

Interviewee: William Nelson O'Steen
Interviewer: Michael Jepsen
March 2, 1991
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J:This is Michael Jepsen. I will be conducting an oral history with Mr. Nelson O'Steen, a long-time commercial fisherman and resident of Cedar Key, Florida. This interview is in conjunction with the Oral History Project at the University of Florida and the Florida Fisherfolk Project.

Mr. O'Steen, I would like to begin the interview by having you state your full name. Would you state your full name for the tape, please?

O:It is William Nelson O'Steen.

J:Where were you born?

O:Up here by Suwannee River.

J:What is your wife's full name?

O:**Claris Nadine** O'Steen.

J:Do you know her maiden name?

O:O'Steen.

J:[That was] her name before she was married?

O:Yes.

J:Who were your parents?

O:Bill O'Steen and **Mattie** O'Steen.

J:You said that your father was a farmer. Where did he farm?

O:About fifteen miles north of here.

J:Is that where you were born?

O:No.

J:Where were you born?

O:I told you, Suwannee River. Up at Cedar Branch. Do you know where that is at?

J:No, I am not familiar with that area.

O:Well, you can go that road going to Fowlers Bluff, and you will see Cedar Branch.

J:What type of farming did your father do?

O:Oh, just gardening. He raised most anything.

J:Cotton?

O:No, we never did plant any cotton. [We planted] just about everything else, though.

J:Did you work on the farm when you were growing up?

O:Yes, right with my daddy. I stayed with my daddy and worked for him until I was twenty-two years old.

J:How many brothers and sisters did you have?

O:I had one brother and two sisters.

J:Did your other brother farm with you?

O:No, he died when he was a baby.

J:And your two sisters, where are they now?

O:They are done dead and gone.

O:Were you the youngest?

O:Yes. I was the youngest one of the bunch.

J:Where did you attend school when you were growing up?

O:Right out there in 1918.

J:Where was that?

O:At the schoolhouse right here in Cedar Key.

J:What type of a schoolhouse was it?

O:Well, it was not like this one. They have changed it since then.

J:Was it a one-room schoolhouse?

O:No. It had a lot of rooms.

J:What was the last grade that you attended?

O:First grade--what they called the primer then.

J:So you worked with your father until you were twenty-two. Then what happened? Where did you move?

O:I started fishing.

J:Did your father fish at all?

O:No, he did not like it at all.

J:What made you get into fishing?

O:Well, I just liked it.

J:So you had fished before?

O:There were two things I wanted to do, and I did not have the opportunity to do one of them. I wanted to [either] fish or be an engineer on a train.

J:Really? Why did you not have the opportunity to be an engineer?

O:Well, I did not have any way of [getting the] training and [necessary] learning.

J:So you chose fishing.

O:My brother-in-law was a fisherman, so I fished.

J:Your wife's brother was fishing at the time, then. Did you learn from him.

O:No, my sister's husband.

J:What was his name?

O:**Alan Faircloth.**

J:What type of a fisherman was he? What type of fishing did he do?

O:Gill net.

J:Did you first start fishing with him?

O:Yes.

J:And what were you catching at the time?

O:Mullet mostly.

J:Let me back up a little bit and ask you, first of all, how you met your wife?

O:Well, her daddy moved down to Shell Mound to fish. I lived there about ten years, so we got to know each other there.

J:How many years did you say you had been married?

O:Sixty-one.

J:How many children do you have?

O:Nine.

J:Were they all born here in Cedar Key?

O:No. One was born in Chiefland, one at Gainesville, and the rest of them were [born] right here.

J:When did you move to Cedar Key?

O:In 1933. I moved from Shell Mound down here.

J:So it was not that far a move?

O:No. I was coming to Cedar Key all the time.

J:How did you get to Cedar Key? Were you fishing from Shell Mound when you first began?

O:Yes.

J:So you started fishing over there, and you were gill netting with your wife's brother. How long did you fish with him?

O:Not my wife's brother.

J:I am sorry, your sister's husband. I get that confused all the time. How long did you fish with him?

O:Oh, I imagine five or six years.

J:Did you both fish out of the same boat?

O:No, separate.

J:You each had your own boat. Did you fish as partners? Did you go out together?

O:Yes.

J:How many other people were fishing in Shell Mound at that time?

O:Oh, there were a lot of them.

J:[Give me] a rough estimate.

