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## *Labor, Landscape, and Four Virginia Watermen<sup>i</sup>*

In Mathews County, Virginia, men crab, oyster, and fish in workboats or sail on commercial vessels. They leave home hemmed in by 340 miles of shoreline, tidal wetlands, stands of pine trees jutting into the water, and small, brushy islands at a distance in the haze. On shore, a few less than nine thousand people live in Mathews County, many of them retirees in second homes and care facilities, or commuters to military and shipbuilding installations nearby.<sup>ii</sup> Once numbering in the thousands, only a few hundred commercial watermen work between the York and Rappahannock Rivers today. “It was hard work, but I didn’t mind it.” former waterman Gilbert Hall remembers. “I was young. I never liked that kind of work, fishing. My daddy was good to me. He worked me to death, but then you gotta make boys work.”<sup>iii</sup> Young and old men understood that fishing together, and sharing the stories about fishing, transferred the value of hard work between generations of men who had navigated changes that redefined the daily nature of work for them. In oral histories, the Middle Peninsula’s watermen today describe drawing on these skills and values as they respond to intertwined environmental and economic instabilities, from species collapse to labor migrations to climate change.

For watermen fishing through the twentieth century, good seasons of productivity and profit have punctuated a longer overall decline in the amount of work. Informed by generations of local knowledge, men who continue to fish for a living in the Chesapeake Bay are sensitive to how economic and ecological imbalances affect everyday life for their communities, and their cultural resilience is rooted in values shared between men. Watermen in Mathews County, we argue, used fishing technology and environmental knowledge to adapt to change and pursue a particular ideal: individual economic autonomy through physical labor. But over the last century, accelerating shifts in technology and the Chesapeake’s environmental quality, harvests, and

demographics have proved some fishing technologies and labor regimes obsolete. As local landmarks erode from the shore and commercial fishing on the Chesapeake becomes financially untenable for many, watermen explain these challenges as only the latest among many they have already weathered.<sup>iv</sup>

However universal “hard work” might seem, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century development of the Chesapeake Bay’s diverse water industries transformed the meaning and payoff of work. During the nineteenth century and onward, the demands of cities like Baltimore, and the steamer lines and roads leading to them, created employment for skilled people in relatively distant rural areas like Mathews County. Although men on the Middle Peninsula built and captained merchant ships and manned fishing vessels long before the Civil War, the need for dry goods, produce, and seafood for cities created a wider demand for steamship captains and workers to carry freight beyond Virginia. Watermen who harvested oysters, crabs, menhaden, and other fish likewise profited. The waters and banks of the historic York River and the Chesapeake teemed with steamships and industrial fish-packing houses and canneries, the docks crowded with families and crews of men moving crates of colorful watermelons, cantaloupes, and daffodils.<sup>v</sup> Mechanization, demographics, and fluctuating fish populations and profits have changed the historic landscape. Increased harvesting efficiency also may have caused the decline in catches and busts that began to disappoint watermen by the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>vi</sup>

Economic change has depressed the overall population of Mathews County, which has remained stagnant as Virginia’s population explodes. Here, the water is calm and winding, and skinny pines, buoys, osprey nests, and low marshes leave clear views of the creek’s or harbor’s opposite shore. The Mathews tip of the Middle Peninsula, once connecting mariners to consumers nationwide, seems isolated to young residents; they take the road up the peninsula or

bridges south across the river to look for work. A tourist taking in the bay or the river finds it pristine, but to an experienced waterman it looks empty. “We don't have many watermen no more. We don't. Like I say, we used to have three or four hundred boats working in the James River and now we only have thirty or forty,” Crabber JC West explains. “But today is so much different,” he continues, “with these young boys now. I told them, I said, brother, y'all should maybe try to find a good job on the land....And that ain't the way it ought to be. I think if anybody wants to work the water, go for it and work hard and you'll survive.”<sup>vii</sup>

Our use of oral history sources foregrounds work experiences within historical contexts which seem interconnected to watermen: military and industrial and infrastructure expansion along the coast, corporatization in the seafood industry, technology, labor organizing, and climate change. Oral accounts from and about watermen provide a lens through which we can observe how they made meaning of their lives in the places and occupations that ground their identities. These firsthand accounts provide hindsight perspective on the vocational choices these men had considered, new data points that allow for individualized contextualization of surrounding, larger changes.<sup>viii</sup>

Performing skilled, physical, and extractive work, commercial watermen have persisted through adaptation and shaped imaginings of the North American coasts. Their identities have been carefully cultivated through family and work connections across generations and for the public view, even as everyday survival strategies have evolved over time. Indeed, studies of the U.S. seafood industry demonstrate that the relationship between watermen, politics, and science and technology is complex under the surface.<sup>ix</sup> From Mississippi to New Brunswick, watermen face threats like suburbanization in their coastal communities, shifting fish populations, predatory corporations and processors, and pushback from environmentalists and recreational

fishermen.<sup>x</sup> In studies from shrimpers in Texas, oyster rakers in North Carolina, and crabbers in Maryland, watermen weather booms and busts in their local waters with an adherence to an independent and timeless self-image, centering work as a “way of life.”<sup>xi</sup>

While watermen appear beleaguered by the uncontrollable social and environmental changes transforming the coastline, they consciously contribute to those changes. Historians argue that mirroring agricultural shifts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, watermen navigated painful choices about whether to embrace or to fight privatization, major seafood corporations, and new technologies.<sup>xii</sup> Scholars debate whether in particular historical moments, watermen have played into a tragedy-of-the-commons story, overharvesting and precipitating long-term declines in catches and mirroring stories of agricultural decline.<sup>xiii</sup> Building regional seafood industries, white watermen captured and perpetuated inequities in the workforce, devaluing the work of women on boats as “just for fun,” and relegating Black and brown watermen to lowest-paid positions with few opportunities for advancement.<sup>xiv</sup> All watermen carry regional, racial, gendered, and capitalist baggage into a global market.

Watermen are neither isolated nor provincial, and the salt water and its harvest connect them to national conversations. Their knowledge of local landscapes is profound, alongside their knowledge and experiences in regional politics, contemporary labor struggles, and national discussions about conservation. Rather than a battle between stubborn traditionalists and progressive policy-makers, at odds are multiple ways of knowing a place. Watermen, according to anthropologist Michael Paolisso, maintain that, “It is only through experiential knowledge that one can learn what can be learned about the blue crab.” Christine Keiner’s *The Oyster Question* points out that policymakers have changed course often since the late twentieth-century decline of the fisheries, sometimes but not always privileging quantitative, scientific epistemologies over

watermen's occupational knowledge sourced from the bay's ecology. In Keiner's argument about Maryland's watermen, twentieth-century work days were defined by "dignified self-employment" reliant on accumulated, local knowledge and the bay as a commons. In Virginia, oft-told stories of hard work, and real and fictive kinship lines along which they are retold, frame knowledge, debates about that knowledge, and the pursuit of self-employment for watermen.<sup>xv</sup>

How individual watermen navigate the intersection of race and manhood in their work is also crucial to understanding watermen's thinking about work. Their battles against price fluctuations and declining seafood populations are inseparable from the power that white captains have had over Black crew members whose labor built the Chesapeake seafood industries in the mid-nineteenth century during enslavement and the Civil War's aftermath. In our interviews, bonds of kinship between men rarely cross racial lines. Further, historians and anthropologists who study gender, masculinity, and manhood recognize the link between dignified self-employment and performing manhood. What happens when -- through regulation, competition, or species collapse -- there is no more work? How do male-identifying watermen's gendered and racial identities change or persist when their self-employment and income for their families is threatened? While upholding identities largely as white men engaged in a commercial enterprise, watermen adapt to stay in the place and near the people that gave their work meaning. Pulling histories of environmental and demographic change into the story of the bay helps explain why some watermen insist on staying on the water, why others do not, and why they meet the greatest threats to the Chesapeake with stoicism.<sup>xvi</sup>

As the environments and demographics of Eastern Virginia change, community and academic interest in salvaging stories of the coast has grown. The Tidewater Main Street Development Project at the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program contains over two hundred

interviews conducted between 2009 and 2019, and donated audio and visual material pertaining to work and rural development in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck regions of Virginia. As community interest grew along with increased collaboration with local historical societies and preservation groups, the project's geographic and subject coverage expanded to include interviewees from surrounding counties, with a broader focus on the water industry, environmental issues, and local folklore. The project has produced multiple student fieldwork trips, community workshops and panels, conference presentations, podcasts, and a collaboration with the Southern Foodways Alliance at the University of Mississippi.<sup>xvii</sup>

Interviewees were initially selected based on recommendations from community contacts, and later through word of mouth or requests by collaborating organizations. For each fieldwork trip, a different set of research questions was selected in collaboration with community groups. Interviewees such as public servants, watermen, or restaurateurs across several counties required careful planning in creating effective interview guides, a set of questions and literature pre-circulated among students and staff. Our project included interviews focusing on a specific place, such as historical districts or homes, as well as larger subjects like experiences with processing menhaden (a North American fish from the herring family often used for fish by-products like fertilizer) or in the Merchant Marines during World War II. Each of these interviews were conducted in a life history format covering family history to the present.<sup>xviii</sup> The core group of questions concerning work, education, family life, and community change--as well as the narrator's ability to guide the interview--remained the same. Interviewees were found by word of mouth, publicizing in the local newspapers, and through regional historical societies and preservation groups. Because of the exodus of Black watermen and farmworkers discussed below, the number of Black interviewees reflects the low contemporary population of the Middle

Peninsula rather than higher historical population; we rely on census data and newspaper accounts concerning Black residents in order to tell a more complete story. Below, four watermen of four different generations and strategies, three white and one Black, share their stories of their beloved workplaces on the water. Their accounts are supported by the words of their contemporaries, demonstrating how watermen weathered those shifts by holding fast to hard work.

From the end of the steamboat era, through the Depression and World War II, to mechanization at midcentury, and finally the aging of the waterman population, each man employed different strategies to stay at work. They adapted to changing economic and environmental conditions, leaving, reentering, and supplementing water work and engaging in different fisheries. Additionally, these men all descend from multiple generations of Mathews watermen, their narratives, racial identities, and knowledge deeply rooted in the work and region. As they negotiate shifting environments, the four narrators express reliance on previous generations for occupational knowledge, personal identity, and attachment to place. We highlight this exchange beginning with the oldest narrator, Charles Victor Hudgins, and move chronologically to Gilbert Hall, Charles Lee Forrest, and finally the youngest waterman, Kevin Godsey. These men learned to see the world around them through history split into generations, their own lives revealing the repercussions of ecological changes and decisions made by previous generations in this place.

