

Cape Lookout National Seashore

CALO AS-1564

Audio Tour Portsmouth Village

Final Oral History Excerpts Script

RBH Multimedia Inc.

12 Hatch Terrace

Dobbs Ferry, NY 100522

Salter House

Track 46: COMMUNITY/LIFE IN THE VILLAGE (2:04)

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-51, Interview 019, Tape 1 of 2, side 1

We lived a life of pleasure, happiness and freedom. We were perfectly free from anything or everything, with no law whatsoever. No law visited us. We didn't know anything about any laws. (You never looked at a clock.) We never had to have any law. There were no fights, no drunks, no trouble and we had no business for any law. And we were just free people. And when anybody got in trouble, everybody jumped in to help them. And there were no charges whatsoever for anything that you helped a man do. There were no charges. We just helped one another.

Levin Fulcher, NPSCALO-167, Interview 060, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

We didn't have no running water, you know, around there or no ready made market but we lived just the same. We all made out. I don't think anybody ever starved down in Portsmouth. Didn't have no bathrooms. You get them old Sears and Roebuck catalogues, you know, and when they got through the order, take them down to the bath house, drive a nail into them and that's what they used, ain't that right? (laughter)

Emma Gilgo, NPSCALO-108, Interview 037, Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

We didn't hear any bad news. And it was only just before we left from there that we had our first little radio. And it was just, it was just all entirely different. And

that's the way I find it to this day. If there's a paradise on this earth, it's Portsmouth Island, as far as I'm concerned.

I know the day that we were moving, Marion Gray's mother, Lillian was her name, she said, "Children, you're making the biggest mistake you've ever made in your life." Lionel says, "Well, now, listen. It may be a mistake, but it's one I've got to make."

Track 47: SUSTINENCE (2:12)

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-32, Interview 013, Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

Well, the fishermen got up round about three o'clock to go cast their nets. When they were oystering, they got up about four-thirty. Now oystering, the mother got up and cooked breakfast before you left and you had light rolls to eat for lunch with raw oysters that you had caught. The best meal anybody ever ate (laughs).

Ira Babb, NPSCALO-100, Interview 034, Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

I hate fish! (Oh my goodness!) My aunt ruined me with fish back when I was a boy. (What did she do?) Stewed drum fish and tried to make me eat it. My daddy used to boil them, eyes, head, tail, and all. And you look right at them when you open the lid. My daddy loved the herring, boiled herrings and he loved boiled fish. He pickled them. He used to sell them in the store, pickle fish. Pickled herrings. And the stewed crab, now, I can eat a stewed crab...

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-32, Interview 013, Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

Everybody had chickens. And when you were gonna eat a fryer or a make an old hen in a soup or bake an old hen or something like that, you usually put it in a coop and kept 'em the whole week and fed 'em only corn to get the odor and the taste of fish and the marshy taste, you know. And in my day, the gulls laid on there by the hundreds. People would go out and gather the eggs in big tubs. But I never could eat them. They tasted fishy to me. And I know they had to them, but they still ate them, just the same.

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-32, Interview 013, Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

The water was our problem. We had gutters on our house. And we had a spout the same way run down from that to the tank. Well, when you went a long time with no rain, the tank was dry and you used a well and that's the reason you had so much typhoid and malaria fever on the Banks 'cause you gotten that impure water.

Track 48: MOSQUITOES (1:22)

Levin Fulcher, NPSCALO-169, Interview 060, Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

So many mosquitoes, stand flatfooted in a barrel of water and live over top of it. I'll tell you, what's so, where we lived, between us and the beach, there was a low marsh and actually I seen them just like clouds. Evenings when it's calm, just about dusk, you know, they'd shoot up in the air like clouds. I think you've seen them that way, too.

Mother used to make a smoke. She had a pan, she used to make a smoke into it, put stuff into it, set it afire and put it out, let it smoke. Nights, she'd go on every corner of the house, smoke out the mosquitoes. That's all we had.

And I'll tell you one my mother didn't do. If you had a bad burn on you, she'd go round and get these para pads, you know what I mean? Thorny things? (Yeah, Prickly pears.) Prickly pears, yeah. She'd gather them up and she'd burr them, get all the thorns off them and make some kind of salve. And I'd be darned if it wouldn't heal that up, just as nice. I don't know whatever she done to it.

