

Oral History Interview – Charles ‘Charlie’ D. Bowen, Jr.

Isle au Haut Historical Society

Date: November 4, 2012

Location: Home of Charlie Bowen—year-round resident of Isle au Haut

Interviewer: Marshall Chapman, summer resident, owner of The Keeper’s House, an Inn on Isle au Haut

Transcription written by: Kristen Carlson-Lewis

Marshall: Today is November 4, 2012. I am Marshall Chapman and I am interviewing Charlie Bowen for the Historical Society. And Charlie—I am going to just go ahead—Harold van Doren wrote down all these questions that I should ask you. I’ll go through them, and you can go for them as long as you want, and you can expand all you want wherever.

How old are you now?

Charlie: I am 84.

Marshall: When and where were you born? The mainland or on Isle au Haut?

Charlie: I was born in Rockland in 1928.

Marshall: Rockland in ‘28?

Charlie: In a blinding snowstorm.

Marshall: What month was it?

Charlie: March.

Marshall: A blinding snowstorm in March?

Charlie: With two doctors. I was a breech birth. I didn’t want to come out.

Marshall: What was it like when you were a kid?

Charlie: I grew up partly in Rockland, then we moved to New Castle, then I moved to Damariscotta Mills, then we went to Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Marshall: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Charlie: I have one-half brother now left and I have a half-sister up in New Hampshire somewhere.

Marshall: What were the other members of your family like?

Charlie: It was just us, the old man and I.

Marshall: No special ones that you remember?

Charlie: He married the second time—Madeline. She was more of a mother to me than my real mother. She was a shoemaker in Boston somewhere.

Marshall: Did you grow up in Head Harbor?

Charlie: I was only there part-time.

Marshall: Was that as a kid or later?

Charlie: As a kid. The old man sent me down from Boston. I guess he figured I was going to get into something there in Boston. I had already done it. I came down. Grandpa picked me up and brought me across the Rockland Bay and dropped me off at Al Thomas's wharf. So I went up over the hill there and Grammy was right there.

Marshall: Where was Al Thomas's Wharf?

Charlie: That's in Head Harbor. It's not there anymore. My grandmother's was there.... The Wilsons didn't keep it up.

Marshall: It was part of the Wilson property?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: What all have been your occupations? What all have you done?

Charlie: I worked for H. E. Frost for two years, trucking and refinishing boats. Then I went to work for First National Warehouse for 15 years. I spent 14 of them trying to get a job. I finally got the job and they closed the warehouse. I waited years to work there. So I went to work for W.H. Nichols, who later sold out to Parker Hannaford. I was there for 25 years.

Marshall: Then you came back here after that?

Charlie: Yeah, I retired in '93.

Marshall: So was that part of the Bath Iron Works?

Charlie: Nope, that was the biggest little company in the world, Parker Hannaford. The only reason W. H. Nichols sold to Parker Hannaford was because they wanted to get in on the New

York Stock Exchange. We had overseas orders. I don't know what was going on there. That and we were working for the Navy. They had to buy a company out there. I think it was Wisconsin or Michigan. And I was grinding for them—they were 3" pieces. I think they were used in submarines because they wanted them quiet.

Marshall: What were you grinding when you said you were grinding for them as a machinist? What 3" pieces were you talking about?

Charlie: You had an inner and an outer—they were hydraulic pumps.

Marshall: For the submarine class they had to be?

Charlie: Yeah. And you can't work for the government unless you are unionized. So we weren't union. So they bought a company out there, out west—HPI—that was unionized. So I would grind, they'd ship to them, and they would sell to the government.

Marshall: So everyone would get a little cut out of it.

Charlie: Sure.

Marshall: That's the government way. Did you work at Bath Iron Works at all?

Charlie: Nope.

Marshall: I guess Harold recollected that incorrectly though.

Charlie: No, Uncle Lou [Lewis Bowen] worked for them and Smokey [Henry Harjula]. He worked for Bath Ironworks for a long time.

Marshall: When you came here as a kid, how did it feel when you first came?