The oldest interview and narrator in the collection, Charles Victor “C.V.” Hudgins (1905-1998) initially explained shifting shorelines through his view of Winter Harbor from his home. “It was so far contrast from today...all where that grass is there now was nothing but water . . . [and] sails. Many a time. Wasn’t woods like it is now.” C.V. accentuates the changes in the shore



with the changes in technology and work on the ships. “I had been down there many times probably and I’d say, ‘Cousin Anna, I see the mast. They’re at the mouth of Winter Harbor, but they can’t get in.’ They didn’t have it dredged out then. And they’d have to wait for the tide. Many a time she’s gotten me to go down to that creek gate, and there was boatbuilding in there then. Yes, there was boatbuilding. Very active. I’ve seen boats were built there and launched out of that creek. I don’t know how they got a boat out of it, it was different than what it is now. Crabs can’t get out of there now hardly.”<sup>xix</sup>

C.V. situated his family in relation to this work on Winter Harbor, placing his name carefully in relation to long-gone Hudgins patriarchs, men with given names like Argyle, Genius, and Macon Georgia. He took time to spell the tough ones (“O-t-h-n-i-e-l...it’s a Bible name.”) and to sort them by distance from his own line (“Elijah Hudgins, I think, was a different breed.”). He put their homesteads and places of business together, revealing a nineteenth-century Mathews County overrun with Hudginses, busy building the ice plant, manning the store counter, tanking the oil, operating the mill, and running homeplaces up and down the lane.<sup>xx</sup>

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, between the careers of C.V.’s grandfather Argyle and C.V. himself, employment in maritime industries diversified to keep pace with changing demands for shipping, seafood, and produce.<sup>xxi</sup> As one of the last generations of the steamboat era, many men like C.V. Hudgins left fishing and boatbuilding occupations behind, changing their relationship to the water without sacrificing connection to place. In describing the modern work of moving product across the bay, C.V. evoked earlier family histories of hard work. His family’s solution to the decline of steamboating--to leave it--aided in facilitating that decline and the changes in the landscape C.V. observed.

Born in 1905, C.V.'s identity is rooted in the work of generations of men with a common surname. Along with his Hudgins cousins, he grew up listening to stories of the Mathews County Hudgins progenitors, a set of brothers from Ireland (or Wales, or England, depending on the storyteller) who in the 1740s built boats in England and sailed them to the Middle Peninsula. C.V.'s cousin Clyde remembers, "Well, the first Hudginses that came over from England were very industrious. ... So, my granddaddy always told me that the first group, the first Hudginses that came over, and their children and their wives, was that type of people."<sup>xxii</sup> C.V. was largely uninterested: "I'd say, 'Mama, I don't want to hear no more about them damn Irishmens.'"<sup>xxiii</sup> But twentieth-century Hudgins family men understood their common origin gave them the opportunity to pursue independent work in fishing and shipping. The Hudgins family's ownership of and navigation with steamboats, buyboats, and workboats placed them at the center of water-based commerce.

C.V.'s particular Hudgins line has roots in Winter Harbor. With navigable water in guts and ditches and between peninsulas, the area was naturally conducive to sailing, preferred to the less developed overland routes. Neighbors would row their boats to each other's docks to congregate or go fishing, and on a larger scale, steamboats provided similar access but would broaden their range to farther coastlines. C.V. is one of the only interviewees old enough to remember the era of steamboats, the primary mode of transportation from Reconstruction until the mid-1930s. As Curtis Sampson, another Middle Peninsula resident, recalls, "The steamboat was the outlet to the rest of the world for us, but it was also a means of getting out, getting in, getting what you need, sending out what you don't want to try to sell."<sup>xxiv</sup> Indeed, the steamboat was responsible for connecting people to goods and resources by shipping stock for merchants, hauling fish off of work boats, and transporting people to bigger cities for medical specialists and

shopping. Curtis describes growing up with limited land access to the rest of the country, emphasizing how steamboats broadened people's social and job opportunities. As a young boy in the 1910s, he remembers listening to the whistle of the steamboat and watching the buzz of people and goods trading places as they arrived or prepared for departure to a place they had no other way of reaching. The variety of work on the water, the distances Mathews sailors went in their work, contoured the local landscape for C.V.'s generation.<sup>xxv</sup>

The enterprising Hudginses reinvented their occupation of moving things across the bay as the technology changed around them. A large uptick in steamboats between 1870 and 1885, like the famous Old Bay Line from Norfolk to Baltimore, made it possible to cut across the Chesapeake in a day. When C.V. was a teenager in the 1920s, the fleets of twelve steamship companies from Baltimore alone criss-crossed the Chesapeake; four of their routes made stops on the Middle Peninsula. The Hudginses themselves commenced operating a schooner with four engines to move freight. Clyde remembers that his father's generation of Hudginses shipped horseshoe crab meat, conchs, and both live and processed crabs to Baltimore and Washington. Their flexible career paths portray a stark contrast to previous generations of Hudginses, who were more stringently tied to agriculture and fisheries. C.V.'s father farmed through the 1920s and 1930s while many others found new opportunities elsewhere. In 1910, twenty white Hudginses (and one Black Hudgins) worked on the water. Census data reveals that by the 1920s, the sons of Mathews County farmers frequently took up new occupations as sailors on bay craft, and commercial crabbers and oystermen. Indeed, it was during this period that C.V. and his brother were broadening their exposure through their work on steamboats, the merchant marines, navy, and coast guard.<sup>xxvi</sup>

This period of opportunities for the Hudginses reflects a larger change in the water industry during the 1920s and 1930s permeating the Middle Peninsula and Chesapeake. Groups like the Virginia Good Road Association and highway commissions argued over decades for more efficient and connected road maintenance funded by the state and federal governments.<sup>xxvii</sup> Rural consumers found improved road networks and the automobile, rather than ship, the most efficient way to travel. Docks and country stores were no longer the focus of commerce, once residents could drive to the county seat or larger urban centers like Richmond or Newport News. Carl Thomas, another Mathews County resident, describes this change: “the young people left...and the people that ran the store died. And transportation got better...so, they could come up to the Courthouse when they wanted to get what they wanted to, and they didn't need these kind of stores”<sup>xxviii</sup> Some of C.V.’s relatives traded floating tankers for trucks. With the rapid decline of local stores after World War II came a similar decline in credit options for watermen and farmers, limiting their access to financial assistance and contributing to the deconstruction of the close-knit community interdependence that had previously existed in the county. As a result, these previously water-centric communities along the Chesapeake turned inland for work and consumption.<sup>xxix</sup>

Technological and economic change pulled the Hudgins men and many others in two directions: between the increasingly tenuous job prospects in the county, and that of a well-traveled worker on corporation-owned fleets. C.V.’s brother Sherwood, whose first job after leaving the family farm was as a mariner on a steamboat in the early 1920s, lost work over the next decade. He would later find work on an oil tanker carrying oil to South America before ending up in the marine department of the Gulf Oil Corporation. These jobs broadened the geographic boundaries of his work but allowed him to reside in the county throughout his career.

His cousin Aubrey converted his fishing boat into a makeshift oil tanker in 1923 and over the next decade the Hudginses began to amass steel-hulled boats specifically to haul oil products. C.V. himself passed up a career as an independent waterman to work at the Newport News naval shipyard and for the merchant marines through the 1930s, before settling on a career as salesman for marine engines after World War II.<sup>xxx</sup> He was one of many men from Mathews County to join the merchant marines and the navy; during the war twenty-two merchant marines, almost half of the county's total casualties, were lost to German U-boats off the U.S. Atlantic coast. Over two hundred others enlisted in Richmond and Norfolk for the armed service. Adaptations like joining the military, or taking a corporate job, forfeited some autonomy but allowed men like C.V. to remain involved in the shifting maritime industry. While C.V. and other men were working for others, they found ways to remain in the area that had granted their skills and knowledge regional prominence.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Boats with names of family members past and present demonstrate that the Hudginses pulled on family origins to make meaning of their hard work, the technological changes, and resulting success.<sup>xxxii</sup> Around them, their labor and the labor of others produced community change, altering work in boat sheds and sailboats and steamboats that C.V. remembers and associates with earlier generations of fishermen. The Hudginses' pursuit of new opportunities on the water facilitated the growth of roads and car culture, encouraging travel and job seekers in their community by connecting the communities they knew with broader markets and careers.<sup>xxxiii</sup> C.V. and others were able to remain in Winter Harbor, rooted in the land their families had claimed and controlled for centuries. Their work, and the work of many others transporting in-demand seafood and produce to new markets, changed the relationship between the shore and commercial watermen by connecting them to markets farther and farther afield.

Meanwhile, younger and less powerful men than C.V. relied on family and a community with fishing skills, devising new strategies to preserve autonomy and ride out a different set of economic and environmental fluctuations.

Gilbert Hall (1924-2020) of Horn Harbor was one such young waterman, born twenty years later than C.V. and raised three miles away and around thin stands of pine trees on flat land, by boat or road, south of C.V.'s home. For every question, Gilbert returned a smile and a punchy, economical response. ("T: What creek was your favorite? H: Horn Harbor, right here... Where the boats sailed out. I worked here in Horn Harbor.")<sup>xxxiv</sup> He sat upright on a chaise lounge, his feet stick-straight in front of him, in the kitchen, next to the refrigerator, in a later wing to a largely empty house yards away from the water. ("T: Tell me about living in Mathews when you were a child. H: 'Twas all right. Pretty girls. Some of them didn't pay no attention to you." "T: Tell me about this house. H: It was built in 1911. That's all I know. Talk to my grandfather.")<sup>xxxv</sup> In a more immediate way than for the Hudginses, family dynamics geographically situated the work Gilbert, his father ("Pound fisherman. Little, small man."), and grandfather did from the house.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The occupational transitions documented in Gilbert's oral histories demonstrate how the hard work of his chosen industry, pound net fishing, defined Gilbert's relationships with other watermen and work beyond Mathews. Once the centerpiece of the seafood industry in Mathews, pound fishing, a centuries-old technique that survived with limited mechanization, encouraged both shared knowledge and shared politics. Starting during the Depression, watermen's organizing efforts were predicated upon the assertion that work in the seafood industry was central to the economy of Eastern Virginia. But the cycle of booms and busts across the fisheries, and white pound fishermen's reliance on cheap, often Black, labor

pushed these “self-reliant” men to give up on pound nets. White families like the Halls relied on kinship, and the shared skills and experiences of pound fishing, to adapt.