Track 49: CHILDHOOD DAYS (2:33)

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-48, Interview 018, Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

But one morning Tom and I was going out the front gate and it had rained the day before. And one of those chickens had got-- I'd seen him four or five times up on the side of the tub. One had fell in that thing. Well we picked the chicken up, and we decided he was drowned and went and got one of these Ball Band shoeboxes. Now we were right little fellows then, probably six or seven-years-old. We put that chicken in that box, and put that box down in that hole. We put the dirt over it, piled it up, put flowers, and we went off playing. The next morning when we went out to play, we decided we had made a mistake, we discovered we had made a mistake. So we went and took everything off of that grave, took that box out and set it aside, and got everything leveled back, and went and got some new flowers, and come and took that chicken and went over here, to bury him over here. We took the lid off the box to look at him, and he jumped out. He'd been there 24 hours. And here's what they told me. They said, "Steve, that

chicken was so near drowned that it only took a little bit of oxygen, and just the least little bit." Well that's logical. See? It was oxygen

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-52, Interview 019, Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

Now croquet was the main game there. Everybody knew how to play croquet and we had four croquet diamonds. We'd gather in the afternoon if we didn't have any work to do. That was the only time. Sometimes we'd play a couple hours and a game wouldn't finish before it got so dark that we couldn't see how to knock the ball. We'd leave 'em right there just so, and the next day we'd finish it. I can tell you right now, we were proud of our croquet. We were strict too. I'm tell you, there was nobody cheated. (laughs)

THE STORE AND THE POST OFFICE

Track 66: THE MAIL BOAT (1:49)

Ira Babb, NPSCALO-99, Interview 034, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Ed Dickson used to carry the mail. He used to go out on a boat, a little sailboat, rowboat, and get the mail and come ashore.

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-61, Interview 003, Tape 1, Side 1

Any time the weather conditions allowed those mail boats to come, he met that mail boat. I tell you, he met on some terrible days too. I wouldn't undertake it. No, sir, I would not. But he did. He met the boat.

Jakie Robertson, NPSCALO-174, Interview 062, Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

Oh, Uncle Tom's sent me up so I could spy for the mail boat when it came to the Channel there. We could go up into the little room there, and he had one of them old spyglasses like Black Beard or somebody had and I'd tell Uncle Tom and Uncle Jody, the mail boat was coming, you know, when I'd see the mail boat out there.

Ira Babb, NPSCALO-99, Interview 034, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Well, a lot of people come down. They'd get up there around three o'clock in the evening three or 3:30 and they would be out there when they called the mail in.

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-158, Interview 055, Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

That was a slot where you went out and put your mail in if there wasn't nobody in the post office and you wanted to mail a letter and you had a stamp. If you didn't have a stamp, all you had to do was drop three cents in the box with it and Miss Hannah would put the stamp on it, you know.

Mary Dixon, NPSCALO-103, Interview 035, Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

You see the mail boat brought the things that we couldn't get from the store at Portsmouth, we ordered by mail.

Mary Dixon, NPSCALO-102, Interview 035, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

A friend of mine asked how we managed to get what we wanted; I said we spend our time trying to want what we can get.

Track 67: THE STORE (1:36)

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-152, Interview 054, Tape 2, Side 1

We used to get molasses in a 50-gallon barrel, wooden barrel and it had a wooden spigot in the bottom of it. And this barrel would sit on brick and you'd go there to get a quart of molasses and you'd sit that jar underneath that spigot and turn it on and it would take about an hour to get a quart of molasses run.

And right next to it, on this side, was the apple barrel. The boys used to take old stick, broomstick, and drive a nail in the end of it and they'd sit there at night and kind of reaching around to get 'em an apple. That's the way they got them.

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-152, Interview 054, Tape 2, Side 1

Then the canned stuff was all up above and went all the way around. Meat,

fatback pork, that was right to the back of the, right back of here. There was a shelf built right to the back of the store, where the back of the store was off, just like the wall there, there was a shelf built up there with this fatback pork in trays. You had paste board trays that it come in and it was placed up there and they'd go down and cut you off what you wanted.