Charlie: Great! Away from the city.

Marshall: And the trouble that you were stirring! How old were you when you came over here?

Charlie: Oh, I must have been 13 or 14. Yeah, 12 or 13, somewhere around there. I had been there before as a little one when I was three or four. We stayed at the old camp.

Marshall: Is that over at Duck Harbor?

Charlie: No, that was in Head Harbor. Bill Stevens tore that down the 17th of July. That was the day my father died.

Marshall: Where was it located in Head Harbor?

Charlie: Just at the top of the hill, just as you come up the road.

Marshall: What did you like or not like when you first got here?

Charlie: Oh, I adapted. Granny grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and gave me a shake. She was the disciplinarian in the family. She had had five kids and the old man used to tell me how she used to beat the living hell out of 'em. So he used to send me down to her to straighten out, but there was no straightening out there. I was a good boy. But, she was fair.

Marshall: Fair when you stayed in the lines, huh?

Charlie: She told me what my duties were going to be. What I could do and what I could not do, and God help me if I did. If she finished her work before noontime, she would take me over on the backshore down to Thunder Gulch. Take me down and show me where the Indians used to stay. Down by Kendra's house now. And she'd take me down on the beach in Head Harbor. And one time, she took me to the pond.

Marshall: Who are some of the people that you first remember seeing and meeting? Did you remember many?

Charlie: There was Gooden and Nettie.

Marshall: Gooden Grant. Who was Nettie?

Charlie: Nettie was his wife. She was a big woman. I was over there one morning and he was just getting ready to shave. He lathered up. He took his straight razor. He had a glass and he put about that much booze in it. He downed half of it.

Marshall: Shave himself up nicely?

Charlie: Oh, yeah. "Now for breakfast, Mom," he said. And there was Les. I never cared much for Les.

Marshall: Les was?

Charlie: Gooden Grant's brother. He lived in the red house there. Guglielmo owns it now. And Bert Nevell—he lived there with Les. I don't know how he was related there somehow.

Marshall: What was it about Les that you didn't really get along with him much?

Charlie: There was no difference there. He was old and I was young. I was only 20, 22, 23, I guess, at that time.

Marshall: How was the island different from when you came back?

Charlie: There was a lot of people then. Head Harbor was full. There were fishermen, a lot of fishermen here. Some of them fished all year round. I fished with my Uncle Elmer [Bowen]. We fished offshore. Government interference—now you have to buy a license to fish off a three-mile limit. Before, you could get there, you could fish, all on a \$5 license.

Marshall: Did he fish all year round?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: How was the fishing offshore?

Charlie: Loved it.

Marshall: What was so much more enjoyable about fishing offshore?

Charlie: You would haul the trap up. You either had a lobster in it or there was nothing there. If you had a lobster, you didn't have to put a measure on it except to see if it was too big. Band it and sell it.

Marshall: You didn't have to clean out the trap with all the other stuff?

Charlie: I didn't mind that anyway.

Marshall: There were a lot more fishermen down there?

Charlie: Oh, yeah.

Marshall: Head Harbor is a pretty separate community from the village, Isle au Haut Village.

Charlie: Then you had your eastside, the Turners and the Riches. They were all fishermen. You had Maurice Barter and Jackie McKean was there. You had some of the Riches still fishing out of Rich's Cove. I had a whole list of them.

Marshall: Hmm. You still have that list somewhere about?

Charlie: Yeah, it's somewhere over there.

Marshall: What made you want to keep coming back?

Charlie: Well, my family was from here. I came back and now I am related to almost everybody on the island, except you and Bill Stevens, and so far, the DeWitts. But, that could go.

Marshall: Well, you never know. We might be related somehow, sometime.

Charlie: Well, maybe.

Marshall: How has the island changed since when you first came?

Charlie: Oh, it's changed a lot. I can remember the store down here. They didn't keep much in it, but they had a few cans of canned milk and they sold hot dogs. And they always had a big wheel of cheese that they would take and slice a hunk out of it. When I was coming out of Head Harbor, I used to come by Gracie's house. Gracie would come out with a list, "Would you get this stuff at the store for me and have them put it on my bill?" "Okay."