The Hall house on Horn Harbor situated Gilbert in both his family and occupation. Gilbert says his grandfather built it "to get close to the water, ‘cause he works in the water, shad fishing and stuff, oystering."<sup>xxxvii</sup> It was home to Gilbert's immediate and extended family: his grandparents, mother and father, a cousin, and a great-aunt.<sup>xxxviii</sup> His father's only son, Gilbert contracted an illness that forced him out of school by the eighth grade.<sup>xxxix</sup> His father and grandfather filled his time with gardening on family land, fishing, and maintaining pound nets. Despite the increase in traffic and fishing witnessed (and enjoyed) by the Hudginses, and more extreme fluctuations in catches, the Halls believed pound netting had a viable future.

Pound fishing regulated the routines of Gilbert's family members and, as census records reveal, many of his immediate neighbors. Among all fishermen, it remained the most popular way to catch fish in the Mathews County of Gilbert's youth in the 1920s and 1930s. The oldest form of commercial fishing on the bay, the technique of funneling various species of fish into a net "pound," or trap, held together by stakes stuck into the riverbed, demands hard physical labor as the net is pulled up by hand by a group of men. Pound fishing was practiced up and down the Eastern seaboard and predates European colonization. It wasn't until the 1850s that it was used in New England fisheries, making their way down to the Chesapeake Bay two decades later. Their introduction into the Chesapeake revolutionized Virginia fisheries and dramatically increased their catches. The number of pound nets rose from 162 in 1880 to a peak of 2,262 nets in 1930.<sup>xl</sup>

Pound fishing takes cooperation of small groups of watermen with both physical strength and knowledge. Gilbert recognized the generational dynamic as a son who was learning but had

more strength than his father, and work brought him close to his father's neighbors, other watermen who drove stakes for their own pound nets. They became Gilbert's professional mentors and the oldest watermen he knew. His grandfather's vegetable garden and cornfield reinforced neighborly bonds through produce given away to those who did not own or work farmland. Gilbert's time tending it as a teenager pulled him into this exchange between households, perhaps unwillingly: "He raised for Tom, Dick, and Harry, for everybody. But I said, 'Well, why don't you get them to come in and do some of the work?'"<sup>xli</sup> Gilbert's labor alongside the men of his family produced tangible results which, complaints aside, reinforced interdependence between independent watermen.

During the Depression, fishermen drew on this camaraderie to organize for better seafood prices in a struggle against wholesalers in city fish markets. Editorials in the newspapers issued the rallying cry: "the financial structure of Mathews County is built around the pound net fish business which is its greatest and most productive industry." Another explained, "We believe that the time has come for all the people of Tidewater who are thus engaged to lay aside their differences and make a united effort...to save the great industry from disaster."<sup>xlii</sup> In 1936, watermen in Mathews County formed the Virginia Fisherman's Association, "every member of which is honor bound to sell no edible fish at less than 1 cent a pound."<sup>xliii</sup> (A fish called croaker from Mathews sold for fifteen cents a pound to consumers in the Richmond markets 75 miles away.) The following year, the Virginia Fisherman's Association coordinated with watermen near Hampton on the lower Chesapeake Bay to negotiate a minimum price for shad. An association of independent proprietors rather than a union, the "strike" appeared in newspapers inside of quotation marks. The men involved were only bound on their "honor" to hold the line,



leveraging their personal reputations in their communities and among people with the same vocation across the bay.<sup>xliv</sup>

During Gilbert's adulthood, watermen continued to engage in politics on behalf of the industry, defining environmental stewardship as regulation that could save the industry as well as the fish population. Immediately before and during the Second World War, the waterfronts across Virginia bustled. Newspapers reported that oyster "packing houses operating at capacity and boats bringing in bumper loads," and blue crab and shad "landings," the number brought from sea to land, were both on the rise.<sup>xliv</sup> But after the war, declines in harvests and prices of some species and imported seafood diminished Chesapeake seafood profits. By the late 1940s, watermen sought to head off a crisis by seeking a voice in the state and federal policies dictating marine law enforcement, conservation, and seafood imports.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Across the state they again organized watermen's associations, in one group's words, "to strive, by cooperative effort, to head off threatened depletion of our seafood industry."<sup>xlvi</sup> In 1953, the Northumberland Watermen's Association, with 121 members, had succeeded in realizing their lobbying agenda on an annual budget of under \$100: the Virginia legislature passed a resolution opposing Pennsylvanian industries' practice of dumping coal mine waste into the bay, pointing out-of-state to explain the causes of pollution and decline in profits. While laying blame elsewhere for environmental degradation, the Virginia legislature opposed fees on pound nets, and opened 95,000 acres of offshore oyster beds to dredgers, who enjoyed a newly extended season.<sup>xlvi</sup> In 1967, members of the Chesapeake Bay Watermen's Association applied to join the AFL-CIO food processors' union to bargain for better prices for their landings.<sup>xlix</sup> According to the former president of the Watermen's Association, Tangier Islander and crabber Milton Parks, the move united the organizing power of the watermen and the wholesalers: "They

had power to cause strikes or anything then, because the employees at those processing houses belonged to the same part of the AFL that we did. Therefore, they had to honor our problems. ...We didn't suffer many strikes.”<sup>l</sup> Their most recent actions took place in the 1980s, when men stayed home a week at a time to drive up crab prices. When one waterman went out anyway, Gilbert's son Kerry remembers, other crabbers cut his dredges loose and put sugar in his boat's gas tank. Over the course of Gilbert's earlier career, watermen flexed their organizing muscle to influence state fisheries regulation and interstate commerce and protect themselves.<sup>li</sup>

Like the Hudginses and their adaptation to new modes of transportation, Gilbert found new ways to work on the water that kept him in charge of his own labor, and put him in charge of others. After a two-year stint in the Navy during World War II (T: "How did you survive?" H: "Just like the rest, just didn't get sunk."), he finally became a captain himself.<sup>lii</sup> Owning a boat meant true economic autonomy, working on one's own or employing a crew. Captains with enough capital to build a large boat, purchase equipment, and pay wages were disproportionately white, while African Americans looking for work found it as cooks, dock laborers, and crew. Since the nineteenth century and slavery, in many Southeastern and port towns waters, Black men dominated labor across multiple maritime industries including pound fishing, placed in close proximity aboard cramped workboats with white employers and white wage laborers.<sup>liii</sup> Gilbert hired the same group of men who had worked for his father. "Most all were Black, and wonderful people, real nice," Kerry remembers.<sup>liv</sup> "They were very loyal, I guess you'd say."<sup>lv</sup> He thought so because by the 1950s, for the 25% of Mathews County's population who were Black, few nearby alternatives were open in an economy revolving around fishing and farming. The African American men who had composed the Halls' crews worked fifty to sixty hours a week and made, according to Kerry, between \$150 and \$400 a year based on skill and

experience. In the 1940 census, Black men employed as fishermen earned only a little more than farm laborers. Both the census and interviews demonstrate that fathers and sons, or sets of brothers in the same household, worked for fishermen like Gilbert. Black men who worked for the Halls lived anywhere from a couple of miles to fifteen miles away from the Hall home, sometimes staying overnight in a shanty on the property the night before work.<sup>lvi</sup> Winter Harbor became the site where generations of white employers and Black employees convened, enacting racialized labor regimes in commercial fishing found across the South.

White pound net fishermen's dependence on cheap Black labor began to crack just as Gilbert settled down to raise a waterman of his own. As Gilbert and Kerry adapted to shifting environmental conditions, Cold War military installations and related industries transformed the economy and demographics of Virginia's coast. These enormous industrial employers promised better wages and less physically intensive work to young Black men, who stopped learning the pound net trade from the men in their own families. "You'd get these young kids who worked for six months, a year, maybe two years, and then they'd realize what they were doing and go get a better job with benefits and all," Kerry remembered.<sup>lvii</sup> In much of the mid-century South, pro-business policies and pursuit of military contracts brought tech firms, contractors, and military bases to nonmetropolitan areas.<sup>lviii</sup> Federal installations and related industries in the Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia communities made Virginia the most reliant state in the South on federal funding and accounted for a large share of income growth.<sup>lix</sup> As in other cities like Huntsville, Alabama or Pascagoula, Mississippi, Eastern Virginia looked different for it: suburbs spread outside of Hampton Roads, roadways improved, and Virginian and non-Virginian workers came to work and changed the segregated life in these Southern cities.<sup>lx</sup> As Kerry learned to crab, men like the elder Halls lost their pound fishing employees to the Naval

Weapons Station in Yorktown and the Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Company.

