname. So, there was Irish Mike, who tended bar at the Cat's Eye. There was Greek Mike. There was Railroad Mike, Mike Boke. There was Easy Eddie, Fast Eddie ... all these different names that people picked up over a period of time ... Dirty John. A couple that referred unkindly to people's ethnicity. But they didn't mean it unkindly, it's just something that happened.

[Jacquie]

Examples?

[Steve]

Black Doug, that's not particularly unkind, but Black Doug ... some people called him Doug the Biker. Doug is still there. Lives over the Wharf Rat. You can usually tell when he's there because his Indian motorcycle is parked out front. Good guy. Long time Fells Point denizen.

[Kraig]

Remember the guy, Rudy, the Austrian baker that was there that drove an old BMW?

[Steve]

Of course. Yes.

[Kraig]

He made the best strudel in the world. I don't know if he's still there...

[Steve]

Yes, he's still around. Austrian Rudy. Rudy's still around last I knew. He's got a bakery. He's from Austria. Baked a lot of the pastries you'd pick up at the Market. Yeah, they were great.

[Kraig]

Yeah. He made some big strudels for a party I had one time, me and my next door neighbor Bill. And he just came over. He wasn't happy, and he said, "I'm not going to stay around but I wanted to make something..." and these giant strudels.... They were this fat and this long [not on camera], two of them.

[Steve]

He did a bachelorette party for a friend of ours, Denise, Denise Whitman over at the Preservation Society. He did the bachelorette party for her. He brought pastries, and some of them were lewd pastries. And they held that party in my back yard.

Fells Point, at one point, we counted 36 nationalities in Fells Point in family groups. Elaine F, who was the City's folklorist, I guess the State's folklorist, for a time. Elaine and I both compared notes at one time. We both came up with a figure of 36. And by 36 nationalities, I mean in family groups. That doesn't count the woman from Borneo who was tending bar down the street. These are family groups. The old ethnic groups in Fells Point are probably the Germans and the Irish, and even the French. But the later groups, beginning in the 1880's, 1890's, right up to the present day, are Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Eastern Europeans generally. Lately, there's been a big influx of folks from Mexico, working people from Mexico coming up. Just a few years ago was Nicaragua, El Salvador ... people fleeing the wars and the troubles down there. They opened a number of really nice little restaurants ... and they've settled the area known as Spanish Town and have brought a lot of life, a lot of variety to the community.

[Kraig]

That area was almost desolate and they've turned it completely around.

[Steve]

That's right. Well, that's what happens, you know. People have to have dreams and have to believe in an area enough to settle down and give it time...

[Kraig]

Does that Spanish Town area ... is that in any reminiscent of that Fells Point you said isn't going to exist any more? The people, working people building...

[Steve]

Yes. This is the way that some folks are able to get a second start. They'll come in and the whole family will work. There's a Thai family running a convenience store up the street on Broadway. It isn't just one person that came in and plopped down some money. The whole family works there. And that's how they're able to do it.

[Kraig]

Ding How?

[Steve]

No, Ding How's different. As far as I know is essentially Ronnie and [can't remember name] came in from Shanghai. That used to be a 7-11 when they set that up.

But at one time at the Market, you could get ... Eric was there, who was a Dutchman, he was a meat cutter... There was several people selling things like pierogies, there was Italian specialties, there was Hispanic and Mexican food, there were some Palestinian folks there... Right on the block alongside the Market there, the first market building up on Broadway, at one point, there was a Palestinian, there was Avie has a little antique and curiosity shop there, he's from Morocco, he's Jewish from Morocco... So, it was always a neighborhood that had interesting cross-currents. That's part of the neighborhood that I always loved.... That's one of the things I always loved about it.

[Kraig]

Yeah, that's still what I love about it. I can go walk around and get different... things.

[02:25:23:06]

[Steve]

That area has an interesting labor history. There were quite a number of union halls through that area at a time when unions were just forming. When I was going to sea as a young man, the National Maritime Union, the NMU, had a hall up the street. The NMU was one of the most progressive unions in its day. It was an early union that had no place on its form for race. It didn't matter what your national origin or what race you were. If you were a working seaman, you belonged in the Union. And that was exceptional back in the 1930's and 1940's, particularly in a port that was really a Southern port like Baltimore. The SIU was down there, the marine carpenters, the ship's carpenters union was down there. Longshoremen, the ILA, was down there... Back at the turn of the century and up into the 20's, the Marine Transport Workers Union, which was an IWW union, the wobblies, they were there. There were quite a number of strikes and a couple of real labor wars that took place there ... big strikes in the late 30's that were headquartered out of what is now the Admiral Fell Inn, but what was in those days The Anchorage, which was a seamen's home. Across the street at 817 South Broadway was the wobbly hall. That was always a hiring hall ... Standard Oil Pete actually hired people for tankers out of there for quite some time...