O:Oh, let me see. About eight or ten.

J:They were all gill net fishermen?

O:Yes.

J:And you were catching mullet most of the time?

O:Yes.

J:Where would you sell your fish?

O:A lot of them we would sell out there at the mound.

J:There was a buyer right there?

O:Most of the time. The rest of them we would just bring to market in Cedar Key.

J:When you brought your fish to Cedar Key, did you sell to a fishhouse or did you sell them at a market?

O:At a fishhouse.

J:How many fishhouses were in Cedar Key at that time?

O:Oh, goddamn, lots of them. Do you want me to count them up?

J:Just approximately.

O:Well, there was **McCane's, Watson's, Hodges', Johnson's, Wadley's**, and I believe that has about got it.

J>About five of them. Who did you sell to?

O:Well, I sold to McCane's for a good while. Then I went to Hodge's.

J:Why did you first sell to McCane?

O:That was where my brother-in-law was selling his fish.

J:Then you started selling to the Hodges. Why did you move to the Hodges'?

O:McCane went out of business.

J:So you were at Shell Mound. When you first started fishing, how long was it before you came to Cedar Key from Shell Mound? How many years was it after you started fishing?

O:Well, I started in 1922.

J>You started in 1922 and then you came to Cedar Key in [what year]?

O:I went to Shell Mound in 1923.

J:You went to Shell Mound in 1923. Then when did you come to Cedar Key?

O:In 1933.

J:So you were at Shell Mound for about ten years fishing. Now, how many children did you have when you were at Shell Mound?

O:I had one. That was the one that was born in Chiefland. Then my next one came, and I moved to Cedar Key in 1933.

J:What was Shell Mound like then? Was it just a fish camp? I mean, were there just fisherman there?

O:There were fishermen and buyers in there all the time.

J:Did they have any other businesses in Shell Mound at that time?
A gas station?

O:No.

J:A general store?

O:No.

J:Did you have electricity in your homes then?

O:No.

J:How did you bring your fish to Cedar Key when you would bring them to the market?

O:A little old outboard motor--a two-horse engine.

J:How big was your boat?

O:Anywhere from sixteen to eighteen feet long.

J:What type of nets were you using in the beginning?

O:We used about three changes of nets in a year because we fished flax nets then. You would fish one size for a while and then you would have to buy another size because the fish got

bigger. So we fished 1 1/2, 5/8s, 6/8s, and like that. [A 1 1/2 is actually a 3-inch mesh, a 5/8 is a 3 1/4-inch mesh, and a 6/8 is a 3 1/2-inch mesh. The fractions are derived from the "bar" measurement, which is one-half the true mesh size (1 5/8 = one-half of 3 1/2). When naming the net, fishermen usually drop the one. Thus, a 1 5/8 (or 3 1/4-inch mesh) would be called a 5/8. Ed.]

J:About how many nets did you have to have?

O:About three nets a year.

J:How long did the nets last?

O:About three months.

J:Now, were you buying the material and hanging the nets yourselves, or would you buy them already made and already hung?

O:You bought them already made. But they were not already hung.

J:Did it take you a while to learn how to hang a net?

O:No, I did not have any problem with it.

J:What type of maintenance did you have to do to flax nets? What did you have to do to take care of them?

O:Lime them mostly.

J:What did that do to them?

O:It cleaned them out. It cleaned all the slime. You put lime in your boat, mix it up [with water], throw the net down in it, pull it out on the rail, and then when you fished it, it was clean.

J:Did you have to hang them and dry them after you were done?

O:You put them on rail spreads--net spreads.

J:Did you fish year-round?

O:Yes, year-round.

J:Did you have any other income during that time when you were fishing?

O:No.

J:When you first moved to Cedar Key, what was Cedar Key like? How did people make a living in Cedar Key when you first came?

O:Fishing and the fiber factory. That is all there was here.

J:Approximately how many fishermen do you think there were then?

O:Oh, there were quite a few of them here then. I would not even know how to guess at it.

J:Would you say over 200 or less than 200?

O:I imagine there were less than 200, but there was quite a bunch of them.

J:Were they all net fishermen?

O:There were some hook-and-line fishermen. [There were] some oystermen. Of course, oystering was just in the wintertime.

J:What other types of businesses were there in Cedar Key? Did they have a general store at that time?

O:They had grocery stores.

J:Now, was the railroad here then?