Although longtime employers in the state, “the shipyard” transitioned from building World War II-era ships to the largest Cold War-era nuclear aircraft carriers in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>lxi</sup>

And shipbuilding jobs were suddenly accessible to Mathews residents via a new bridge over the York River built in 1952.<sup>lxii</sup> In Gilbert’s words, he and his son “didn’t want to get out of fishing, but we had to do it, you know? It’s all over with now. Nobody ain’t ‘round here now.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

Gilbert had continued to work pound nets with his father, and Gilbert's son Kerry "picked it right up."<sup>lxiv</sup> In 1962, Kerry turned twelve and Virginia saw an uptick in crab landings. His grandfather, Gilbert’s father, taught him how to set his first line of crab pots. While the other Halls worked with crews pound fishing, a waterman can pull a crab pot up to the surface and empty it on the deck, separating crabs by size and sex, by himself. Before the boom, teenagers and young men were the most frequent crabbers, unable to afford overhead costs of a larger operation; Kerry set crab pots and saved for his own boat. Although he fishes for different seafood than his father, the value of captaining was similar for him. “You can paint it up, nice and neat and pretty. It’s part of being a watermen, is having a boat and taking care of it, and being proud of it.”<sup>lxv</sup> Gilbert recognizes Kerry’s success with a brief, "He's done right good," crediting his son with teaching him how to crab.<sup>lxvi</sup> Ultimately, Kerry joined the Navy and his hindsight reinforced the values of his early work years crabbing: “I didn’t like the Navy, I wanted to be my own boss.”<sup>lxvii</sup>

But just as Kerry returned and started crabbing again full-time in the 1970s, the next decline in landings began. The Halls were pulled back into pound netting, replicating the father-son relationship that had characterized Gilbert's childhood. Gilbert was setting stakes for pound nets with Kerry in 1980 when he fell off a pile driver and into the water. (“He wanted me to go

every day with him and make sure the net was set good,” said Gilbert about that day.)<sup>lxviii</sup> Then in his fifties and disabled, Gilbert was still too young to quit working and found a job with a local watermen's supply store. He used a skill integral to pound fishing that he had learned as a sick child: hanging nets, attaching them to stationary hooks to prepare for the water. “Wasn’t much money in it, but I was glad I could do it, you know? For eight years, I couldn’t do nothing. That’s the hardest work.”<sup>lxix</sup>

Gilbert survived the booms and busts in the national economy and the seafood industry by relying on kin and skills he gained through pound fishing. He and his son were beneficiaries of a nascent organizing movement establishing a political presence in Richmond, keeping down fees and pushing for better prices. When pound fishing finally proved untenable as the regional economic focus shifted, Gilbert and his son switched tactics, relying on the skills they had mastered or could master with the help of neighbors and kin. Like men of C.V.’s generation, they took advantage of growing industrialization and nearby military installations at strategic moments but stayed nearby, leaving behind a particular component of the seafood industry without totally leaving the industry itself or the landscape that supports it. Black employees and neighbors who left in search of better prospects made the move away from pound fishing as permanent as their departure. The demographic shift underscores the irony that the Halls’ autonomy and independence was dependent upon exploitative labor practices fixed in place by Mathews’s distant, coastal location, long its greatest asset. The thought of leaving self-employment, place, and an accumulated life of hard work behind, even in the face of disability or the possibility of a stable job elsewhere, was a difficult one for the Halls.

Like the Halls and the Hudginses, those who fished from mid-century on were raised in a community of men who left them skills useful beyond Mathews during hard times, but also their

identities as watermen of Mathews. They could either pursue generations-old definitions of success, staying in place and achieving economic independence on the water; or, as economic independence moved away from the Middle Peninsula and to places like Baltimore, they could redefine success elsewhere. Whatever their choice, these men forfeited the hope that the next generation would be able to achieve the same.

In his career aboard a menhaden vessel, Charles Lee Forrest (1931-2019) made the difficult choice to separate work and home. The Forrests live south across Horn Harbor, where the water narrows further inland. He describes the home he grew up in nearby, where family, work, and sustenance came together on the property: “My dad’s? It had a kitchen, a living room, and a dining room. Had a three-story house. Big bedroom on one floor and two on the other. So I had a place to sleep at. To eat, we got fish out the water, oysters and clams. Made a fire on the yard and had food. My sister—Mama died early—she kept us all together. Very good, done had a good life.”<sup>lxx</sup> Charles Lee lives off the main highway through Mathews County in the post office district of Susan, long home to intertwined families of Black watermen. He and his wife, Helen, interviewed together, point out the buildings constructed by their and their neighbors’ families in the generations after emancipation: the church, the school, their houses. Census data reveals that even during Jim Crow, most Black heads of household owned the homes they lived in. Building a life and career meant, like in Susan, organizing people and resources at a distance from Mathews.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Charles Lee dropped out of middle school to work full-time in the 1940s when strong prices and landings for seafood lured boys and men to the industry. He was the son of a pound fisherman, the most common vocation for Black watermen who remained in Mathews, and the grandson of an oysterman and sailor. Charles Lee’s father worked on his own account rather than

for wages. Of Mathews County's Black watermen, 85% worked for wages, compared to 53% of white men on the water in 1910. A Black household in the 1910s and 1920s might be home to several fishermen at a time, with sons-in-law, widower grandfathers, and a few teenage daughters pooling money from oysters and fish. Charles Lee's father, Ralph Forrest, and his eight sons maintained a homestead and a strong tradition of starting work on the water during teenage years.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Work on the water had been notoriously difficult for generations of African American men on the Chesapeake, who labored hard amidst threats of violence, seasonal unemployment, and struggles over pay. Black men and women sailed and also worked in seafood packing and processing plants; by the 1930s, over three-quarters of the workers engaged in seafood processing were Black, and a third of these were women.<sup>lxxiii</sup> An exposé about oyster dredging published by the *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1933 detailed white-owned boats with lice-ridden bunks, seven-day workweeks for a month at a time, a scrip system for supplies, and, despite the watermen's associations, white captains' violent warnings against labor organizing.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Life in the seafood industry's summer off-season was also difficult, when entire communities were laid off by both captains and canneries, often ineligible for unemployment benefits.<sup>lxxv</sup> Although the shipyard, shipbuilding, and ports provided job opportunities, Hampton Roads and Newport News offered little stability. In the interwar period, even as shipbuilding ramped up, mechanization forced many Black employees into retirement.<sup>lxxvi</sup> A decline in sailing cargo vessels after World War II posed similar threats.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Nevertheless, as David Cecelski's study of North Carolina's nineteenth-century Black watermen demonstrates, generations of work created "collective experience," organizing strategies, and exhilarating mobility for workers which white people could not control. Black

men, linked to one another through family and work over generations, accessed Atlantic intellectual currents and developed political coalitions in towns like Beaufort and New Bern. Black watermen and seafood workers in this study also organized and unionized.<sup>lxxviii</sup> During the Depression, oyster shuckers in Norfolk organized a strike against a wage cut from thirty-five to twenty-five cents per gallon of oysters.<sup>lxxix</sup> After the war, as oyster landings increased, the all-Black workforce at Portsmouth's largest seafood plant organized under the AFL and won higher wages and overtime with a new contract.<sup>lxxx</sup> A year later, seven hundred oyster shuckers who had organized under the CIO, most of them Black, won a wage hike and overtime at one of the region's largest seafood processing plants, J.H. Miles and Company.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Mirroring the organizing in other lines of watermen's work, Black menhaden fishermen stayed on land during a strike in 1952. They immobilized fifty-six of sixty vessels set for a summer voyage out of Reedville, the epicenter of Virginia's menhaden industry and the immense wealth it created.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Robert Hudgins reports that in 1953 "the unions were trying to unionize the crews and a lot of the Black people got in it, you know? Well, the company didn't want unions."<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Black women organized a strike against J.H. Miles in 1973 to demand heat, ventilation, and toilets as well as overtime, retirement, and better wages; they demonstrated outside of the *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper office to protest the lack of coverage.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> At the same time that white men organized "associations" for better market prices from aboard their own workboats, Black men and women who worked for wages employed strategies wholly apart from white watermen.

Noticing that things had slowed down in pound netting and crabbing, Charles Lee Forrest found work on the menhaden boats during the 1950s. The nature of menhaden crews was changing when he joined up, and particularly for Black workers. As with pound net fishing, the enormous physical labor required to man multiple skiffs, then encircle and pull in a catch of



hundreds or thousands of fish at a time had been provided by Virginian African American men since the 1880s. But with midcentury innovations like winches lifting menhaden from the water, the crew shrunk. White waterman Robert Hudgins remembers, “we had twenty-six men in the crew. And then they got modern hydraulic locks that you pull the net in with, and that cut the crew in half.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> Many Black watermen left the occupation and the peninsula for connected coastal cities like Baltimore and Newport News, looking for less taxing work and more economic mobility. Charles Lee Forrest noted, “We were working to get good jobs on them boats, made a living that way. This day and time, that’s why there’s few Black people in Mathews, ‘cause they all had to leave, to get their education so they can get a job.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup> The number of Black watermen in Mathews and in neighboring counties steadily declined through midcentury, from a third of the Black male workforce (228) in 1930 to less than a quarter in 1960 (131).<sup>lxxxvii</sup> While the population of Mathews County was over 30% African American in 1870, for example, that percentage and the total number have steadily decreased and left a population that is today almost 90% white.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Charles Lee Forrest rose to captain in 1955, against multiple strong currents. For thirty years, he fished in the Gulf off the coast of Louisiana, a hotspot for menhaden after the collapse of the Atlantic fishery, aboard his ship, the *Bulldog*. He claims to have caught over a billion fish.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Back at home, Black women’s family lives were shaped by the fact that their husbands sailed farther and farther away for good work. Helen Forrest was also the daughter of a pound fisherman. She noted he did not own his own boat but worked for others, and left for Baltimore to look for a factory job hoping to bring his wife and child north once the money came in. When Charles Lee “went south fishing,” Helen was among other Black women in Susan whose husbands pursued menhaden on risky trips together, leaving women together in a long, familiar

wait.<sup>xc</sup> Charles Lee Forrest described his schedule as, “Come home twice a summer and stayed home six months, from November to April. My family, they stayed here—my wife and her mother stayed with her— raised our children, sent them to school.”<sup>xcii</sup> Unlike the wives of other fishermen, who learned the industry by signing their husbands’ names to paperwork or making crab pots, these wives of menhaden company members had little to do with their husbands’ everyday work.