[Kraig]

Another nickname...

[Steve]

Yeah, Standard Oil Pete, that's long before my time.

In 1949, there was a labor war and, just around the corner from 817, was a hotel, the building is still there ... it's now, I think it's Hightops or something now... But that was a hotel for seamen. A lot of those guys were Spanish speaking seamen who didn't even know there was a strike on, but they were brought in to break the strike. So some of the strikers who were living around the corner had enough of that, and they went around the corner one night and threw a couple of gasoline bombs in the place and a couple of people were killed. So, it always had its ugly side.

On the very corner there, that same corner of Broadway and Thames, was the Double-Pump Tavern. The Double-Pump was a long-term seaman's bar, had been there for a long time. He didn't always have the best reputation with the local seamen. It was back in the 40's and 50's and early 60's. He shortchanged a group of Danish and Norweigan seaman one night, gave them change for a \$5 when they had given him a \$20. So they waited for their moment. The local policeman was walking his beat. They advised the policeman it was probably time for him to move on and so when he moved on up the street they went in and thoroughly trashed the place, just tore it up ... put him out of business for a while and taught him a lesson. But, a lot of that sort of thing happened in that area.

Right on that corner were two pumps ... that's why it was called the Double-Pump. It's because there were two pumps, two public water pumps there where people could get water.

A lot of folks didn't have running water in Fells Point really until fairly late. If you go through Fells Point, you'll still see out houses in the backs of some of the yards of some of these houses, if you go through the back allies... Now those aren't used any more, now they're usually used as gardening sheds. But every now and then, you'll encounter one that looks like it might have been used recently. They're not legal. Nearly everybody, I'm sure, has running water now, but those days aren't that far long gone.

When I first moved into Baltimore, I moved into a place up on Federal Hill, up on Churchill Street before it became "Federal Hill", before it became as fancy as it is now and expensive... and there was a big brown mule living in one of the back allies. Guy had a nice big brown mule back there. Woke me up at night.

[Kraig]

Nice big brown mule... as opposed to not nice.

[02:29:33:08]

One thing that nobody's talked about yet, and I guess this would go along with the gentrification ... you're familiar with all the controversy, and I even went to a few meetings ... over the Rec Pier. What do you see?

[Steve]

Where the Recreation Pier stands now, there was a community out there... there was a whole series of houses, a little village out there, it was part of the waterfront community in Fells Point. And nearly all those people living on that pier worked on the waterfront. They were sailors or longshoremen or dock workers of some kind. One of my old neighbors, Mrs. Lewkowski, who was actually born right there, was my neighbor for a good many years ... didn't pass away until she was in her 90's, she used to tell me stories about that place. But in 1912, the City decided that they wanted to do something with that and they wanted to build a modern cargo moving facility in that area. So they bought everybody out and tore down everything that was on the pier and then built the Recreation Pier that you see there now. They called it the Recreation Pier to some degree for political purposes. If you look closely at that building, you'll notice it looks like many of the piers on the Philadelphia waterfront that has large bays on both sides. Those bays were used for loading cargo. In 1913, they loaded their first cargo out of there, a British freighter that came to call in Fells Point.

But because they had taken that community away, people were upset that they weren't getting something within their own community. Fells Point has always had its own agenda. And so the City said, alright, we'll make a nice recreation facility in a safe place for kids to play and a nice ballroom. Kids had been playing in the street on Thames Street. And now automobiles were becoming big, and trucks. And the trucks were coming and going from this cargo pier and were in danger of running over kids. Mrs. Lewkowski said they were already running over people's chickens, because they used to cut the chickens lose in the street to pick for goodies. So they didn't want to lose their kids like they were losing their chickens. So when they built the building, they built it with this ballroom and this playground, this facility in the back for the kids. They called it the Recreation Pier in deference to the community's wishes. In reality, that pier was built to load cargo.

The future of that pier is going to be something to watch. I don't think that they should do anything more with that pier in terms of construction. Certainly, the back deck is in need of structural repair. There's a number of things that need to be done with the building, elevators, for example, and facilities for disadvantaged people and handicapped people. But I think that the City would be shortsighted in simply trying to dig up highest and best use, that is make the most money on it. A facility like that is a really important part of the community and the way the community is viewed. If it's turned into condominiums or boutiques and fern bars or businesses that are too expensive for local people to patronize, then I think they're being very short-sighted. Whatever developer goes in there, I hope he remembers that he's in Fells Point. And I hope the City Fathers, the powers that be downtown will listen long and hard when the people of Fells Point speak and talk about their vision for that building. I think it's pretty important for the future.