THE SCHOOL

Track 76: MEMORIES OF SCHOOL DAYS (3:42)

Mary Dixon, NPSCALO-102, Interview 035, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

They had trouble keeping a teacher that far from the mainland. I think I was the only passenger that day that I was on the mail boat. Oh, when Mr. Alfred met the boat he didn't know there was going to be a passenger on, and he didn't have extra boots in the boat to wade ashore. I figured that he would stay aboard the skiff while I put his boots on and wade ashore. But he didn't do a thing but turn around and pick me up and carried me ashore.

Cecil Gilgo NPS-CALO-156, Interview 055, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

They had benches, homemade benches in there. And they were just a narrow aisle that went down in there'd be at least-- there'd be about five that sit on the bench. And then there was a great big black board on each side of it and then it went in the back, across the back and it was just as weak as it could be. And you could get in there and go to trembling your foot, kick someone in your foot, and the old windows began to shatter. And the old chimney broke off right even

to the ceiling. It would be a-swaying back and forth that way. That teacher would say, "Whoever is doing that stop it right now." And about that time somebody would let her have a load of shot. They'd taken out a gun shell, had a pocket full of shot, get her not looking and throw them shot at her. They put tacks in her seat, in her chair. Bullfrogs, snakes in the desk drawers.

Mary Dixon, NPSCALO 102, Interview 035, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Anyway I enrolled about forty children the first year I taught there. And after every storm still more and more families would leave Portsmouth, you know, be afraid to stay, until finally, the year, the last year I taught I had two children.

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-156, Interview 055, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Right out in front of it were a big pond and it was called the Academy Pond because where it got its name just beyond that was the old Academy. You'd get wet in it all right. We had one teacher by the name of Linda Delong a redheaded woman, boy she was mean. And this Russell Dixon he did something and she was going to whip him and before she got a hold of him, he run out the door and run to that pond and jumped in. She went down to the pond and tried to get him out and he wouldn't do it. He says, "Come in Miz Linda," says, "the water's fine."

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-145, Interview 053, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

It was what we called Cat, playing Cat in them days, you know? It wasn't regular baseball, it was just Cat. And that's where we played, between that pond and that schoolhouse. We didn't use a regular baseball. We mostly used a net cork. Yeah, the cork that come up from the net. They used to have 'em in them days round and of course the hole went through 'em. We'd take a net lead and drive into that hole where it would be a little heavier so you could throw it. That's what we used. We didn't have regular baseballs or anything like that.

Church Quotes

Track 86: CHURCH REMINISCENCES (2:51)

Marian Gray Babb, NPSCALO-04, Interview 005, Tape 1 of 3

See, our preacher was the Ocracoke preacher. Once a month they would stay here for the services. We didn't have a minister that lived here, no. We had Sunday School, but not a church service. We didn't have the church service only once a month, but we had our Sunday School every Sunday.

We had what was called the Lady's Bank Society. Once a month when he was going to come, like on Saturday afternoon, maybe one or two of us would get together, maybe up there and somebody else would go this month, maybe next month somebody else would go. But you'd go round to everybody's house and say, "Well, we're collecting for the preacher." And believe it or not, some would come up with a quarter, some would come up with fifty cents, but see, every little bit helps.

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-46, Interview 018, Tape 1 side 1 of 2

In that old church, I've seen women shouting in there and their hairpins are flying all over creation out of their hair. And there was preachers, there was preachers that preached down to earth preaching. But this has been, has been a good, good building, I'm telling you that.

Now Bessie Salter and myself, we used to sing songs with nobody but her and I together, when we were round about five years old, six, along in there. They'd take everybody on the place would come, and they'd pay the fee or they'd put money in a pot somewhere for the people to spend on the church and to pay the preacher.

Marian Gray Babb, NPSCALO-04, Interview 005, Tape 1 of 3

I always heard Mama say, if it hadn't been for Captain Charlie that church would've never been there, that he was the instigation, he was the one that worked so hard to get it back. And he begged and did anyway he could to get the materials and the money to get it done. He'd beg and everyway he could he'd go and say what he was trying to do and he'd say "If you can't give me nothing give me nails." Some would give him nails and some would give him shingles and some would give him paint, and he just took anything that anybody would give him, until he'd just get on until he got enough to do it with.