Marshall: Who was Gracie?

Charlie: That was Jim Jenkins's wife. She was a little bit—

Marshall: She was a little bit not there?

Charlie: So was he. She was always telling, "Jim, put your tongue back in your mouth or people will think you are foolish." He used to take a little something.

Marshall: What other kinds of changes have you really noticed?

Charlie: Less people and less fishermen. I noticed the Hancock County fishermen are moving in, and they've taken our territory because we don't fish there anymore. And they won't let us come back into it. Now, that is something that's going to have to be settled someday. As I see, Isle au Haut is a dying island.

Marshall: As far as fishing, or all the way around?

Charlie: All the way around. I figure when the taxes get so high that the people can't afford it, why they'll sell and the summer people will move in, and they'll take over.

Marshall: So the year-rounders will just be catering to the summer folk?

Charlie: They'll move off and go someplace else. They'll be some of them stay here and caretake, but—

Marshall: What have been some of the good changes you have seen?

Charlie: Well, we have electric lights for one thing and the telephone.

Marshall: In that order?

Charlie: Yeah. I kinda pushed that a little bit.

Marshall: The electricity or telephone?

Charlie: The telephone, because Bud and Ann Blaisdell was down in Gooden's house. He slipped and fell and broke a couple of ribs. She was down there three days and couldn't get help. No phone.

Marshall: Nobody to send up the road?

Charlie: You couldn't get up the road.

Marshall: How come you couldn't get up the road?

Charlie: Well, evidently it was plowed out, but it was icy, and she couldn't leave him. So I looked it all over and I told them, I says, "Why don't you extend the telephone service down to

the house? There is no reason why that girl has to be down there with her husband and not be able to get help when she needs it.” Guglielmo, he fought tooth and nail on that.

Marshall: Against?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: He liked the isolation?

Charlie: Well, it was really funny. They put the telephone line in and I noticed there was a pile of wire going into Guglielmo’s cellar window. Well, figured it was telephone wire. Well, I take that wire and wrap it around my trailer ball and drive off the road somewhere why that would take care of that. Then, I got to thinking, well, Rob DeWitt, he was the repairman, and he’ll have to repair it. So I didn’t do that.

Marshall: So as a courtesy to Rob, you didn’t take Tom’s telephone wire. So you listed some of the bad changes. What other bad changes you remember seeing over the years?

Charlie: I don’t know. The summer people, I guess; they seem to take right over. Well, it’s the island’s fault. They should have put them over there on the Point and kept them over there. It’s the only bad thing about the Point there. You can’t land there because that’s their private property. But, they can come down here and use our dock. Park their cars and everything there. It’s not right. But, people have to live with it.

Marshall: How do you usually spend your days here now?

Charlie: I’m busy around. I go up and take care of my cats. I got entrusted with two cats. Do a little maintenance every now and then you have to do to keep caught up.

Marshall: What are some of the happiest times when you have been on the island that you recollect?

Charlie: When I had my boat—well, that was a stupid thing to do. I bought that boat ‘cause I thought Sally would be more comfortable in it. She had her own chair; she had a heater and a windshield wiper. It was a bigger boat. Had I known it was going to be so much of a problem, I would have called up my ex-boss and had him pick me up a 14-foot Global Mastercraft. Put it on a trailer. And I would have gone up to pick it up for less than \$10,000, much less.

Marshall: But, you describe that boat as being part of your happiest times?

Charlie: Yeah, it was nice to be able to go and come and not be tied to a boat schedule as I am now.

Marshall: How well do you know the island and the surrounding waters?

Charlie: I know. I can go around the island inside and out. I can go places where some people can’t go.

Marshall: Some people can't go or some people shouldn't go?