[Kraig]

Cause a lot of the talk on the Rec Pier... I went to the... actually videotaped some of the meeting ... they had the old-time town hall meeting and they had all the different developers there. One was going to be a circus with a Ferris wheel and one was going to be ... With all that idiocy past, do you

see it being restored to what it was originally intended, a ballroom and a place for the community to meet, a community center, or ...

[Steve]

It's unlikely that the building will ever be redeveloped or restored to what it was. There just aren't a lot of freighters calling in Fells Point for cargo any more, so that's gone. But they need to preserve the tugs, because as long as you have a working waterfront, there's going to be a turkey on the table come Thanksgiving and Christmas. As long as you have a waterfront that's capable of creating jobs, then it's an important thing to reinforce that and to make sure that they know they have a place for a long time. That ever the City has to do to retain those tugs there, I think they ought to do. And then they ought to develop around that. They ought to develop around community uses. That doesn't mean you can't have offices. It doesn't mean you can't have nice facilities of some kind. It does mean that you should simply take the philosophy of the community and extend it into that structure.

You're not going to get a huge number of tourists who are just going to come over to go to another shopping center by the water. In spite of everything they want to tell you about Harbor Place, that more people went through it in its first year than went through Disneyland, this is all nonsense. We know its nonsense. That's not what people come to the waterfront for. Fells Point is unique. Don't try to do the same thing there as you do in San Diego and New Orleans and every other waterfront. Let Fells Point and the philosophy of Fells Point continue into that pier.

[Kraig]

Its funny, too, because the Cordish family, not only in Atlantic City but New Orleans, the downtown area, all that same developer ... David Cordish, they were also at the meeting for the Rec Pier presenting their plan. Sooner or later people should see ... don't all these places kind of look alike? Downtown New Orleans looks just like downtown Baltimore.

[Steve]

Exactly. And it's interesting to note too that in New Orleans it hasn't been particularly successful. Most of these projects now around the country are not doing particularly well. Richmond folded up, the Rouse project down there.

Listen to the community. Communities, people that have committed themselves to a community and to a neighborhood, they have knowledge that no one else has. It's knowledge that you can't hire. You can't buy it. No feasibility study is necessarily going to reflect it. You need to listen to the people that live there and that see it every day. Take that knowledge and treasure it. And combine that with a sensible business plan, and you'll have a winner. If you just want to cookie-cutter something, plan something in isolation that could have fit on any waterfront, it's not going to work out. It's just not going to work out. It's going to bad for the community and ultimately it won't be good for Baltimore.

[Kraig]

I agree with you. A lot of those mega plans work as long as they are brand new. And as soon as the first year the newness wears off right in the crapper.

[Steve]

When they talked about Harbor Place and what a success it was in the first couple of years, the City kept beating the drum for it. The Baltimore Sun kept carrying stories about it. They kept saying that more people had passed through than passed through Disneyland. But, you know, if you were over there and you watched it, you knew what they were doing. First of all, there was a guy at the bottom of the stairs with a clicker and a guy at the top of the stairs with a clicker, and they were both clicking off the same people. Secondly, the people going through Disneyland are spending \$50 apiece. The people passing through a place like the Inner Harbor were spending \$1, \$2, \$3 buying an ice cream cone. It's very different. You can create a feasibility study to say whatever you want it to say.

Listen to the community. The community knows things that the experts don't know. Fells Point is participatory democracy. It's also good business to listen because they'll back you up. If hard times hit and you have working tugs, and you have a working waterfront ... again you'll still have a turkey on the table come Thanksgiving. If on the other hand you've turned the whole thing into marina and cutsie boutiques and designer soap stores and places that people can't afford, where's that going to take you? It's not going to hold you up for the long run.

[Kraig]

No. [02:38:49:02] Any thoughts on gambling?

[Steve]

I think casinos and gambling are one of the worst things that could happen in a city like Baltimore. It would be a disaster for Fells Point. There is no business like gambling anywhere in the world. Nothing that depends so much on the largest number of people losing their money. It's a parasitic business. The money that comes out of those casinos, that goes into those casinos, comes out and leaves town because they're not owned locally. They pay a certain amount of taxes to Annapolis. Annapolis will spend them in any way they see fit. And who does the accounting? It's not going to be folks in the community that do the accounting. The first couple years, it'll bring in some tourists. It'll be a novelty. The minute they open a new casino in Charlestown or some other place, Wilmington, then people will start going there. And when the gamblers and the gaming interests that have built this casino then get desperate, who are they going to turn to for their revenue? They're going to turn to Baltimore. They're going to turn to local people. Baltimore is a relatively poor town. And relatively poor people are the ones spending the most money in the casinos.