O:The railroad was here until 1932.

J:So that was just prior to your moving here. Did the railroad run near Shell Mound?

O:No.

J:When you first came to Cedar Key, and you were still fishing, where did you live?

O:Right across the island on the east side of this island.

J:In your first house, did you have electricity?

O:No. I did not have any electricity until after 1940.

J:When you first moved to Cedar Key, then, did you fish alone, or were you still fishing with your sister's husband?

O:Oh, I had done changed a dozen times by then. I was with a crew. There were four of us.

J:Now, when you say you were on a crew, what kind of fishing were you doing then?

O:It is just four men, and they all fish together.

J:In separate boats?

O:Yes.

J:When you would go out in a crew, how do you decide where to fish?

O:Well, you just make up your mind where you want to go and you go there and do it.

J:Then, do you all set your nets in a certain manner, in a certain place, and at a certain time, or did you each just go and set your nets wherever you wanted to?

O:[We went] wherever we wanted.

J:Well, why was it a crew? Did you put your fish together and sell them all together?

O:Everything went together.

J:Then did you share the profits from that?

O:We shared it four ways. If there were just two men, we shared two ways. If there were three men, we shared three ways.

J:Was it more profitable to be in a crew, do you think, than fishing alone?

O:No, I do not think so. I got tired of it and just went by myself.

J:Were there a lot of other fishermen [doing that]? Were crews a manner in which people fished at that time?

O:Yes, most people did back in those days. [They fished] anywhere from two to four in a crew.

J:How did you afford to buy your boat and your nets?

O:The best way I could. Any way I could get it.

J:At that time, were you able to get loans, or did you just save up money?

O:You did not get a loan then--not a fisherman.

J:Someone said that at one time there was what was called a fishing union in Cedar Key.

O:Yes.

J:What was that all about?

O:They wanted to raise the price.

J:Were you a member?

O:Oh, yes!

J:How many fishermen were in the union?

O:Just about all of them. They had to be.

J:Did you raise the price?

O:I went on strike for three weeks and went back for the same price that I was getting before. That is how strong the union was.

J:When did the union form?

O:I do not remember what date, but it seems like [it was] in the late 1930s.

J:Was Cedar Key, at that time, doing a pretty good business in seafood?

O:Pretty good, yes.

J:Were there approximately about the same five or six fishhouses at that time?

O:Yes, about the same.

J:Why did you think they needed a union? Why do you think they had a strike?

O:They thought they were not getting enough for the fish.

J:How much were you getting at that time?

O:I think we were getting seven cents [per pound] and went on strike for a dime. We stayed on strike three weeks and went back for seven cents.

J:How many pounds of fish would you catch in a year? Any idea?

O:I would not know.

J:Did you do any oystering?

O:Yes, later on.

J:Did you like oystering?

O:I did not when I first started, but I got to where I liked it.

J:When you first started fishing, you said you had a two-horse motor.

O:I did not have any motor at all. My brother had a two-horse motor. I did my fishing with a pole oar.

J:Was there anybody using sailboats at that time?

O:Hardly any at all.

J:So would you pole to the fishing grounds, or would you have your brother-in-law pull you out there?

O:When I first started fishing, I walked two miles to the creek, poled about four or five miles, fished, then poled back up the creek, and walked to the house two miles. I did not know anything about running the motor because I did not have one. [laughter]

J:When did you first get a motor for your boat? Do you remember?

O:God, it was a long time ago.

[Mrs. O'Steen reminds Mr. O'Steen of the consequences of not joining the union]

If you did not belong to the union and you went out fishing they would sink the boat.

J:How many boats did they sink?

O:They would put syrup in your motor, and they sunk several [boats].

J:Did the fishhouses get together and decide that they were not going to raise the price when you guys formed the union?

O:Yes, sir, they were together the same as we were.

J:The fishhouses in Cedar Key were backing the union?

O:No, they were against us.

J:Now, you first started fishing, and you were gill netting. You were using flax nets, and you had a small boat. Did that change any over the years?

O:Very little.

J:What changed in the method or the gear that you used?

O:Well, we fished flax nets a long time, then we fished nylon nets a long time, and then we got to fishing monofilament. That is what we are using now.

J:Can you tell me what was the biggest difference that you saw when you changed from net to net? What happened? Was there any difference?