Helen and her mother instead managed the household and community affairs, under the weight of the physical separation that delayed news of storms and wrecks. In 1965, these women attended a funeral held at the segregated schoolhouse for seven local men lost at sea on Captain Forrest’s voyage. Helen Forrest calls it “the most trying time of my life,” a moment when her own husband, the captain, survived while his crew members, some of them neighbors, did not.<sup>xcii</sup> She recalled brief details passed on from the half-dozen men who lived: “they were all in the water for a while.”<sup>xciii</sup> Sitting next to Helen, her friend Rosalind Knight recalled the organizing work to host a seven-casket funeral held at the school, and the difficulty of seating families so interrelated in any proper order. Mostly, Helen and her friends remained brief and quiet in their thoughts about tragedy, a reflection on its continuous weight over fifty years later. Although the scale of menhaden technologies and the industry’s corporate structure provided income for Black families, the scale of loss and community separation is proportionate.<sup>xciv</sup>

Running a menhaden vessel was different from captaining a skiff to crab in the creeks by the house. Refrigeration aboard the ships, vacuum hoses that pull in hundreds of thousands of fish at a time, and airplane spotters searching for menhaden schools all expanded the scale and distance of a single voyage. By 1955, East Coast crews landed 640,000 metric tons of menhaden a year. Unlike crabbers and oystermen who own their own boats, the captain would work for the

boat owner, oftentimes a national or international corporation producing fertilizer or animal feed from fish oil. Before large corporations like Omega Protein and Zapata Haynie owned boats or processing facilities, captains calibrated wages based on “knowledge”--like in pound fishing, reflecting specialized tasks only certain crew members could perform. Inside a more corporate structure, wages are now decided at the company level by experience and seniority. According to Robert Hudgins, the change altered the connection between wages and work. Before, “The more effort you put in it, the more you’re gonna earn,” and the accumulation of knowledge meant that (white) crew members could become mates and then captains.<sup>xcv</sup>

The men who worked for major menhaden firms valued being captain as a comparable achievement to men who captained boats that they owned. Wendell Haynie became a menhaden captain at age twenty-four in 1955, joining two brothers and his father, also menhaden captains. He proved his worth as a captain in the making as a young man, not by deciding the direction of the vessel or the men but in deploying knowledge of the fish, understanding of the technology, and instincts to best his father in a catch: when his father thought “ain’t a Goddamn thing here,” Wendell coordinated using hand signals with the striker boat, a loudspeaker and walkie talkies with a pilot in a small aircraft, and a sense that a school of menhaden were just under the surface, to prove his father wrong with “a whole load of fish.”<sup>xcvi</sup> The major firms provide a venue to demonstrate the skill and knowledge required of men who captain, allowing them a recognizable and commensurate place alongside the crabbing and oystering captains. The Vice President of Operations for Omega Protein, Montgomery Diehl, was the son, grandson, and brother to menhaden captains but chose to leave the coast for college. He concluded his interview, “I look at them, they’ve been here for twenty-five years, already had their home paid for, their families were here, you say, ‘I wonder if I would’ve been better off doing that?’ Because I would have

been there.”<sup>xcvii</sup> In an environment where the economies of kin and race otherwise played a deciding role in financial independence and status, Charles Lee worked for a corporation and yet was an uncontested success as a captain, skilled waterman, and earner.<sup>xcviii</sup>

But he is an exception inside of a long-term demographic shift. According to Helen’s friend Rosalind, “there must’ve been something in the water and the food in Mathews County that caused these kids to keep going for higher education and also better jobs.”<sup>xcix</sup> Between technological innovations, shrinking crew sizes, and no promises of a future as a captain like Charles Lee’s, many Black watermen and their descendants only come back to the Middle Peninsula for church homecomings in the late summer. Glimpses of life in canneries, the demands that men and women made of their employers through strikes and contract negotiations reveals an experience and strategies completely in contrast from men who worked on their own account and indeed, profited from an exploitative labor system. Although men like Gilbert held fast to both work and place, the children of Black watermen who sought true economic independence were afforded no such luxury; they found themselves working for others or they walked away from the communities their families had lovingly and literally built. Despite his own success, Charles Lee Forrest says of his children, “They got out; they all got jobs. That’s where they’re at now. I’m sitting here in this chair after forty years.”<sup>c</sup>

Aware of these shifts, Mathews County’s self-described youngest waterman nonetheless intends to stay put. Kevin Godsey (1972- ) fishes, often alone, to the north on waters familiar to C.V.: “Winter Harbor is very shallow, so that’s one reason I probably don’t see many people, because you really gotta know where you’re goin’ to navigate it. It has a lot of marsh channels.”<sup>ci</sup> He is also alone in carrying firsthand knowledge of the same harbor where C.V. looked for stranded sailboats and boatbuilders daily: “One thing I like about Winter Harbor that’s kinda sad

to me: it's so many little points and guts and ditches all have names, and I'm probably one of the last one that will know those names. And when I die all those names will be gone. And I guess it's foolishness, but it's kinda sad to me that all those places were named for some reason and they will soon be forgotten."<sup>cii</sup>

Kevin hustled over to his fireplace mantle, where dust-covered gear from masted ships and the rusted barrel of a musket lay underneath a painting of a workboat. He explained that all kinds of things get caught in nets and particularly dredges on Virginia's rivers, holding a statuette of the Virgin Mary to illustrate his point. Other objects he salvaged from neighbors' garages, and he's not above fishing on E-bay for the right price on an early twentieth-century oyster can. No fewer than two dozen of these products of the Middle Peninsula's canning facilities frame his kitchen window, from which Kevin can see his skiff. Some iteration of a Godsey boat had docked off that exact land, Kevin states, for three hundred years. "Father done it. Both grandfathers done it. All the great-grandfathers done it, so, just decided to do it, too."<sup>ciii</sup>

Crabber and oysterman Kevin Godsey's identity is informed by his things and his dock, the physical remains of the knowledge and careers of past watermen and water-faring people. He understands the past die-offs, demographic and labor shifts, and technological changes, and now the looming environmental regulations and challenges, through the lens of past successes. Similarly, an earlier ethic of hard work and family pride shape the daily life of this man with no family of his own. Kevin worked throughout his young adulthood with his father, a crabber, and together they successfully navigated industry regulations, changing markets, and new international competition.

Kevin drives his truck weekly to markets in Richmond, where he sells fresh crab and oysters to seafood retailers. He is proud to wake up at 3 AM during crabbing season exactly

because no one else does now. "The average crabber in Virginia is sixty-two years old now," he says, "And there's nobody young. I'm the youngest person [in Mathews County] at forty-six that's doing it."<sup>civ</sup> He faces both the cycles of species and demographic shifts that governed the lives of Gilbert and other watermen before him, and the realization of their fears: the perhaps permanent decline of the occupation, and the meaning of those places, in the Chesapeake.<sup>cv</sup> As he engages in the old watchfulness over regulations and landings, environmental crises and demographic shifts have made and will continue to make permanent and visible changes in his lifetime. Even the most industrious, adaptable crabber cannot anticipate that they can work through those challenges and come up unscathed.

During Kevin's young adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s, watermen braced defensively for further shifts in practice as researchers urged changes in regulations on crabbing, warning of a potential blue crab population collapse. Kevin grew up during a time when crabs were fished twelve months out of the year, potted for some seasons and then dredged from the river bottoms the remainder of the time. This latter practice did not spare pregnant crabs, which were harvested with their "sponges" containing hundreds of thousands of eggs that might replace those harvested. Regulations on watermen accompanied poor harvests as legislators and scientists became concerned about overfishing. In 1970, watermen across Virginia reported a 27% drop in harvests, from 279 million pounds of seafood the previous year to 176 million.<sup>cvi</sup> The depression in crab landings lasted for a decade. Some crabbers reported throwing back just under two-thirds of their daily catches as too undersized to harvest.<sup>cvi</sup> Although the price of crab increased accordingly, limits on the number of hours a crabber could work and how many pots they could put in the water chafed watermen who felt at their core they should be their own boss. Steve Pope, a former marine resource officer responsible for enforcing regulations, summarized, "I was

probably reviled more than the regular law enforcement here because what I did affected somebody's livelihood."<sup>cviii</sup> Rather than watch their catch get shoveled overboard into the water, some watermen fought back, threatening officers and ignoring calls to cut the engine.<sup>cix</sup>

By the 1990s, conservation efforts--shrinking the size of dredge nets, throwing back sponge crabs--were met with division among watermen. Some supported protection while others argued that new regulations would "endanger the industry."<sup>cx</sup> In 1996, under increasing pressure from conservation groups to pass regulations, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission capped the number of crab pots per licensed waterman to three hundred and shortened dredge seasons.<sup>cx</sup> However, after only a few years, as landings plummeted ("I caught more crabs in one week last year than I did all winter," Eastern Shore waterman Marshall Cox said in 1999) the VMRC granted increasing numbers of hardship licenses to men who needed the work and together added another fifteen thousand pots to the bay.<sup>cxii</sup>

Some watermen preferred to work elsewhere rather than give up the water completely. Gilbert Hall's neighbor Roscoe Rowe learned how to pound net from an uncle and crabbed on another Mathews waterman's boat, but found himself leaving with a friend for work at Fort Eustis Military Base east in Newport News. "It was almost like being on the water," he says.<sup>cxiii</sup> The causes were disputed: some researchers blamed weather patterns, while more straight-laced watermen complained that the marine police were not enforcing the regulations already in place.<sup>cxiv</sup> Other watermen felt that there was no problem at all.<sup>cxv</sup> Crabbers had always worked their lines of pots as hard as possible, switching tactics as needed. One of the things now required to save the industry, to work less, placed them in a financial and ideological bind.

Oral tradition reminds watermen like Kevin of the good times from C.V. and Gilbert and Charles Lee's generations that came before. Kevin's father told him of public performances of

success and wealth: "They got filthy rich here in the [19]40s during the war. . . some of the stories is unbelievable, lighting fifty-dollar bills to light cigars."<sup>cxvi</sup> For watermen, failure might be due to overharvesting or regulation, but success is due to hard work. Grouping booms and busts by decades he was not alive to witness, Kevin demonstrates how population dynamics push watermen from one pursuit to the next. "Some people made a lot of money on croakers in the [19]40s, then in the [19]50s the croakers disappeared and they lost all that money to keep tryin' to catch 'em. Oysterin' had become huge in the [19]50s and they all died in the [19]60s [when the disease MSX devastated the fishery]. Crabbin', was probably a lot of crabs in the [19]70s through the [19]80s and catch is kinda fallin' off, but the market price has gone up kinda to take care of the amount that we catch."<sup>cxvii</sup> The ability to shift between fishing technologies and strategies allows fishermen to ride out the cyclical nature of the industry, relatively new strategies and problems present for Kevin's entire life. In hindsight, there was always another species that brought good prices, and the wild success of decades past seemed achievable. The one constant, a century later, was working everyday in the same place.

Mathews County shores have always shifted, but the changes are stark to Kevin. He points out that the porches of empty country stores collapse at the crossroads; seasonal retirees build vacation homes with water vistas; fewer workboats leave their docks in the morning; red tide hits in the summer. And the shoreline itself pulls away more every year, leaving cemeteries and utility lines exposed on the beach where he finds old things for his mantle.<sup>cxviii</sup> Climate scientists report that among other environmental threats like runoff and overdevelopment, Virginia's historic coasts and riverfronts will be affected disproportionately by sea level rise. Virginia Beach and Hampton Roads, major developed areas along the Chesapeake at or near (and sometimes technically below) sea level, must prepare for billions of dollars in planning and



remediation costs as the tides rise over the course of the next century.<sup>cxi</sup> People from rural coastal areas, where employment and the future economy may rely on the water, have unique perspectives on the costs of history and loss of their changing coastline. But even if the crabs and oysters came back in large numbers, the coast and its working landscape will not reappear. With it has eroded the network of men that had held one another in place through cooperation, kinship, and coercion.