[Kraig]

Ala the lottery.

[Steve]

Exactly. If a man has \$10 in his pocket and he goes out to buy baby food and Pampers, and he's desperate and he's hungry. He doesn't have a decent job and he's feeling bad about himself, he's going to walk by that slot machine and he's going to say, "Oh, what the hell. I've got 10 bucks. I'll spend 2 bucks in this machine and I'll take a chance." Because the one thing he has in abundance is hope. So he puts the \$2 in the machine and of course he doesn't win anything. Then he puts a

3rd and a 4th and a 5th dollar in the machine and eventually his \$10 is gone. He still has to go home with baby food and Pampers. Where's he going to get them?

The last thing you need in a town, a working town like Baltimore, a town with a declining population and a rising proportion of poor, the last thing you need is any kind of gambling or gaming operation. They bring the worst element into the community, and they take the best out.

[02:41:28:25 Moved to DVD #2 01:00:00:00]

[Kraig]

Give me something about music in Fells Point, and then we'll call it a day.

[Steve]

Oh, Fells Point's always had an interesting music scene. Pretty eclectic. Hard to make a living at. I've seen some great acts. A lot of them have passed through my store at some one time or another because a lot of the musicians ... we all seem to like the same things. Ron Furman used to bring some great acts into his club there, Max's. But most of the music scene down there has been small music venues. I can't say much about the music scene down there because, quite frankly, I think it never was developed in the way it should have been. I think it was always under appreciated.

[Kraig]

And that would have been...

[Steve]

If more clubs could have had more good, well-paying venues for local musicians, I think it would have been a lot healthier. That's one place I think Fells Point fell down.

[Kraig]

The one part I see very close to the mainstay of the jazz scene in New York and the falling off in other cities that Fells Point has ... New York you can walk from jazz club to jazz club. You can have 5 or 6 jazz clubs within 10 minutes.

[Steve]

DC used to be like that.

[Kraig]

You could do that in Fells Point. It could be a New York type of... Now ... it's a whole different city, but it could be done. It couldn't be done in LA. It couldn't be done in a lot of other places.

[Steve]

I think a lot of the problem is that a lot of the bars in Fells Point ... again, this gets to the gentrification of Fells Point ... a lot of the bars in Fells Point are essentially run as kiddie bars. And they're often operated by 20-something guys who get money from Mom and Dad or from some other source and they open a club. And they do it as much for peer approval as anything else, and creating their own

social scene. That's why they don't often last very long. But, an awful lot of the clubs are built to appeal to the 20-something crowd, the college crowd. Those are people that, they don't have as much money to spend, they don't drink particularly well, and they're not very good patrons when they do drink. And so it's created some problems in Fells Point. They are also people that do not support the music scene because, why should they? They figure they can go in, and they don't know the etiquette necessarily of putting some money in the tip jar. The club owners themselves don't want to pay the musicians anything, figuring they'll get it all in tips, so a lot of the quality musicians have avoided Fells Point. And it's too bad. I think it's a real loss.

[Kraig]

It really is. I noticed that when I first moved here, that this would be really neat, and it just never came to pass. This would be so neat if....

[Steve]

I remember the music scene that I used to love in Fells Point was the spontaneous music that would just suddenly break out. You'd be in a bar some place that wouldn't even have a license. The Ann McKim, now the Dead End, or even the Cat's Eye. I've seen it happen in the Whistling Oyster. Bertha's, of course, is famous for it. And people would just start suddenly playing, and somebody else would come in with another instrument, and somebody else would come in, and they'd all pitch in together. We formed our own band at one time in Fells Point, Captain Bunker's Happy Harbor Home for Wayward Seamen's Band. And it was principally ex-sailors...

[Kraig]

Hence the drum hanging in the main room there?