O:There was a lot of difference. The nylon and monofilament you do not have to pull off the boat and dry them. The flax nets you had to pull them off every day, [put them] on the rail, and dry them.

J:Did you catch any more fish with the nylon or the monofilament?

O:The monofilament is the best catching net there is made.

J:Why is that?

O:Well, see, it does not absorb water. The mesh of the nylon or flax, when it gets wet, closes up. Monofilament mesh stays wide open all the time. It does not take in any water; it stays dry.

J:Now, you told me once that you also did some shrimping.

O:Yes, me and my son went out there a while shrimping--for one week.

J:What type of boat did you shrimp with?

O:A twenty-five-foot launch.

J:What type of a net did you drag?

O:A regular shrimp net.

J:Did you catch any shrimp?

O:Very few.

J:Were there any other people shrimping from Cedar Key at that time?

O:Yes, a bunch of them.

J:Did anyone catch any shrimp?

O:They did not do too good; all of them caught a few. I think we made about \$70 apiece that week me and my boy shrimped.

J:Was that the only time, then, that you shrimped?

O:That was it.

J:When was this? What year, about?

O:I cannot remember all of that.

J:Why did everyone start shrimping then?

[Mrs. O'Steen answers: "Most of what they caught around here was just to eat. If they caught enough to sell, they sold."]

J:What was life like as a fisherman in Cedar Key in the early days? Did you make a good living at it?

O:No, we just lived. That was all. You would go out there and make fifteen or twenty dollars, you come in and buy your wood, [and] pay your grocery bill.

J:Did you ever think about doing something else at that time?

O:No.

J:What is it about fishing that you like?

O:You ain't asking me what we got for the fish, now.

J:What did you get for them?

O:When I was telling you about us four fishing when I moved to Cedar Key, we got a penny a pound. We would catch a damn twenty-foot launch just piled up every night.

J:You were catching a lot of fish, then?

O:A lot of fish! The four of us would load that boat every night. We would make fifteen or twenty dollars a week apiece.

J:Was it hard work?

O:Yes. You ought to try it.

J:At that time, was everyone catching fish like that?

O:Yes.

J:What were they doing with all those mullet?

O:They were selling them for a penny a pound.

J:And the fishhouses, what were they doing with them?

O:They were shipping them on the railroad. You know, that pier down there was railroad plumb to the end. The fishhouses were right beside that railroad. Every morning the train would back down there and stop at every house and get his fish. Then it would back down to the fiber factory and pick up stuff down there and then pull out. The next day was the same thing.

J:Every day?

O:Every day.

J:Did Cedar Key have an ice plant then?

O:No.

J:How would they preserve the fish?

O:They got ice, but there was not any plant right here right then.

J:Would they ship it in on the train?

O:Yes.

J:So would you go out early in the morning in those days and fish before the train came?

O:I fished at night for fifty years. You went out there when the sun went down, [and] you did not come in the next morning until about 8 o'clock.

J:Did you fish with lanterns?

O:Yes, Coleman lanterns.

J:So how far did you travel? I mean, where were your fishing grounds? Were they close to Cedar Key? How far would you have to travel?

O:You want distances?

J:Approximately, in miles.

O:Seven or eight or ten miles, something like that. Maybe twenty. About twenty miles was as far as you ever went.

J:Did you have a favorite fishing area?

O:A lot of them! See you fished this way: that is what you call a western. That is eastern, and you could go either way.

J:Did it matter? What made you decide to go to the western or the eastern? Was it the weather?

O:Because I was used to the western. But I did learn to like the eastern. See that [the eastern] is the Wacasassa side over there, and this [the western] is the Suwannee River side.

J:How did you learn to find these places to fish? Who taught you?

O:I mostly taught myself. I will tell you, if you get out there enough to make a living at it, you will learn it.

J:You have to learn it.

O:Yes. I learned it the hard way. I found out what people taught me was not worth a damn. That is what I learned myself. That is the way fishing is. If you do not learn it yourself, it ain't worth a damn to you.

J:Were there any rules or any idea of you having a certain fishing spot that you went to all the time, and that was your fishing area?

O:No. The first man that got to it, it was his.

J:How did you try to make sure that you were the first man to get there?

O:It just happened that way. You just had to go in time to get there. If you wanted to get there ahead of the other man, you just had to leave in time.

J:If you were fishing with a crew, did you all try to go to the same place, or did you all [fish] in the same general area?