Track 87: CHRISTMAS ON THE ISLAND (1:51)

Steve Roberts, NPSCALO-47, Interview 018, Tape 1 of 2, side 2

They used to go and get a great big cedar. Then, they numbered the people that were on Portsmouth and put a present on there for every one of them. Everybody got a present. That was taken out of money that was made by selling ice cream, cake and baskets. They put different kinds of paper things that they can hang on it to make it look Christmas like. Then they took every one of those presents, wrapped them, tied them and put the name on there of the person they wanted to give them to. And then they would have a play of some kind. And the last thing they did was give the presents out. And that was the greatest night of all. Now everybody enjoyed that. Everybody went home about 9:30, not later than 10 o'clock, rejoicing because they had such nice fellowship one to the other. And it made things better for all.

Marian Gray Babb, NPSCALO-04, Interview 005, Tape 1 of 3

They would have programs like at Christmas time, they would have lots of Christmas plays. I remember back when they used to have the Christmas trees, they'd put up a big Christmas tree and decorate it and then they would have like a program. Right, in the church, and well, the smaller kids would have pieces to say, you know, they'd get up and they'd memorize their full speech and they'd get up and say it and maybe we'd have Santa Claus coming in dressed, you know. Yeah, I remember when they had the Christmas- what they'd call Christmas tree, Christmas tree parties in the church.

Track 88: CHURCH SOCIAL LIFE (1:27)

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-151, Interview 054, Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

Well, when, when I was a kid, I was a kid, I was eight, nine years old, up on the Sheep Island, a lot of people lived up there. I mean a lot of people. They'd come down on Sunday afternoon and I can see them walking down over on that side, on the beach side of the sand dunes, you know? Way down there. See them with their flowered umbrellas over them, you know, and they're all dressed up, coming down, a whole bunch of young people. Going to Sunday school. They had Sunday school at 2:30 on Sunday afternoon and they were going down, a big bunch of them.

Nina Mann Dixon NPSCALO-132, Interview 047, Tape 1 of 2, side 1

And in the winter, we'd have candy parties. You know, I mean, the boys would buy the sugar, and we made taffy. (laughs) And we'd get together in the winter, and a whole crowd of girls and boys, you know, and dancing the Virginia reel. That's all the dancing I ever did, the Virginia reel. There was a lot of young people on the island when I grew up there. As I say, there was, well, 350 or 400 people. But they gradually all moved away.

Track 89: BURIAL ON THE ISLAND (1:23)

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-156, Interview 055, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Henry's mother was the first person that I ever helped bury. She was a big woman and they made her a casket, a homemade casket and it was black. There was eight of us that were pallbearers. And when we went to the gate they couldn't get it out of the gate and had to lift it over, over the fence. We had sheets around underneath the casket you know and wrap around your hands the way they had to carry it. They didn't have handles on in them days. And somebody dropped the front end of it. And I see it right now how it went down in that dirt and they got it up and they got the mud off it. And we had to carry from Henry Piggott's up to Abner Dixon's place where she's buried. That's how far we carried it. You talk about somebody worn out. There was eight of us. She was a great big woman. A great big one.

Life-Saving Station:

Track 106: STATION ROUTINE: (3:31)

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-62, Interview 003, Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

Yes sir, they were up at a certain time. They had a certain time to eat their breakfast. If they wasn't there at that time they didn't get any. They had to be up dressed, just like you do the Navy. Get their muster, they had to eat their breakfast at a certain time, their dinner at a certain time, their supper at a certain time.

But uh, later years, yes, when their work was done in the afternoon they could go home and stay all night. And if they needed them, they had a large bell out in the yard, a real large bell. Each man was numbered and if they wanted that man they would ring that number so many times and brother, you could hear it all over this island. And he'd jump up and go back to the Coast Guard station and they would want him for something and 24 times was for all the crew. They'd ring it 24 times for all the crew to come in but we knew that there was something bad going on.

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-62, Interview 003, Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

Was of the night, they had a sundown patrol, they went out at sundown and he would come in at nine. Then a man would leave at nine. He'd go out and come back 12, and then a man would leave at 12 and come back at three, and then a man would leave at three and come back six, which would be daylight, then, in the morning patrolling the beach. Then they had a watch, the same watch of a daytime, only they didn't have the patrol, they had to serve that in a tower-- lookout tower. Yes sir, they had a watch at night, yes, sir, a man in the tower. Yes sir. This nine o'clock man, he had to serve in the tower from six o'clock until nine. Then when he came down relieved the man was patrolling, he went up and stayed and came back at 12 then he could go to bed until his next watch, which would be in the daytime.