Charlie: Shouldn't. I've been a lot of places. I like the island. It's homey; that's where my family came from. We came from the Hamiltons over there in Duck Harbor. Sol [Solomon Hamilton], Jr., he had 11 boys and two girls. I remember Great Grammy; she was a little thing. She must have been quite a woman—13 kids. That house wasn't much bigger than this living room. I don't know where they stacked them all.

Marshall: So about a 20' × 20' and that was it?

Charlie: I don't think it was that even. Somebody in the family burnt it down anyway, because Uncle Charles Hamilton, he was coming down from Rockland with a boatload of furniture. He was going to establish residence in Duck Harbor. And somebody in the family went over and burnt the place down. So when he pulled into the harbor, why there was still smoke coming up out of the cellar. Not a blade of grass was burnt all the way around it.

Marshall: Just the house and that was it?

Charlie: Just the house.

Marshall: Do you remember Solomon Hamilton, Sr.?

Charlie: Nope, he died before my time. He was born in 1820. I don't know. My grandmother said there was an Indian chief in the family somewhere. So it must have been Sol, Sr.

Marshall: Were there Indians still on the island?

Charlie: Nope.

Marshall: I had heard a story of three Indians that stayed on.

Charlie: I don't know. I've been over there at the yard—the cemetery over there in Duck Harbor. My grandmother told me that there were three sailors buried outside of the yard underneath the tree that's there.

Marshall: Three sailors from where?

Charlie: Shipwrecked.

Marshall: These were just three bodies that washed ashore?

Charlie: They probably came ashore or died or something.

Marshall: Did they hit the island or a ledge off the island or out to sea?

Charlie: I don't know. She never said.

Marshall: You remember Sol Hamilton, Jr.?

Charlie: No, I never met him. He died before. The only reason I remember Great Grammy was when I was down here every Sunday, Grandpa and Grammy used to jump in the old Nash and go over to Duck Harbor for dinner.

Marshall: The Nash was the car?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: The old Nash mobile. Not many people remember those.

Charlie: The old man brought that down, I guess.

Marshall: I understand they created the road in 1903 or 1904? Was that Sol Hamilton, Sr., or Jr.?

Charlie: Must have been Junior.

Marshall: 'Cause before how did you get to—

Charlie: To Duck Harbor? That must have been the crossroads. What they call the crossroads now?

Marshall: Was it just a trail?

Charlie: This island used to have trails all over.

Marshall: Have you walked all of them?

Charlie: Nope. Some of them I have walked and some I haven't. I walked the Goat Trail because I did a lot of hunting down there when I was living with my uncle there in Head Harbor. I used to bring home ducks and deer. I shot two deer a year. I shot all the ducks I wanted.

Marshall: So two deer would pretty much keep you through the winter?

Charlie: Yeah. These guys take more than that now. I see they had one in the back of the truck.

Marshall: We won't talk about that now. I don't want to get anyone in trouble. There are a couple trails right behind your house that go up to the top of the mountain.

Charlie: There is one here that goes over to Sawyers Notch. I have been over there. That's beautiful over there.

Marshall: You'll have to show me where that trail begins. It's right behind my house, isn't it? I haven't been back there.

Charlie: You can just walk to the Notch anyway. Susie McDonald had her father down here. He came out here with two canes. He could hardly walk. He got better. Somehow, he got hold of a spray can and he went into the woods. A lot of times I went to Sawyers Notch. I'd look up there and I'd be standing there and there would three different trails—take your pick. Seems every time he went into the woods, he sprayed on the trees.

Marshall: He sprayed a different blaze? Did they all end up at Sawyer Notch?

Charlie: They went that way anyway.

Marshall: You just picked the path that you knew.

Charlie: When I came out here, I made a trail. I wanted to come out on the crossroads just above Gooden Grant's. I got three-quarters of the way down here when I'd come to another trail. Why, I'd stop and I'd cross that and continue on. Bill Stevens, after I left, he went down there, and he went all over hell. He took the scenic route.

Marshall: You been all around the island by boat?

Charlie: Oh, yeah.

Marshall: Figured as much. Been swimming in the pond?

Charlie: Oh yeah.