[Steve]

Yeah. Well, there's one hanging in Bertha's hanging behind the bar. What we would do is ... we had John the Piper, who was a very fine bagpiper, John Albert ... there's two John the Pipers, by the way, there's John Albert and John McCrueten. John McCrueten pipes for the Fire Department in Baltimore, a very fine piper himself. John Albert's an old friend from many years ago from the street who kind of followed me into Fells Point. And he would break out his pipes and a couple of guys would come along with whatever other instruments they had. When I had my flop house for sailors there on the Square, people were always leaving instruments, all kinds of odd-ball stuff. But heavy on the percussion ... lots of drums. It doesn't require a huge amount of talent to bang on something ... So we would get out on the Square. We would all get together. Usually Spider would grab ahold of a boat hook and a ridiculous hat and he would be the drum major. And we would then pipe our way from bar to bar. John playing his pipes and the rest of us banging on drums and bodhrans and tambourines. We would stop in each bar, play a tune, sing an thoroughly bawdy and vulgar song, pass around the oyster can for tips, and then move on to the next bar. At the end, by the time we had drunk enough beer and had gotten enough money in the can, we would then take the money in the can, either divide it among ourselves or give it to somebody who needed it the most and go on home and have another story to tell. That was the kind of music that I loved in Fells Point.

[02:46:46:14 Moved to DVD #2 01:05:17:19]

[Jacquie]

He wanted to talk about the hotel on the street.

[Steve]

One night about ... This had to be about 1981 or 82. My friend Dirty John was visiting. He's an old friend from other adventures and other times. We decided that the place was a mess. We had cleared a couple of rooms for our friends coming in off the ships. And I had all this extraneous furniture. There was a couple of big over-stuffed chairs. There was a huge mattress and box springs that somebody had left there. There was a lamp, a big standing lamp. There was a handsome table cloth with a few holes in it. There was ... just this collection of odd-ball stuff. So we threw it all out the back window. This was 817 South Broadway, the old union hall where my first shop was. We threw everything out into the back yard, and didn't want to leave it there because we knew it would rain and this big over-stuffed chair would just stink.

So, we dragged it through the alleyway out onto the street, right at the corner of Broadway and Thames. This is 3:00 in the morning and we were in no condition to be making rational decisions. So we decide the best thing to do with this stuff is to leave it on the corner figuring that somebody might appreciate it and come by and pick it up. So we put the chair out. And of course, there's a little stone table there with a checkerboard on it. So we put the tablecloth on that, and we had a vase, and we found some raggedy flowers and we stuck them ... and we put them in the middle of the little stone table. And then we took the mattress and the box springs and laid it out. We had an old set of sheets and we put the sheets on the bed. And we fixed it all up real nice. It looked right comfortable. It would be Bindlestiff's heaven, you know.

And we figured it would be funny. People would get a laugh over it the next day. The City would come and police it up and carry it all off.

Well, about 3 days later, I walked by it and there are 2 gentlemen of the road who are sitting at the stone table. They've taken the table cloth off and they're playing checkers with bottle caps they've found on the street. There is some guy sitting in the chair who looks like he's about to doze off. And in the bed ... there's one guy sound asleep in the bed with the sheets cast off, laying there in his underwear, with his trousers very neatly folded in a pile right next to it. So we laughed. We thought this was wonderful. We provided a home for these gentlemen, and expected it would be gone in no time.

It took about 3 weeks for the City to finally come and pick it up. In the meantime, we had a whole colony living on the street corner. They never bothered anybody. We didn't even have pandlers in those days, because there was no money to panhandle.

[02:49:47:09 Moved to DVD #2 01:08:18:14]

[Jacquie]

Just to fill in, can you tell me what you told me earlier about Bob Eney?

[Steve]

Oh, yeah. If anybody can take credit for saving Fells Point, and doing it with historical integrity, it would be Bob Eney. Bob was the architectural and historical genius who put all this information together. Other people could buy the property and other people could amass this stuff and create some political front to fend off the highway. But for the community to be appreciated in its historical context, it really took somebody like Bob Eney. And Bob worked long and hard on that. Whatever has been done to save Fells Point, has been done on the foundation that Bob Eney laid. We all should be very grateful to him for that.

[Jacquie]

We're interviewing Bob, and that's a real nice kind of segway.

[Kraig]

He's a real nice guy, too.

[Steve]

Yes, he is. He's the salt of the earth. I love Bob.

I new Bob and his partner very well. You know, Bob is gay ... and lived with Jack Gleason for many years. Jack was a good guy.... Oh, not Jack Gleason ... oh god, I'm tired ... I'm thinking of David Gleason. Anyway, Jack lived in Atlanta for some time; we knew a lot of the same places. He had a daughter living in Atlanta. So, that's how I got to know Jack.

Jack died, I guess probably early 90's. And Bob had a beautiful home. Bob and Jack had this beautiful home together. Bob surprised us all one day by selling his house. He sold his house. Sold his house to an asshole. Which is a shame. Because we not only lost Bob as a day-to-day neighbor, but we gained this suburban fool who came in who demanded the neighborhood change just for him.