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-150, Interview 054, Tape 1 of 3, side 1

There was one time down there, I remember, Leona's daddy was in charge. The captain was gone. And they were going to have a beach apparatus drill. And so

the boys got together, just to play a trick on him, you know, they sneaked there, and they-- the equipment room, and took a bunch of powder and shoved it in that cannon. Well when they went to set the cannon up, Roland, he went down and put the powder into it, put the bullet in there, and when you pulled the thing down, it went nearly to the big hill. They had to go nearly to the big hill, to get it.

<laughs>.... Boy, they done some-- they had some tricks there.

Cecil Gilgo, NPSCALO-156, Interview 55, Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

Mr. Conehey he was down in the coast guard station one night. It had been raining real hard. And he was always scared to go home by himself and night overtook him. So he decided he had to go home. He was young then. And you know how the moon will shine on the water you know, and make a shadow how it looks in mud puddles or water standing on the road. And he was going along and every now and then he'd look over this shoulder. And the first thing you know he saw that puddle of water with the moonshine on it and he thought it was something after him. He took off and went a hollering, "Mama open the door. Mama open the door." And she heard him a-squalling and when they got to the front door he was there. He said something was after him.

Track 107: STORMS (3:05)

Nina Dixon, NPSCALO-124, Interview 044, Tape 2 of 2, Side 2

And that day of the 1899 hurricane, I had taught school that day. Well we just thought it was a northeastern. You know? And it's not unusual in the fall of the year-- of course, it was in August, the 16th of August; I will never forget it. And

so it was raining so bad, they couldn't go out to play. So I said, "I'm going to close school and you all go home right now."

So Mamma cooked supper, and we all went to bed. When we got up the next morning, it was still rolling. And we had a peach tree out there, and it was full of peaches, and it had blowed all the peaches off. So Poppa went out and picked the peaches up, and Mamma preserved them that day. And we had watermelon and melons floating all around. Well round about-- I don't know just what time it was, one or two o'clock; but anyway, Poppa said, "Maddy, you better take the carpet in." Mama said, "No, sir. I was born and raised in this house, and I never saw water in my life." And he said, "Well it may not come," but he said, "It looks to me like it's going to." So she didn't take the carpet in. But when the water began to come on the porch, they decided better take it up and they take it up.

And he looked around to get something over it and he said, "It's ten minutes to ten." And according to the natural time for the tide to come in, it's two hours. And he said, "I don't see"-- he said this to himself-- "I don't see how the house can stand it." And so he come on outside. And Mama said to him, "What do you think?" He said, "I don't know. If it keeps on like this, I don't see anything for it but we'll all be washed out in the Atlantic Ocean." And he was serious. And that water kept coming in.

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-62, Interview 003, Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

Oh, my father was in the Coast Guard station with him, yes, sir. We had a hard northeast wind and the tide was so high out on the flats-- the beach flats-- that it was impossible for a horse to cross it. They rode horses on patrol at that time and when the Sundown patrolman came in-- he just made it in, too-- he told my

dad that he could not make it, not to try it. He said, "Well, I've got to try it." He said, "Well, go down to the flats and come back because you can't make it across that beach. A horse won't make it." So he went down to the flats and it was the water was so deep and wind blowing so hard he was afraid to be washed across the flats in the ocean, so he came back to the Coast Guard station. The next morning, the keeper checked the clock and it wasn't punched so he pulled my dad in and they had an investigation and uh... they sent my dad home without pay for 30 days.

Track 108: WRECKS (1:04)

Lionel Gilgo, NPSCALO-62, Interview 003, Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

The only ship that I remember coming ashore here while I lived here was the Looney, that's three miles south of here. She was loaded with iron ore. I remember her very well. Walked to her with my family. After Sunday school then we'd go out on the beach, and go walk up to the old Looney, she was there on the beach and there just wasn't anything else to do. Pretty afternoons we'd go over—

Nina Dixon, NPSCALO-133, Interview 047, Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

There were several shipwrecks that came a shore on the beach, you know. One time, they were loading the general merchandise, and one time they had fur coats and they'd send a man-- the government would send a man down there to sell off these things and nearly every woman on the island had a sealskin coat that winter (laughs). One time (laughs) one came loaded with whiskey (laughs). They all had a good time with that (laughs).