O:Sometimes we would split up and sometimes we would all go together.

J:Did you share information?

O:Oh, yes.

J:If someone was catching a lot of fish in one area, would he come back and tell you so that so if you were not catching fish [you could go to that area]?

O:Yes.

J:What do you think is probably the biggest change--the change that made the biggest difference for you--in fishing?

O:How do you mean?

J:In technology, what you use, your gear, and [other] stuff.

O:Well, you learn that by the time you start and the longer you do it, there is always improvement.

J:Was there ever a time that you would say fishing was a profitable or good business to be in?

O:Yes. After you learn it, after you are man enough to do it, it is a good living.

J:What is good about fishing?

O:You are your own boss. You do whatever you want to.

J:Did you usually oyster in the wintertime, or did you just do that for a short period?

O:No. Me and my wife oystered about ten years.

J:Why did you start oystering?

O:Because there was more money in it than most fishing.

J:Were the fish disappearing at that time?

O:Yes. Now, if you did not want to oyster, you could go crabbing. We even did that.

J:You did some crabbing?

O:We crabbed ten years.

J:So were you fishing for a while? Take the course of the year.

Would you fish for mullet for a while and then start crabbing at a certain point in time, and then oyster [at another]?

O:Well, I fished all the time when I crabbed because I caught my [own] bait.

J:Did you enjoy your life as a fisherman?

O:I sure have. Every minute of it.

J:What would you say is one of the best things that ever happened to you?

O:I do not know. There has been a lot [that has] happened to me that I am proud of. The family, mostly.

J:Were you ever injured while fishing?

O:Oh, yes.

J:Seriously?

O:I threw the anchor overboard one time, and a nail in it stuck in me right there and [it] tore right on out to the end of my thumb.

J:Did that lay you up for a while?

O:Yes, a couple of weeks. It took seven stitches to sew it up.

J:What are some of the changes that you have seen here in Cedar Key overall? How has Cedar Key changed?

O:There are so damn many ways that I do not know how to talk to you [about them]. Used to be, there hardly were any phones in town. Just business people had phones. There were no

cars to amount to anything. Just business people and doctors [owned cars].

[Mrs. O'Steen adds: "Cedar Key used to be across on that other island. Across from the pier down there."]

J:So how did you travel, then, most of the time?

O:I did not [travel].

J:You stayed here?

O:I stayed right here.

J:Did you travel by boat?

O:Yes, back and [forth] to fishing.

J:Were there very many black people on Cedar Key when you lived here in the early days?

O:Well, there were quite a few of them.

J:How did they make their living?

O:They hook-and-line fished [and] oystered a little.

J:Did any of them join the fishing union?

O:That fiber factory, as long as it was there, was the backbone for the niggers.

J:Were there a lot of white people that worked at the factory?

O:Yes, a lot of them.

J:So it employed quite a few. Did any of your children fish with you?

O:My boys. I have taken them out there a lot before they were ever big enough to fish.

J:Did they like it?

O:Both of them made fishermen.

J:Did any of them go into fishing as a profession?

O:Yes.

J:For how long?

O:How long did Bill fish?

[Mrs O'Steen responds: "I really do not remember."]

O:About ten years I imagine.

J:What do you like best about living in Cedar Key?

O:I like it because it is on the water, and my life is out there on that water. If I was to get out yonder in the country and look out there and not see the bay, it would not be home.

J:Do you like the changes that you see in Cedar Key today?

O:No, I sure do not.

J:What is it about it today that you do not like?

O:The damn law mostly. We used to have conservation. They would just come in and catch you at the fishhouse or something, you would pay [for] your license, and they would go home. Now they are continuously out there all the time following and watching. If you do a little something wrong, they do not even fine you, they take what you have got. They take it up there to Bronson and auction it off. I do not like that.

J:When you first started fishing, did they have the Marine Patrol or anything like that?

O:No. That did not start until 1950.

J:Did you have agreements? If you saw the fish dropping off, would you get together and talk about it and decide not to fish?

O:No.

J:So there was not any regulation at that time?

O:No.

J:If the fish were just dropping off, what would you do?

O:Let them alone or catch what you could and let them go.

J:When they first started regulating the fisheries in 1950, did you think that was a good idea?

O:I did not see any need for it. All the need I saw for it was [for] somebody to draw a check and get something to do. People that did not have anything else to do got a job to watch somebody else that was trying to make a living. Fishermen take care of themselves.