After decades of intimacy with the shore, watermen point to the changes in the working waterfront to measure economic and environmental decay. The land that C.V. Hudgins knew as a child was already vastly different from the one he saw in his eighties. His old family homestead and cemetery were inaccessible, “the road was all growed up,” and even the docks off of Walker’s Landing were abandoned.<sup>cxx</sup> “Now, you can’t get through there with a bulldozer.”<sup>cxxi</sup> In fact, over the past forty years, an uninhabitable island formed in Winter Harbor where C.V. lived, the result of erosion, flooding, and storms altering the tidal wetland.<sup>cxxii</sup> Thirty years later, both Gilbert and Kerry Hall noted changes to their own view from the Hall house. Gilbert recalled country stores that sold wire and offered credit lines and nearby houses that were even older than his grandfather’s, now empty or gone. The Hall home stands, if precariously, on Sand Bank in Horn Harbor, although Gilbert seemed to occupy only a room or two and shut the rest off. Gilbert speculates his grandfather would “be sorry about it now, if he had lived in it. The tide comin’ up here.”<sup>cxxiii</sup> Kerry measures the rising water by the place where he used to stack the poles for his pound nets, now submerged. When asked what he’d hope for the future of environmental regulations, the seventy year-old responded in 2019, “I have at most, four or five more years that I’ll work...I don’t really care what they do anymore.”<sup>cxxiv</sup>

While men make sense of loss, the work itself feels unfamiliar. Watermen who are still working like Kevin Godsey experience shifts in water quality firsthand. "We're fightin' crab pots that we cannot keep clean...the grass on 'em just grows overnight and we're continuously pressure washing."<sup>cxxv</sup> Problems that long afflicted other fragile coastal areas suddenly threaten his personal livelihood, like when red tide comes through his line of stationary crab pots: "it'll just kill everything in the pot."<sup>cxxvi</sup> Kevin used the plural "we" to discuss "fightin'" pollution, hinting that it's not just his livelihood but all watermen's at stake. When asked how he plans for the future, Kevin laughed. "I won't be here in fifty years. Well, if I am, I'll be old enough, I won't care. Let it come."<sup>cxxvii</sup> Kevin has no children or living family with whom to share his knowledge and the resources he has accumulated over hard years. Without investment in the well-being of the next generation of watermen, the permanent shift in coastline and demographics means little to him.

The work lives of these men, caught up in kinship and community status, represent feats of strategy. Armed with accumulated skills and the language of hard work, oral histories show that watermen understood their choices as simultaneously deeply historical, values-driven, and local. Kevin's insistence on speaking the names of "guts and ditches" and collecting human history from the beach signifies that his life history makes the most sense in its environment shaped by fishing, on Winter Harbor, on the Middle Peninsula.<sup>cxxviii</sup>

These histories also make the most sense in light of the work and knowledge of other watermen and in spite of bleak predictions about the future. Watermen respect that elders' skills and community reputation for hard work empowered them to shift between booming and busting seafood populations. Gilbert's move from driving stakes for the nets to hanging nets demonstrates a commitment anchored to the knowledge of more traditional technologies

worthwhile because they originated with and supported family.<sup>cxxix</sup> C.V. Hudgins's encyclopedic knowledge of his family and property demonstrate that place attachment and the feeling of shared values make this knowledge and adaptation worthwhile. Using generations of accumulated knowledge and community support, Charles Lee Forrest adapted to changes in the industry to achieve and retain captaincy. His story as he tells it acknowledges and belies the longer story of demographic change, how the economic opportunities for Black watermen in Mathews County were too precarious and paltry to justify a tie to a landscape they shared but experienced very differently than white boat owners and captains.<sup>cxxx</sup>

Environmental and economic changes tied to larger international events influence the breakdown of identity and values of watermen in Mathews. Menhaden vessels owned by international corporations and the pull of the military-industrial complex from nearby Newport News and Norfolk and the bay's pollution and species die-offs proved formidable external factors that changed life on the Middle Peninsula.<sup>cxxxi</sup> However, many systemic problems facing the Chesapeake's water industries--racial inequality, destructive extraction technologies--originated inside of watermen's communities. By making the choice to adapt by switching between fisheries and machinery, watermen privileged the sustainability of place and kin networks over demographic and environmental sustainability. Oral history interviews reveal why. The disappearance of place and kin as watermen knew it undercuts the value of hard work, and the value of the history of these places. When the shore disappears, so does the reason to love it.

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<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1, 2019, Mathews County, VA" *Quick Facts*, accessed June 15, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/mathewscountyvirginia>.

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<sup>iii</sup> Gilbert Hall, Interview with Jessica Taylor and Patrick Daglaris, July 8, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00054725/00001>, 16.

<sup>iv</sup> C. Scott Hardaway, Jr., Donna A. Milligan, Carl H. Hobbs III, Christine A. Wilcox, Kevin P. O'Brien, Lyle Varnell, and Shoreline Studies Program, "Mathews County Shoreline Management Plan," Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary, 2010.

<sup>v</sup> For one woman's recollection of the Middle Peninsula's steamboat docks, see Catherine Brooks, interview with Jessica Taylor, July 13, 2014, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032081/00001>, 5. For a discussion of daffodil farming, see Bessie Emory, interview with Jessica Taylor, July 10, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00054705/00001>, 44-45.

<sup>vi</sup> To satisfy urban populations' desire for seafood, twentieth-century watermen in this study left behind low-cost technologies that had served the area since the colonial period. Oyster tonging, for example, traditionally completed by a skilled waterman or two in a canoe or skiff, gave way to dredging, which required a crew, a much larger boat, and more expensive equipment. The larger catches of oyster dredgers meant that dredging "captains," in this case men who owned their own boats, accumulated profits more quickly than tongers and paid crews of men dependent on this seasonal work. Michael Paolisso, "Taste the Traditions: Crabs, Crab Cakes, and the Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Fishery," *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 4 (2007): 654-665, esp. 654. John Frye, *The Men All Singing: the Story of Menhaden Fishing* (Norfolk, Va., 1978), xiii. Bradford Botwick and Debra A. McClane, "Landscapes of Resistance: A View of the Nineteenth-Century Chesapeake Bay Oyster Fishery," *Historical Archaeology* 39, no. 3 (2005): 94-112, esp. 94. The classic *Beautiful Swimmers* discusses how Virginia and Maryland crabbers brought their products to market as far away as New York City. William Warner, *Beautiful Swimmers: Watermen, Crabs, and the Chesapeake Bay* (New York City, NY., 1977), esp. 185-202.

<sup>vii</sup> James West and Carrie West, interview with Patrick Daglaris and Jessica Taylor, July 10, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00054706/00001>, 1-2.

<sup>viii</sup> Daniel James writes that "oral sources can also take us beyond the limits of existing empirical data," and assist in interpreting the written historical record. Daniel James, "Listening in the Cold: The Practice of Oral History in an Argentine Meatpacking community," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (3rd ed.; New York, 2016): 73-90 (quotation on 75). Daniel James further discusses the limitations of oral history as subjective narrative while asserting its utility in enabling "us to approach the issue of agency and subjectivity in history."

<sup>ix</sup> Anthropologists have argued that the identity of watermen and meaning of work adjust with resource availability and technology, signaling a decline in both skills and autonomy over time. Barbara Garrity-Blake, *The Fish Factory: Meaning and Work for Black and White Fishermen in the Menhaden Industry* (Knoxville, Tenn., 2005), xv.

<sup>x</sup> Anthropologist E. Paul Durrenberger points out that policy to conserve resources can be targeted at "inappropriate elements of the system" when policymakers lack historical context--pointing to the unexamined exploitative role of processors as an example. E. Paul Durrenberger, "Shrimpers, Processors, and Common Property in Mississippi," *Human Organization* 53 (Spring 1994): 74-82, esp. 74. Arthur F. McEvoy's *The Fisherman's Problem* also points to flawed policy models, for example those that consider a species population in isolation, as ineffective towards solving the problem of overexploitation of shared resources. Arthur F. McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1920* (New York, NY., 1986), 10. Such policy decisions and other factors often cause hostility between watermen and state actors, as argued in Anthony Davis and Leonard Kasdan, "Bankrupt Government Policies and Belligerent Fishermen Responses: Dependency and Conflict in the Southwest Nova Scotia Small Boat Fisheries," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19, No. 1 (1984): 108-124. Lobbying and activism undertaken by recreational fishermen and environmentalists is covered in several studies examining diverse movements from the nineteenth century to the present day, including Donald J. Pisani, "Fish Culture and the Dawn of Concern over Water Pollution in the United States," *Environmental Review* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 117-131 and John T. Cumbler, "The Early Making of an Environmental Consciousness: Fish, Fisheries Commissions and the Connecticut River," *Environmental History Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 73-91. Robert Lee Maril discusses how these threats reduce chances of economic survival in *The Bay Shrimpers of Texas: Rural Fishermen in a Global Economy* (Lawrence, KS., 1995).

<sup>xi</sup> Several studies cover the cyclical nature of the seafood industries in the Southeast, including, Mark Taylor, "Seiners and Tongers: North Carolina Fisheries in the Old and New South," *North Carolina Historical Review* 69,

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no. 1 (1991), 1-36. Paula A. Johnson, *Working the Water: The Commercial Fisheries of Maryland's Patuxent River* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988).

<sup>xii</sup>See, Jack Temple Kirby, "Virginia's Environmental History: A Prospectus," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 4 (1991): 449-488. Nowhere is the role of capital in watermen's lives more clear than in the menhaden industry. See, H. Bruce Franklin, *The Most Important Fish in the Sea* (New York City, NY., 2008). Keiner, *Oyster Question*, 19.

<sup>xiii</sup>Other historians and anthropologists have demonstrated that communal exploitation was not the ultimate cause of declines in harvests. See, Bonnie J. McCay, *Oyster Wars and the Public Trust: Property, Law, and Ecology in New Jersey History* (Tucson, AZ., 1998). Keiner, *Oyster Question*, 145. McEvoy, *Fisherman's Problem*, 10.