[Kraig]

Where was Bob's house?

[Steve]

Bob's house was on Thames Street in the 1800 block across from dogshit park and the rag factory. I don't know what they call dogshit park officially, but that's what we always called it.

[Jacquie]

It's got a lot of dog shit there still. And they periodically clean it up. And there are sections of it that are forbidden to dogs...

[Steve]

Yeah, yeah. That's right. We always called it dogshit park. And "King George House" ... nobody called it King George House. It was the rag factory. For one thing, it was Fells Point. Nobody

recognized a King in Fells Point, for god sake! Unless it was the king of the gypsies. It was the rag factory because that's what it was -- it was a rag factory.

At one time, that had been known as King George Street or George Street. Then it became Thames Street after the Revolution.

[Jacquie]

Yeah, I remember seeing that on the maps.

[Steve]

Eastern Avenue was known Wilks.

[Kraig]

Is it off? [referring to the camera]

[Jacquie]

No, it's not off. As long as he's sitting in that chair, I'm leaving the camera run. But if you can get up and I'll turn it off.

[Kraig]

He's tired, but let him talk a little bit. I'm going to go have a beer.

[Brief beer discussion. This was very late, and we had traveled all day through a snowstorm to get there... 02:53:24:25, Moved to DVD #2 01:11:55:28]

[Steve]

Fells Point should be known for its more distinguished historical citizens as well. Edgar Allen Poe was an obvious one. Frederick Douglass. Isaac Myers. Billie Holiday....

[Jacquie]

Tell me about Billie Holiday.

[Steve]

Billie Holiday....

I had a dear friend there. We called him Hots. His real name was Paul. He was an older black man, probably 90 years old when he died. I have no idea how old he was, but he was fundamentally old. Hots knew Fells Point like the back of his hand. He knew it in ways that some of the more politer crowd in Fells Point, myself included, would never know. Hots at one time trained fighting dogs, worked on the barges on the waterfront down there, ran wagons, he was a street Araber for a while, worked at Dickman's Stables. Dickman's Stables was down, if you continued on down Lancaster Street, Dickman's Stables were there for 110, 112 years.

He told me one time that he had run across Billie Holiday when she was younger, much, much younger, when she was a little girl. She played her first public performance, he told me, in her Uncle

Albert's low house, which was one of the houses that was sadly torn down. We tried to save it, on what would that have been? Bond, no not Bond. Caroline Street, it was on Caroline Street.

There was a series of houses in there, one of which was Edgar Allen Poe's half brother's home. It was a home for seamen and his half-brother was a sailor. And Poe supposedly sat there and got many stories from his brother. One of them supposedly was the Gold Bug that he based on a story that either his brother or one of his sailor friends told him.

Another one of those houses later became Uncle Albert's low house. It was part of the free black community that lived there in the times before and after the Civil War. This is back, probably the 20's or 30's, I don't know. But, she was a young girl. She was only 13 or 14 years old and she used to come by Uncle Albert's low house ... he always referred to it as a low house, which means a dive ... and sing for a few pennies for tips from people. And Uncle Albert seemed to like that because it kept people coming around. She went on to bigger and better and sadder things. But supposedly she had her first public performances in Uncle Albert's low house on Caroline Street.

[Jacquie]

Neat! When I first started working on this, I had this idea that maybe I could play off of ghosts. There's several competing ghost tours in Fells Point now. And when I was talking to Richard Kirstel and Ed Kane, they took credit for having made up all the ghost stories.

[Steve]

[Laughs] Most of them are nonsense. You know that.

[Jacquie]

But before I got too much into the detail of ghostness and found out there wasn't any, I was wondering ... there are whole areas of Fells Point that have been razed. Do the ghosts go away when the buildings are gone?

[Steve]

I don't know. It depends. If you happen to have a bar or a restaurant with declining fortunes, it's always a good idea to resurrect a ghost.

[02:57:21:20 Moved to DVD #2 01:15:52:23]

I'll give you a ghost story. It's a great story. It's a story that not many people know. It's a story that encompasses not just Fells Point but the whole working waterfront of Baltimore. Everyone shared in it.