Marshall: You went hauling for yourself, but you also went with others?

Charlie: I had my own boat down there. I hauled my traps. Elmer and I, we doubled up. One day we'd go in his boat and one day he'd go in my boat. We were hauling. I liked my boat better because you could start at 7 in the morning and by 3 or 3:30, you're all done for the day. Hauling both gears. Going in his boat, it was 7–7. He had a 38-footer, big boat. He couldn't go places I could go.

We were down there in back of Bungie Head [low point of western side of entrance to Head Harbor]. I had a trap in a hole down there. I nosed her in, he grabbed onto it, and he started hauling. We had a bore tide—went out and left us there. She canted over 'cause she was deep. She drew five feet of water running. She canted over and the bait barrel come up and jammed him in the legs. The lobster barrel too! He was hollering like a burglar, "Get me out of here." "Take care, it will be back pretty soon." Water cools—

Marshall: So when the tide came back, it set you up right. You could get out.

Charlie: Yup! Put her in reverse and backed out. Hauled out that trap—there might be a lobster in it.

Marshall: And was there?

Charlie: I don't remember. But, I had one down there in Eastern Ear gut. I put in a hole. I had a guy that come in there and dropped one on top of it. So I hauled his up and I straightened it out. The next day, I went back out and he was right on top of me again. I curled it all up and cut her right in half. Tied it in great big long ends. And put it back down there.

Marshall: That's kind of the warning sign?

Charlie: The next day, he had the trap back there with a new warp on it. I hauled it up and cut him off.

Marshall: So when you cut him off, what do you do? You haul in his trap. Take it and then cut the warp off or—

Charlie: Haul it up, cut it off, and throw it away. He came into Head Harbor. Bert Nevells was aboard his boat. It was foggy that day. I heard them out there hollering. He was accusing Bert of cutting him away.

Marshall: Might have been, might not have been. Might have been you?

Charlie: Might have been one of those, might have been anybody.

Marshall: You really enjoyed fishing at Head Harbor?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: Your most fun!

Charlie: That was good fishing there. I could talk to my grandfather. I asked him one day, "How is so and so as a fisherman?" He said, "Bury him in claws."

Marshall: Bury him in what?

Charlie: Bury him in claws. Yeah. He was a song and dance man at one time.

Marshall: Your grandfather was?

Charlie: Yeah. We got pictures of him in top hat, cane, spats.

Marshall: Where was this?

Charlie: I don't know whether if it was here. He had a house over in Rockland, too. In fact, he had two houses in Rockland: one on Trinity Street—I liked that house—and one on North Main Street.

Marshall: Does it seem that things often don't go as planned here? In other words, you got interference with bad weather, many things go wrong all at once, or getting the wrong order from the mainland, or leaving your mainland car keys here, etc.?

Charlie: Well, I never ran into that problem.

Marshall: It's so ingrained into you what to do.

Charlie: Take a spare set of keys with me. I did go over there once without my wallet, though. And I had my license in there. That was a concern.

Marshall: Was it enough of a concern to keep you from fishing?

Charlie: No, I kept on driving.

Marshall: Well, talk about upsetting Gooden.

Charlie: I was out there at the Net Ledges, one of those beautiful days. You just don't feel like working at all. But, you know you had to get out there and do something. So I was out at the Net Ledges [rock exposures at the mouth of Head Harbor] and I was hauling a trap. I had hauled all those in the harbor. I had the trap almost up and I heard this 'shsssss.' I looked around and he had me right dead, right center wide open in his boat. I fired the trap one way and the buoys, I kicked her into gear, and hit the throttle, and spun the wheel. He went in by me and he see that it was my trap and buoys. So he never said a goddamn word. He went back over to the Western Head hauling. Well, I stayed out there all day long fartin' around. Finally, I saw him go into the harbor and take on the mooring. I started from the Net Ledges and I opened that girl up. I took all the slack out of the accelerator there. I had her in second gear and she was hauling a wall of water behind her about five feet high. Scare ya to look at it. I went down the side of his boat and I had about that much room.