<sup>xiv</sup>The menhaden industry's shift to rural Black labor in the South is central to Garrity-Blake's *The Fish Factory*. For discussions of race and gender, see, Andrea Fisher Maril, "Negotiating Gender: A Case Study of Researcher-Respondent Constructions of Gender," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 42 (1997-98): 31-54. See also, "Sloppy Work for Women" in Johnson, *Working the Water*, 35.

<sup>xv</sup>Michael Paolisso, "Blue Crabs and Controversy on the Chesapeake Bay: A Cultural Model for Understanding Watermen's Reasoning about Blue Crab Management," *Human Organization* 61, no. 3 (2002): 226-239 (quotation on 233). Paolisso also emphasized how watermen's religious convictions and knowledge of local booms and busts informed their opposition to reductions in blue crab commercial harvests. Keiner, *Oyster Question*, 232. Other recent work on the interaction between watermen and the environment includes Earl Swift, *Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Watermen of Vanishing Tangier Island* (New York, NY., 2018).

<sup>xvi</sup>Research on twentieth-century Southern white men demonstrates that their "identities were inseparable from their familial and communal responsibilities and from their public worth." Craig Thompson Friend, ed., *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction* (Athens, Ga., 2009), x. Reflected in earlier works like Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor*, scholarship on Southern white masculinity emphasizes hard work as a positive moral attribute leading to the greater security of family and community and an attachment to place, where one locates their familial and communal responsibilities. According to historian Craig Friend and others, white men's insistence that they worked hard to provide for their families and neighbors continues to mark them as different from others: greedy, capitalist Northerners and lazy or undisciplined people of color. In the case of Virginia's commercial fishermen, working the water provides a public means to demonstrate private character and financial independence. Other historians of maritime history and the seafood industry have noted the sometimes rigid, sometimes permeable racial relationships between fishermen in the Coastal South, in works like, David Cecelski, *Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001) and Robert H. Woodrum, "The 'Culture of Unity' Meets Racial Solidarity: Race and Labor on the Mobile Waterfront, 1931-1938," *The Journal of Southern History* 84, no. 4 (2018): 883-924. See also, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>xvii</sup>To access the interviews archived at the University of Florida, visit: <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/tmp>. For interviews archived with the Southern Foodways Alliance, visit: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/oral-history/tidewater-foodways/>.

<sup>xviii</sup>On life history interviews, see, Sidney W. Mintz, "The Anthropological Interview and the Life History," *The Oral History Review* 7 (1970): 18-26. On cohering life histories into a collection around a research question, see Linda Shopes, "Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 588-598.

<sup>xix</sup>Charles Victor Hudgins, interview with Mary Campbell Diggs and Catherine Brooks Morgan, September 18, 1991, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061453/00001>, 18-19 (first quotation on 18, second quotation on 18-19).

<sup>xx</sup>Charles Victor Hudgins, 1991, (first quotation on 1, second quotation on 4).

<sup>xxi</sup>For a discussion on the expanding maritime industries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries see, Botwich and McClane, "Landscapes of Resistance: A View of the Nineteenth-Century Chesapeake Bay Oyster Fishery," 94-112; L. Eugene Cronin, "Chesapeake Fisheries and Resource Stress in the 19th Century," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 76 (September 1986), 188-198 esp. 190 and 195.

<sup>xxii</sup>Clyde Hudgins, Interview with Jessica Taylor and Mark Guerci, May 26, 2017, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061504/00001>, 15.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Charles Victor Hudgins, 1991, 31.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Curtis Sampson, interview with Tyler Busbee and Francesca Dupuy, October 13, 2017, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061512/00001>, 8.

<sup>xxv</sup> Curtis Sampson, 2017, 5-14.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Manuscript Census Returns, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Mathews County, Virginia, population schedule (hereinafter cited as 1910 U.S. Census, Mathews County, VA, Pop.), Chesapeake, National Archives Microfilm Series (NAMS), T-625, reel 1897 via ancestry.com. United States Board Of Engineers For Rivers And Harbors, Alfred H Ritter, and United States Army, Corps Of Engineers, *Transportation lines of Chesapeake Bay serving the port of Baltimore MD.* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, 1926) <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012585905/>. Clyde Hudgins, 2017, 21.

<sup>xxvii</sup> “States Must Keep Roads in Repair,” Accomac (Va.) *Peninsula Enterprise*, April 16, 1921, p. 5. Frank Page, “What North Carolina is Doing,” Warsaw (Va.) *Northern Neck News*, January 30, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Carl Thomas, interview with Lara Alqasem and Jennifer Nicholas, October 20, 2017, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061508/00001>, 27.

<sup>xxix</sup> Discussions of credit at small stores: Earl Soles, interview with Henry Alvarez and Tyler Busbee, October 27, 2017, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061501/00001>, 6, 24, and 59; Lewis Roane Hunt, interview with Jessica Taylor, June 19, 2013, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00031946/00001>, 5-6, 11.

<sup>xxx</sup> Manuscript Census Returns, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Mathews County, Virginia, population schedule (hereinafter cited as 1940 U.S. Census, Mathews County, VA, Pop.), Chesapeake, National Archives Microfilm Series (NAMS) T-627, via ancestry.com.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Manuscript Census Returns, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Mathews County, Virginia, population schedule (hereinafter cited as 1920 U.S. Census, Mathews County, VA, Pop.), Chesapeake, National Archives Microfilm Series (NAMS) T-625, reel 1897, via ancestry.com. 1920 U.S. census. Virginia Legislature Resolution on Merchant Marines, SJ250ER, passed March 12, 2004. See also, William Geroux, *Mathews Men: Seven Brothers and the War Against Hitler's U-Boats* (New York, NY, 2017). Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946 (*Enlistment Records*), World War II Army Enlistment Records, created 6/1/2002 - 9/30/2002, documenting the period ca. 1938 - 1946 - *Record Group 64*, National Archives Archival Databases, Washington, DC. aad.archives.gov.

<sup>xxxii</sup> For an example of boats with family names see, Clyde Hudgins, 2017, 25 and 30-31

<sup>xxxiii</sup> For a discussion on the changes in travel and transportation after World War II see, Arnold Ripley, Interview with Sandra Romero, Filiz Sonmez, and Jennifer Romero, October 3, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00060554/00001>, 7-8; Beverley Gayle, Interview with Lara Alqasem and Jasmyn Sullivan, September 30, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00060545/00001>, 4.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Gilbert Hall, Interview with Jessica Taylor, July 13, 2014, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032085/00001>, (first quotation on 2, second quotation on 15).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 2.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 3.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 2.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Manuscript Census Returns, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Mathews County, Virginia, population schedule (hereinafter cited as 1940 U.S. Census, Mathews County, VA., Pop.), Piankatank, National Archives Microfilm Series (NAMS) T627, roll 4,643 roll, p. 3, Gilbert Hall. Via ancestry.com.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 7.

<sup>xl</sup> Pound nets consist of three sections, a leader or hedging, heart-shaped bays, and a squared or rectangular head or pound bowl. The leader is a straight net of heavy twine and large mesh “hung from stakes in line with the openings of the head and the bay or bays.” Each stake is roughly 18 feet apart and can cover up to 1,000 feet of water. The leader is typically placed in a shallower area of water than the head to allow fish moving along the shore or shallow water to be “directed toward the head.” The fish follow the direction of the leader until they enter into one or two bays of net in the shape of a heart that “concentrate and direct the fish toward the head.” On the other end of the bays is a funnel of smaller mesh that leads inwardly into the head, which is the final enclosure of the pound net, and prevents them from escaping. Constructed of net and stakes set in a square pattern, the size of the head varies



significantly. The net in the head is fastened to freestanding stakes outside of the net by ropes to allow the trap to be loosened or removed. A crew of five or six men loosens these ropes at the head and block the funnel to prevent any escape. They secure the ropes and begin raising the net to form a concentrated area of fish that are scooped or “brailed” into the skiff or larger boat. At this point they repair the net and restore it to its original position in preparation of the next day’s catch. In all, this process can take ten minutes per net in good conditions, especially in the early morning during low tide to avoid any currents. Reid, George K. Jr., “The pound-net fishery in Virginia. Part 1. History, gear description and catch,” *Commercial Fisheries Review* 17 no. 5 (1955): 1-15, (quotation on 7), esp. 10.

<sup>xli</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 7-8.

<sup>xlii</sup> “The Plight of the Fishermen,” Gloucester County-Mathews County (Va.) *Gazette-Journal*, republished in the Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, May 11, 1939, p. 4.

<sup>xliii</sup> “Mathews Fishermen Seek Better Prices,” Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, August 20, 1936, p. 8.

<sup>xliv</sup> “Better Shad Prices Sought: Lower Chesapeake Bay Fishermen Call Off Strike After Promise from Buyers,” *Rappahannock Record*, March 18, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>xlv</sup> “Virginia Commission of Fisheries Weekly Newsletter,” reprinted in Warsaw (Va.) *Northern Neck News*, November 3 1939, p. 7

<sup>xlvi</sup> After the war, fishermen flocked to the Chesapeake to take advantage of exceptionally high prices and landings of by pound nets and the trendy haul seines--only for both prices and landings of croaker to decline precipitously. The availability of frozen fish and refrigerators to put them in also depressed demand. For crabbers, the introduction of the crab pot, far more efficient than the trot line, coincided with a long-term depression in crab landings between 1950 and 1960. In the 1920s, the Commonwealth assumed control of private oyster farming in riverbeds while public beds were still harvested; harvests from public beds steadily declined across the Chesapeake between 1930 and 1960, and production on Virginian private beds peaked in the mid-1950s. Watching state attempts to impose taxes on landings and otherwise address declines in harvests, fishermen found that employees of the Virginia Commission on Fisheries, charged with law enforcement and collection of revenues, were unable to complete both jobs satisfactorily and that regulation was uneven; they also sought to defeat the creation of additional governing bodies and shared jurisdiction with Maryland. See, David M. Schulte, “History of the Virginia Oyster Fishery, Chesapeake Bay, USA,” *Frontiers in Marine Science* (2017): 1-19. Landings of American Shad and Gizzard Shad, 1950-1960, Commercial Landings Database, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Foss.nmfs.noaa.gov. Accessed June 15, 2021. J.L. McHugh and Robert S. Bailey, “History of Virginia’s Commercial Fisheries: Neglected Historical Records Throw Light on Today’s Problems,” *The Virginia Journal of Science* (Jan. 1957): 42-64, esp. 58-59. Cluney Stagg and Marguerite Whilden, “The history of Chesapeake Bay’s blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*): Fisheries and management,” *Investigaciones Marinas* 25 (1997): 93-104, esp. 97. John J. Alford, “The Role of Management in Chesapeake Oyster Production,” *Geographical Review* 63, no. 1 (Jan. 1973): 44-54, esp. 46.