J:Do you still fish today?

O:I go catch a mess to eat every once in a while. That is all I do.

J:How many fishermen are in Cedar Key, would you say, now?

O:I do not have any idea. Mike did not tell you?

J:I am not sure if he said there were fifty or so.

O:Well, he ought to know. He is the only dealer.

J:Can you make a living off of fishing today?

O:No, you sure cannot.

J:Why not?

O:Because there are not enough fish out there to do it. When you are talking about living, you are talking about some money.

J:Why do you think there are not as many fish out there now as there used to be?

O:Because people used to just fish in two or three miles square. Now just one man can fish thirty or forty miles within an hour's time, where a man [at one time] would take all night to cover two or three miles of fishing.

J:So it is just that he has got the boat and the equipment to get around.

O:Yes, to get around. They could go back to the pole oar and there would not be [a shortage of fish].

J:Would you advise someone to go into fishing today?

O:I sure would not.

J:Why not?

O:The law is too tough on it.

J:What do you think they should do about the regulation of the fisheries in Florida today?

O:I think they ought to just let it alone.

J:Do you think there are enough fish out there that they could do that?

O:Well, if there were not enough, you could fish until you could not catch any, and then you could quit. But I do not see no need of all this law business in fishing. I do not think it amounts to anything.

J:What is the difference between working on land and working on sea?

O:You ought to try it.

J:Well, I have been out there, but I want to know the difference you see in it.

O:Well, I have never worked too much off of [the land], so I would not know much about it.

J:What is the best part of working out there? Besides just being your own boss, what do you like about working on the sea?

O:Well, something you have done all your life you like to do. Do you not like what you are doing?

J:I like it.

O:Yes. Well, that is the way it is.

J:Well, is there not something about it? I mean, do you like being on the water?

O:I like being on the water.

J:Do you like seeing a bunch of fish coming in on that net? Or do you just like being out there?

O:I like to catch fish. Yes, I have always liked to catch fish.

J:Are there any of the changes in Cedar Key that you have seen that you like?

O:Not that I know of.

J:How has it changed as a community?

O:How is that?

J:Do you know a lot of the fishermen still?

O:Quite a few of them. I do not know but about half of them any more. I used to know all of them.

J:Do you go down to the fishhouse now?

O:No, I have not been down there in a couple of months.

J:Do you think Cedar Key will ever be anything like it used to be? Do you think the fishing will ever come back?

O:No. Never. It never will be.

J:Well, I do not have too many more questions. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about, about the fishing itself, or about Cedar Key and the changes you have seen? Are there things that I might have missed in the interview?

O:You know, in the world everything is fast. They are changing everything too fast, and that is one thing that ails fishing: speed. [They] just cover it up. Fish are a wildlife, and when I fished, when I found a good place to fish and caught a lot of fish, I used to let that [place] alone for maybe a month. Then when I would go back I would make another good catch of fish. Now, by the time I get out of that place, somebody else is in there. See, it is just like that. Fish do not have time. Fish do not all just come in at one time. They come in a few at a time. They just do it so regular.

J:If you could do something to regulate that aspect of the fishing, how would you do it?

O:There ain't no way for me to do anything.

J:But how would you like to see it done?

O:If you want fish to be out there, just stop everybody from using motors. Then there will not be anybody out there. When they cannot ride out there, they ain't going to be out there. Now that is the best I can tell you.

J:It would sure make it a lot more work to get out there.

O:Well, that is what it takes to keep them from [being] out there [constantly].

J:Well, they have a lot of different plans and means of regulating fish--and the fishermen, mainly--and I did not know how you might feel about it. But I just wondered if you thought that they should regulate the number of fishermen, whether they should regulate the type of gear (which would be one manner of doing that), but I do not think they will go that far and ban motors.

O:No, because people just ain't got the guts to get out and do it.

J:Well, Cedar Key has gone through a lot of changes. They have had a real boom and bust cycle with the pencil factory, then the palm fiber plant was here, and fishermen used to catch a lot more fish. What future do you see for Cedar Key? Do you think this latest cycle that they are going into--this emphasis on tourism--is going to be a good deal for Cedar Key?

O:It will not do the poor people any good--the working class.

J:Why will it not help them?

O:[It will] not [help them in any way] that I see.