Marshall: About six inches between you and him.

Charlie: Yup! I went by, and when I went by, I sucked all of the water out from underneath of his boat. Well, when she flopped over, why he was in a barrel filling pockets. All I saw was these two legs sticking up out of the barrel.

Marshall: You took him 'arse over teakettle and stuck his head and rocking his boat, dumped him right in his own bait barrel?

Charlie: Yup! I pulled right around him, took my mooring on, and I said, "Hi Gooden! How did it go today?" And he was just standing there with the pickle juice running off him.

Marshall: Pickle juice? I understand your grandfather got rolled over at Black Point Shoal.

Charlie: Yeah, he had. Back in the '40s, the government put a clamp on marine engines—he had an old Red Wing in there. So he got in touch with my old man up there in Boston. The old man went to the junkyard and found a '41. I guess it was a '41 Buick-8. He sent it down to him.

Marshall: Inline 8-cylinder for a Buick? That's some power.

Charlie: The old man, they put that in there and he ran that for 10 years. Loved it! So he ordered a brand new one. He had to come in over there at Billings Diesel. They put it in for him and they painted his boat up all pretty. They even put a curlicue on the bow of it on each side. He come down here some proud of that boat. She was built in Vinalhaven. Forrest Maker built her. She had a weird design. She had a lot of flare in her. But the rudder post was right in the middle of her to make her turn quicker. It didn't work. She was bad on a fallowing sea. She was broach. He was out there anyway—Black Point. He was always out there fishing around those ledges. She hove up on him. He had Henry Ericson—he was a son-in-law—married Rena.

Marshall: That's Kendra's great uncle?

Charlie: Yeah, would have been, I guess.

Marshall: Uncle Henry they called him?

Charlie: He was sternman. Grandpa saw her heave up. He cuffed her around, but she didn't come around quick enough. He caught it right on the left of the bow. It rolled them over. Stove the cabin off and stove the cabin in. She had cedar planking on the cabin there, broke that all out. The old man replaced that.

Marshall: So it completely rolled the boat?

Charlie: Yup. The only thing that was keeping her afloat was half a tank of gasoline. She was half empty. Charlie Cleveland towed her in. I took her right in on the beach in there at Head Harbor on Gooden's dock. The tide was coming, luckily. So we put her nose in there and snubbed her up. I never knew that a 32-foot boat could hold so damn much water. We had five-gallon buckets bailing, and I had a 4" pump. As soon as the carburetor started coming up out of the water, why I got in there with my wrenches. And I took the carburetor out and I peeled her right down and took the head off. We got the starter and the generator off her. Took it ashore. I oiled and put kerosene on the valves and popped the valves. We put the starter and the generator—after we flushed them all out—in the oven and let them bake overnight, along with the spark plugs. The next afternoon at 3 o'clock, I had her running. He was ready to go haul.

Marshall: Who wanted to go out haul?

Charlie: Grandpa. He didn't have no windshield or anything. He put a lobster crate up there and it was good enough.

Marshall: Uncle Henry and your grandfather were both on the boat when it rolled? What happened to them when it rolled? Did they get tossed off?

Charlie: Grandpa got tossed overboard and Uncle Henry got tossed overboard. And the house come down and hit him in the back of the head and knocked the wind out of him. As it was, I guess Charlie Cleveland saw the boat over there and, all of a sudden, he looked over and it was gone. He came over to check it out. Good thing he did. He fished Grandpa and Uncle Henry aboard. Offered him a bottle. Grandpa allowed he didn't need that.

Marshall: Now, what about the time when your grandfather went to the hospital? Is there a story behind that?

Charlie: He had a heart attack they said. It was one dark night. There were no stars out, no moon. The old man jumped in his boat and he went across to Vinalhaven. He got Dr. Earl and brought him back over. I guess Dr. Earl gave Grandpa a shot of something and it straightened him out. He was at the house there, at the Grove's house.

Marshall: Which house was that?