In 1913, the S.S. Alum Chine from Cardiff Wales shows up in Baltimore Harbor. They're there to load dynamite for the building of the Panama Canal. It's a tramp freighter. So they anchor at the dangerous cargo anchorage. The dangerous cargo anchorage is out in the area out beyond Curtis Bay down by what's now the bridge, where the Bay Bridge is. Any ship coming in loading explosives or anything that was dangerous was supposed to anchor there and the cargo then would be lightered over there in barges. This industrial grade dynamite was loaded on railroad cars. It was

taken down through Fells Point, the tracks that run down Thames Street, also run down Fell Street and run right to the water, in those days. And the freight cars were then usually dragged by teams of horses, big Percherons, big heavy draft horses. They were hauled down there and were then loaded on barges. And these were called carfloats. And the carfloats were then towed out by tug, tied off to the freighter in the dangerous cargo anchorage and the cargo was unloaded from the cars and then loaded in the freighters.

So they were loading dynamite. They had loaded something in excess of 600 tons of industrial dynamite. We don't know how much more dynamite was still in the cars, but there were 6 box cars alongside on railroad car floats. The cargo caught fire. Dynamite burns. And when it reaches a critical mass, it'll eventually explode. They couldn't put the fire out. The crew of the Alum Chine, the regular crew, was in Fells Point living it up in the bars and waiting for the ship to be loaded. The men who were aboard the ship were all local boys. They were from Fells Point, Locust Point and Canton. They were stevedores. They didn't know what to do. There was no boat to take them ashore.

Coming up the Bay is the Tug Atlantic. The Tug Atlantic is heading up for its berth, gonna stop in Fells Point. Captain William Vandyke was on the helm that day. Captain Vandyke wasn't even supposed to be working. He was living in Locust Point at the time. He was going to go on a picnic with his family, but the weather looked a little inclement so he went ahead and he took the watch and let somebody else take the day off. As they were about a mile from the ship coming up toward Baltimore, they notice all these men on the forepeak of the Alum Chine waving their hands. And they see smoke coming out of the forward hold. So they know something is very wrong. So they put full steam and head for the Alum Chine. They get up there. The men jump off the ship into the water. The crew, Lenam, George Diggs, I don't remember all their names now ... the crew of the tug pull these boys aboard. [DVD #2 01:19:33:20] And they start steaming away as fast as they can because they know it's about to blow.

They get about 100 yards away and Captain Vandyke looks back. And 6 more men who have been trapped by the smoke down below have found their way out and now they're up in the forepeak yelling for the tug. He looks around at his crew and there is no question what they are going to do. They immediately turn around. Vandyke tells his crew, "Take all these men we've rescued. Put them down in the Engine Room. Get everybody down below in the Engine Room because if there's an explosion, it'll blow up everything on the surface of the water, but if you're below it, down in the Engine Room, you've got a chance of surviving."

And he sends his crew down there, and alone he heads for the Alum Chine. When he gets there, the men have jumped off and they're hanging onto the anchor chains. Half of them don't swim. By this time the smoke is billowing out and they know it's going to blow any second. The crew of the Atlantic ignores instructions. They immediately come running out of the Engine Room, grab these guys and pull them aboard, risking their own lives. They shove these guys down into the Engine Room.

There's no room for anybody now, so Captain Vandyke and his crew are on deck. They turn around to leave, and the Alum Chine explodes. The explosion left a mushroom cloud that looked like an atomic bomb. Albert Waldeck, a photographer for the Baltimore Sun happened to be in the Inner

Harbor at the time taking pictures in the harbor when this explosion happened. He took pictures, and the pictures are astounding. It does look like an atomic explosion over Baltimore.

The explosion was so powerful that it killed 8 men on board the S.S. Jason which was a ship that was at Maryland Shipbuilding and Dry Dock. They happened to be out on deck watching the fire. They were killed by rivets and flying shrapnel. A piece weighing over a ton landed a mile down the Bay through the Hobo Hunt Club. All the windows in the quarantine station across the river were blown out.

We don't know how many people it eventually killed because along the waterfront in that area was good crabbing ground and fishing ground, and so there were a lot of people along there, poor people who would come out and fish for their dinner at the mouth of Curtis Creek. They were swept away. The ship was atomized. Just blew it to bits.

I talked to Captain Buckey Smith who was 13 years old at the time it happened, down in Curtis Bay. He was probably 2 miles away and he said that they had to dodge all the stuff coming down out of the air, all the debris. It was incredible. In Locust Point, it blew in the transom window at Captain Vandyke's house. And his wife knew immediately that he wasn't coming home.

It's a remarkable story, but it doesn't end there, because just behind the Atlantic, about a mile and a half behind them, was the sister, the tug Marie Riehl. Marie Riehl was coming up the Bay. It blew all the windows out of the pilot house and covered the men on the Marie Riehl with glass. But they had seen the Atlantic. They knew that there might be something there to rescue.