[Mrs. O'Steen adds: "The sport fishermen have the authority now. They can fish seven days a week, and the people that are working for a living cannot make but four and one half."]

J:Why is that?

[Mrs. O'Steen answers: "That is all you can go fishing."]

J:That is all they will allow you to go out fishing?

[Mrs. O'Steen: "Yes. And they have got these old boats running around out there chasing everybody."]

O:You see, I have got books [telling of the time] back where there were not any motors at all. Sailboats was all they had. There were not any gasoline engines for boats. You put up a sail and went out there and fished, and you put it up and came in. I do not believe there are too many fishermen today that like to fish that way.

J:No, time becomes a factor. They want to get out there and catch the fish.

O:You know, in World War II they got to where they would not let us run out there at night at all. They would not allow no motors, so we had to fish in the daytime. You had to get out at sunup; you had to check out. You had to be in before sundown; you had to check in.

J:Did you catch any fish during the day then?

O:Oh, yes. I got with a crew.

J:Were you catching less fish?

O:Oh, about the same as I was [catching] by myself.

J:I have a couple of more questions. What do you think the tourism industry has done for Cedar Key?

O:I cannot see where it has done anything for me.

J:How has it affected commercial fishing?

O:The sport fishermen--and not the tourists--affect that [commercial fishing].

J:How do they [sport fishermen] affect commercial fishing?

O:They are everywhere you want to go out there. And then they want to shoot you if you interfere with them.

J:Have you ever had any conflicts out there with them?

O:Yes.

J:What happened?

O:They threatened me.

J:They wanted you to move?

O:[They] did not want me to come in there.

J:What advice do you have for commercial fishermen today as far as what they can do to help their industry?

O:As long as they are going to mix sport fishermen with them, I do not see any help for it. Either they just take commercial fishermen out or the sport fishermen out. Then it will be settled.

J:Did you ever join any other fishermen groups like the Organized Fishermen of Florida?

O>No, I never did fool with them.

J:Do you think that is an alternative? Do you think that will help if they can organize?

O:I never did think enough about it to fool with it.

J:I know the union did not seem to do much when they got together, but I just wondered if you thought that might be an alternative for them today. Do you have any idea why the union did not work?

O:Not unless they just did not have enough money.

J:What did the townspeople think of the sort of strong-arm tactics they were using like sinking boats? Did you approve of that?

O:No, I did not approve of it.

J:Did you feel that the union needed to be strong in that sense-- that you had to be together?

O:I just was not a union man, and I did not give a damn about the union.

J:Did it just disband, then, after it was ineffective?

O:It just vanished.

J:Were there any other attempts at organizing?

O:That was the last. I think it was in the 1940s. I had done moved out here. You would go on strike, but you had to have something to eat. You had to rent a house, unless you had one. Of course, I had mine. You would sit there and not go out there and make a living, and the union did not give a damn if you had anything or not.

J:They just expected you to sit there and starve?

O:If the merchants here in town did not have mercy on you, you would just sit there and starve.

J:Did they support the union?

O:No! They did not like the union a damn at all. I did not either.

J:Did they support some individual fishermen?

O:Yes.

J:They would give them some credit?

O:Yes. And that is the only way they survived here in a strike.

You would go to a meeting with a union, and they want your dues--you had to pay your dues--and just a promise was all you got every time you went. A promise.

J:What do you think is the most important part of becoming a successful fisherman?

O:Determination.

J:In what way?

O:Sharing the good and the bad parts. There are bad parts here and there are good parts. You have to share both of them.

J:What are some of those good parts?

O:That is when you catch a lot of fish and make your living easy.

And then [the bad is when] it gets to where you cannot do anything. Everything is against you like the weather [and] the tides. You are talking about fishing, [and] there is a lot to know about that stuff, I can tell you! It took me ten years to learn it.

J:What is some of the worst weather that you have fished in?

O:Storms.

J:Have you been caught out there?

O:Yes, many a time. [The] anchor would drag--drag all over the bay.

J:Did you ever lose a boat?

O:No, I never have lost one. I have sure had to hang on to them, though.

J:Well, I do not think I have any more questions I want to ask, except one last one. What do you see for the future of commercial fishermen in Cedar Key?

O:The way I see it, it is very short.

J:Is there anything they can do?

O:I do not know of anything.

J:Well, Mr. O'Steen, I appreciate your taking the time to do this. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

O:I do not think so.

J:Well, thank you very much.