Charlie: The yellow one—Harry Groves owned that. The next day, he was out there at the bottom of the hill. He had his traps on the back there, and he was putting them on a barrel and going through them, fixing them, putting new lathes on them—fix 'em all up, getting them ready. Next thing I knew, he was walking up the hill and he had one on each arm, two 70-pound traps on each arm—a man with a heart attack.

Marshall: Sounds like heart attack be damned, he still had work to do.

Charlie: He was over at the hospital and said they weren't going to do anything for him. So he checked himself out.

Marshall: What about the time your house was struck by lightning?

Charlie: Oh, this is the new addition here. That's the old one there. That was the master bedroom, which we didn't use. I kept the lawnmower underneath that window. There was a big tree over there and the lightning hit that tree and blew it all to hell. So one came over and went through the side of the lawn there and dug a hole and come up underneath the window and blew all the floor up into the ceiling.

Marshall: The lightning bolt came through from the tree and into the house and blew a hole through the floor?

Charlie: I had the door between. That was our bedroom there where the kitchen is. I had the door closed, and it went down through the floor and come back up through. It blew the floor up into the ceiling.

Marshall: In your bedroom?

Charlie: It went between my side of the bed and I had Dana's crib there. I think that bolt probably would have gotten the both of us.

Marshall: How did you luck out?

Charlie: Well, I was talking with Sal. I told her I wasn't spending another night in this house. I'm leaving. I am going with you or without you. We had words. She packed up and we went on the

boat and went home. My half-sister [Elizabeth 'Betty' Amazeen] and Russell MacDonald were living in the house over there.

Marshall: Was that Ben's house?

Charlie: No, that's Colleen's house now. That lightning bolt did a job. It went over between—she had two towers over there—two water towers. Blew one of them all to hell. There was a pile of bricks and it looked like someone put a snowplow right through them. And another bolt went down underneath the Keidel's house and took the frame out of the picture window in front. It went up underneath the house and went through.

Marshall: You talking about Colleen's house?

Charlie: I can't even remember her name now. It took her china cabinet and broke all the dishes in it. Another went out by the house and Noyes had an outhouse out there. First time it's ever been cleaned out. And was that cleaned out! It blew that all to hell.

Marshall: This hill, this area, this has a history of being hit by lightning?

Charlie: I know.

Marshall: That's why I put lightning rods on my house.

Charlie: That night there, someone almost accused you of putting flash-bang behind me. I was walking across my driveway. The lightning came out and bam. Boy, that was close! I don't know if it struck you or if it struck me. But I was moving. I came back after that. Somehow we got hold of a guy. He was a math teacher at Or[___] High. He did all the Texas tile network. He did all the lightning rods. We got him. He came down with my oldest son John and he put the lightning rods on this house. Everybody said, "Jesus Christ, why do you want to put all the money up there for?" "So I can sleep nights." That Gordon Chapin, he was always at me, "Why do you want to put all that money up there for?" It was only \$361 bucks for peace of mind. I sleep good.

Marshall: Any good stories about Del [Delton], your father?

Charlie: Not really. He took me on a ride once, a steamboat from Boston to Nantucket. He asked me all the way across the bay if I was seasick yet. I come across the Rockland Bay with my grandfather. He had a line with a loop on it he put down over the steering wheel and he had a cuddy there. He'd get in and he'd pull on that and that rope steered the boat. Grammy and I are standing in there with him and nothing but oil and smoke. "You sick yet?" "Nope." Watching all those belts going around, that was something.

Marshall: Western Ear shack—was there a Western Ear shack?

Charlie: Well, there is now. Somebody had a house built there.

Marshall: Welch?

Charlie: Don't know, they never came back, I don't think.

Marshall: I am trying to think of—your Charles Hamilton. Didn't he in the 1930s have the first car?

Charlie: Could have been. I worked one day with him. That was enough.

Marshall: Why so?