There was a small tidal wave. By the time they got up to where the Atlantic was, birds had been gathering and there were thousands of dead fish on the surface of the water. There was no trace of the Alum Chine. But the hull of the Atlantic was still afloat. It had blown everything off above the deck. There was pieces of the Pilot House and the fidley, the top of the boiler, still standing. The men who had been packed in down below in the Engine Room had survived. They were all cut and burned and bruised and bleeding, but most of them had survived. The entire crew of the Atlantic was gone. They found Captain Vandyke's body a mile down the Bay.

As they came up to the ship and began pulling these guys off the sinking Atlantic, the Atlantic started to go down. Two men were trapped by shifting debris in the Engine Room. So two men from the Marie Riehl jumped on the deck of the Atlantic, went down into the Engine Room to free these guys, and sank with the wreck. Until all 4 of them popped to the surface. All four of them badly cut up and bleeding, but they survived.

It's an incredible tale of heroism, and it's something that people in Baltimore have long since forgotten. I studied newspaper accounts, all of which conflicted with each other. But I got to Baltimore early enough where there were some people around who remembered it, and some survivors of it, and interviewed them. It's quite a story of heroism. The 7th of March 1913 ought to be celebrated on the Baltimore waterfront as Atlantic Day because the guys from the Tug Atlantic certainly lived in the best traditions of the American merchant seamen.

So if you look at the sign that I painted for the Point, look at it closely and you'll see that it's the Tug Atlantic.

[Jacquie]

I didn't have any idea the significance ... I've always liked that sign.

[Steve]

That's the Tug Atlantic. It says underneath it in the ocean, if you look closely, it says, "Tug Atlantic, Captain William Vandyke, heroically lost 7th of March, 1913."

I didn't have a good picture of the Atlantic, so a lot of it's conjecture. And it's largely now become a folk tale. I couldn't find enough solid information about it. I did find the names of the crew. I found a few personal stories. And then the interviews that I did in 1976 and 77 in talking to people, of course, but it's a long time later. Captain Buckey, he was wonderful. He used to give me all kinds of stories.

[Jacquie]

So, why did you do this research?

[Steve]

I was the City's Maritime Historian.

[03:07:09:22 Moved to DVD #2 01:25:40:25]

[Jacquie]

You didn't ever tell us for the camera exactly how you got to Baltimore.

[Steve]

I was the acting skipper of a ship in Boston, of a 112 foot brig, and it wasn't going anywhere. And I didn't feel like I was going anywhere. So, I spent part of one winter deep sea lobstering. And after 3 bouts of frostbite, and seeing a number of my friends go over the side and disappear, I thought there must be a better way to make a living.

I've always loved history and I'd done some reading and some writing on history. I had written a couple of articles over the years. And I was always a Civil War buff. I've been in a ... Civil War reenactment outfit, a Maine regiment for many years. So, I thought I'd get into the history business. It seemed to have more of a future than getting frostbite on the North Atlantic off the Grand Banks and off of Cape Cod.

So, I got this offer -- Marty Millsbaugh, from Charles Center Harbor Management, he and his wife Meredith were visiting Boston and they came aboard the boat and were getting a tour of Boston and asked if I was interested in becoming part of a crew that wanted to build a Baltimore Clipper in Baltimore Harbor. "Yeah, yeah, sure. OK. Why not?" I'd consulted on 5 different projects that year, Bicentennial ship projects for historic ships that I knew would never come to pass. So I didn't

take it really seriously but they seemed like nice folks. And sure enough, I got a call one day on the dock, would I come to Baltimore where they could pick my brain? They'd give me a good hotel room and if nothing else, I'd have a little vacation for a couple of days. So I did it.

I didn't really want to come to Baltimore, but I went down to Fells Point. Somebody directed me to Fells Point. And I'd been to Fells Point back in the late 60's as a young seaman. I liked it. It just felt right. I thought I didn't know about living in Baltimore but this is kind of nice, Fells Point's nice. So, they finally made an offer and I took them up on it. And I came to Baltimore. They made me the Curator of Inner Harbor Historic Properties and Exhibits, which is a \$2 title for a nickel and dime job, but it was essentially Baltimore's Maritime Historian.

I was supposed to be there for a year. They asked me to stay for a second year. By the end of the second year, I had no place else to go. I shipped out occasionally, but I always came back to Fells Point. Then I started my business.

Where else, where else could essentially a drifter and a water rat move into a community with really no money and no particular future, not many dreams left, and find myself eventually with a going business, a place in the community, on the board of several different organizations, with a lot of friends? It's a very forgiving place. God knows, they had a lot to forgive with me. It's a great place to grow, and I'll always be grateful for it.

[Jacquie]

Thank you.