Charlie: The old man, he got in touch with me. I was living up there in Portland. "I'm going to go away for a few days. Can you come down and take care of my weirs?" I didn't know anything about weirs. "I know that." So I came down. We went out the first night. I saw flashing fish all over the place. I had Maurice and Charlie Hamilton with me. "There's no fish here. It'd be a waste of time to shut off." "Well, I don't know, it looks pretty good to me." "Let's shut her off." Well, I didn't know how much work that was. That was a lot of work shutting that Duck Harbor off. We got it shut off finally. We ran out of twine. I said, "I know where there is some twine. I'll go down to Red Bank and get some twine down there."

Marshall: Where's Red Bank?

Charlie: That's in Duck Harbor, up in. I can remember that ledge that is out in the middle of Duck Harbor. There used to be a wharf and fish house there. Boats used to come in and ground and they'd unload dried fish. Well anyway, we went and pieced it out. I called up the guy in Rockland. I told him I had a load of fish down here, I thought. The weir was full anyway. Yup, he'd come right down. He come right down. I don't know the first thing about this. He says, "No problems." We got in the dory. "Don't worry, we'll go." We put the purse seine in. Of course, the fish were coming out. They were jumping out over the corks. So I told Uncle Charles, "Haul 'em corks up there so they can't jump out." Some kind of fish—dogfish—is in there chasing them.

Marshall: Chasing the herring?

Charlie: He just sat there. I give him hell, "Get your ass moving and get the goddamn corks and haul them up over the stern of the skiff." He got it popped out anyway. I think I made something like \$12 and something. That was my share. At the time, they each got their share and they paid off. They were in the black again. The old man, he came back, he was happy. That was my weir tending. I want no part of that.

Marshall: That was your one and only?

Charlie: Yeah.

Marshall: Let me ask you just one more final thing. What is it about Isle au Haut that makes it special for you?

Charlie: I don't know. The house is mine, the land is mine. I was supposed to have an acre and three quarters here, but they got me down to nine-tenths of an acre. Hey, I can't take it with me.

Marshall: Less to mow.

Charlie: I had to buy a damn mower. I think I got four of them in there.

Marshall: Four mowers in various conditions?

Charlie: They'll all run. I had to go buy a John Deere tractor to mow the damn place. I'm going to have to mow it again if this weather keeps up.

Marshall: The weather has certainly changed from probably as you remember it as a boy.

Charlie: I can remember when we used to have snowstorms, real ones. I like to forget those about Boston. The old man would come in 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, "Hey, it's snowing out. Get busy!"

Marshall: Shoveling?

Charlie: Yes, we lived right on the end of the block. And I had 10-foot sidewalks—front and the side and a three-footer on the back. They had to be shoveled. When you shoveled the steps off, which were big and wide, you had to shovel right out to the street, and then you had to shovel back so the taxi cabs could come in and pick the people up so they could get to work. Stupid kids. Then we would go around after I had finished and shovel people's walks off after for a couple of bucks.

Marshall: I think we were all stupid kids making less than what we should have earned. Do you have any other stories that you recollect that we didn't talk about?

Charlie: Things I used to get away with.

Marshall: Like?

Charlie: In Boston—I could go anywhere in Boston and ride the trolley anywhere for free. I could go downtown, to the movies, or I could go to the beach.

Marshall: How did you get off for free?

Charlie: I knew how to sneak in, get on the trolley, and ask the conductor for a transfer. I could go anywhere in Boston after that.

Marshall: So you figured the system out quick and early.

Charlie: Oh, yeah. I had some help.

Marshall: I am sure.

Charlie: We had a good bunch of kids. We didn't get into anything bad.

Marshall: Any of those memories translate up here to Isle au Haut?

Charlie: No.

Marshall: A lot of kids you brought up here on the island?

Charlie: My kids, they brought a skateboard down of all places. I confiscated the damn things.

Marshall: That sounded like an emergency room waiting to happen.

Charlie: I think if I sawed the damn thing in half it would have been payment for somebody.

Marshall: Well, Charlie, thank you for sitting here and talking with me. And recollecting some of the things you remember. You said you've written down some notes. I hope you make those available to the Historical Society.

This concludes my interview with Charlie Bowen.