<sup>xlvii</sup> “Watermen Organize at Heathsville,” Warsaw (Va.) *Northern Neck News*, December 11, 1953, p. 1.

<sup>xlviii</sup> “Crab Picking Plant Proposed for Lewisetta,” Urbanna (Va.) *Northern Neck News*, December 16, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>xlix</sup> “15 Crabbers Apply to Join New Union,” Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, June 29, 1967, p. 1.

“Watermen Vote to Join Union,” Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, July 20, 1967, p. 1. “Attention! All Chesapeake Bay Watermen,” Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, July 27, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>1</sup> Milton Parks, interview with Jessica Taylor and Diana Dombrowski, Oct. 22, 2015, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections. <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00050416/00001>, 10.

<sup>li</sup> A new “temporary” organization, the Virginia Pound Net Fishermen’s Association asked Congress in 1949 to add a quota to tariffs already in place to “protect American fishermen,” since “It is impossible for American fishermen, who are not subsidized, to compete with fishermen of other countries, who are subsidized, and who generally have a lower standard of living.” They also argued against proposed interstate regulatory cooperation between Maryland and Virginia, passing a resolution stating that the proposed joint committee only added to unnecessary government interference in their affairs, in a state with no plan to conserve its fisheries anyway. “VPNFA Opposes Joint Control,” Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, June 2, 1949, pg. 1. See, Willard A. Van Engel, “Blue Crab Mortalities Associated with Pesticides, Herbicides, Temperature, Salinity, and Dissolved Oxygen,” *Proceedings of the Blue Crab Colloquium*, eds., Harriet M. Perry and W. A. Van Engel (Cameron, LA: Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, 1982), 89-92, esp. 89. Kerry Hall, interview with Jessica Taylor, October 15, 2019, recording, Virginia Tech Special Collections and University Archives.

<sup>lii</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 9.

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- <sup>liii</sup> Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, xv, 81.
- <sup>liv</sup> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>lv</sup> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>lvi</sup> The 1940 census reveals that oystering for wages could earn African American men more than four hundred dollars a year and up to six hundred, but still below the national median for African American men. 1940 U.S. Census, Pop., Mathews County, Va., T-58, reel 11, via ancestry.com. W. Willard Wirtz, *The Economic Situation of Negroes in the United States*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1962), 9.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Ann Markuson, et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: the Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York, NY., 1991), 3.
- <sup>lix</sup> Brent Tarter, *Virginians and their Histories* (Charlottesville, Va., 2020), 422. Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham, N.C., 1994), 136-140.
- <sup>lx</sup> James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: the Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990* (Chicago, Ill., 1990), 11. Tarter, *Virginians and their Histories*, 431. See also, Kari Frederickson, *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South* (Athens, Ga., 2013) and "Creating a 'Respectable Area': Southerners and the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 3 (June 2012), 487-490.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Philip Newswanger, "125 Years Newport News Shipbuilding," Hampton Roads (Va.) *Virginian-Pilot*, Special Reports, December 23, 2011, [https://www.pilotonline.com/inside-business/special-reports/article\\_3c5f277d-d888-53b1-906b-84bf12c84cc9.html](https://www.pilotonline.com/inside-business/special-reports/article_3c5f277d-d888-53b1-906b-84bf12c84cc9.html).
- <sup>lxii</sup> Historic American Engineering Record, "George P. Coleman Memorial Bridge, Spanning York River at U.S. Route 17, Yorktown, York County, VA," Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/va1612/>.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Terry M. Sholar, "Blue Crab Fisheries of the Atlantic Coast," *Proceedings of the Blue Crab Colloquium*: 11-128, esp. 115; Gilbert Hall, 2014, 14.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 14.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2016, 14.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Gilbert Hall, 2016, 24-25.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Sholar, "Blue Crab Fisheries of the Atlantic Coast," 114. Gilbert Hall, 2014, 17.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, Interview with Jessica Taylor, July 17, 2014, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032100/00001>, 14.
- <sup>lxxi</sup> 1910 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., Chesapeake, NAMS T-0062, reel 0067. Census takers seemed confused, perhaps by the seasonal nature of the industry or seafood and farm sales on the side, who worked on their own account and who worked for wages. Takers often wrote a "W" in bolder handwriting over the "OA" for "Own Account" for Black watermen; these numbers reflect the rectified records.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> 1910 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., NAMS, Chesapeake 0062-0067. 1920 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., NAMS, Chesapeake 72, p. 9, family 104, Ralph Forrest. 1940 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., Chesapeake, NAMS 58, reel 2, p. 10, family 92, Ralph Forrest.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> P. Bernard Young, Jr., "Seafood Industry, Concentrated in Tidewater, VA. Section, Gives Employment to 2,120 Negroes," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, February 27, 1932, p. 7B.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> W.P.E., "An Oyster Dredger Talks," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 23, 1933, 17.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> "Seafood Workers Sing as Busy Season Opens," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, October 9, 1937, p. 14. "Seafood Group Lacks Jobs and Idle Benefits," *Ibid.*, July 8, 1950, p. C4.
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> "Race Makes Up to 25 to 28 Per Cent," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, November 11, 1939, p. 11.
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> "Employment and the Maritime Industry," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, November 6, 1948, p. E10.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> Cecelski, *Watermen's Song*, xvii, 151, 177.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> "40 Oyster Shuckers Pay Cut; Strike," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 12, 1931, p. 2.
- <sup>lxxx</sup> "Seafood Workers at Isaac Fass Plant Win Wage Hike," Norfolk (Va.) *Journal and Guide*, August 24, 1946, p. C1.
- <sup>lxxxi</sup> "Oyster Workers End Strike as Seafood Firms Grant Wage Hike," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, December 6, 1947, p. 5.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> "Fishing Fleet Idle as Owners, Union Dicker: Owners Hint Deadline as Fishermen Refuse to Sail," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, May 31, 1952, p. C1.



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- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Robert Hudgins, Interview with Jessica Taylor, July 14, 2014, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032086/00001>, 5.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> Betheye E.P. Johnson, "Oyster Workers Rap Strike Coverage," Norfolk (Va.) *New Journal and Guide*, July 28, 1973, p. A1.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> Robert Hudgins, 2014, 4.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, 2014, 27-28.
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Vol. 3, Population, *Reports by States*, Part 2, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington (US Government Printing Office, Washington DC: 1930), 1187. Eighteenth Census of the United States, 1960, Vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population: Virginia*, Part 48, General Social and Economic Characteristics (US Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1963), 48-279 - 48-280. Because fisheries are grouped with forestry in the occupation data, these numbers may be slightly inflated.
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> 1910 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., NAMS, Chesapeake 0062-0067. 1920 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., NAMS, Chesapeake 72, p. 9, family 104, Ralph Forrest. U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1, 2019, Mathews County, VA" *Quick Facts*, accessed June 15, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/mathewscountyvirginia>
- <sup>lxxxix</sup> "Charles Lee Forrest," Gloucester County- Mathews County (Va.) *Gazette-Journal*, December 18, 2019, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://www.gazettejournal.net/charles-lee-forrest/>
- <sup>xc</sup> Daraline Beslow, Helen Forrest, and Rosalind Knight, Interview with Jennifer Thelusma, Raina Shipman, and Brittney Mejia, October 23, 2014, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061882/00001>, 11.
- <sup>xci</sup> Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, 2014, 10.
- <sup>xcii</sup> Beslow, Forrest, and Knight, 2014, 13.
- <sup>xciii</sup> Beslow, Forrest, and Knight, 2014, 12.
- <sup>xciv</sup> Beslow, Forrest, and Knight, 2014.
- <sup>xcv</sup> Robert Hudgins, 2014, 8.
- <sup>xcvi</sup> Wendell Haynie and Austin Schmidt, interview with Tyler Busbee, October 2, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00058695/00001>, 21.
- <sup>xcvii</sup> Montgomery Diehl, interview with Jennifer Romero, October 2, 2016, transcript and recording, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00058696/00001>, 30.
- <sup>xcviii</sup> 1940 U.S. Census, Mathews County, Virginia, Pop., Chesapeake, NAMS 58, reel 2, p. 10, family 92, Ralph Forrest. Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, 2014. Robert Roland Hudgins, 2014. For more on Black labor on menhaden crews, see Barbara J. Garrity-Blake, *The Fish Factory: Work and Meaning for Black and White Fishermen of the American Menhaden Industry* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1994).
- <sup>xcix</sup> Beslow, Forrest, and Knight, 2014, 25.
- <sup>c</sup> Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, 2014, 10.
- <sup>ci</sup> Kevin Godsey, interview with Jessica Taylor, July 11, 2014, recording and transcript, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032079/00001>, 18.
- <sup>cii</sup> Kevin Godsey, 2014, 39.
- <sup>ciii</sup> Kevin Godsey, 2014, 2.
- <sup>civ</sup> Kevin Godsey, interview with Jessica Taylor and Patrick Daglaris, May 20, 2018, recording and transcript, Tidewater Foodways, Southern Foodways Alliance. <https://www.southernfoodways.org/wp-content/uploads/vtw-003-kevin-godsey-05-20-2018.pdf>, 61.
- <sup>cv</sup> Kevin's observations about age are reflected in a recent anthropological study on fishermen in North Carolina: Susan Andreatta and Anne Parlier, "The Political Ecology of Small-Scale Commercial Fishermen in Carteret County, North Carolina," *Human Organization* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 180-191, esp. 187.
- <sup>cvi</sup> "Fishery Landings Off 27 Percent During Last Year," Kilmarnock (Va.) *Rappahannock Record*, August 20, 1970, p. 7.
- <sup>cvii</sup> Stagg and Whilden, "The history of Chesapeake Bay's blue crab," 97.
- <sup>cviii</sup> Mary and Steve Pope, interview with Patrick Daglaris, October 24, 2015, recording and transcript, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00051938/00001>, 6.
- <sup>cix</sup> Mary and Steve Pope, 2015, 7.

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- <sup>cx</sup><sub>i</sub> Don Koralewski, "VMRC sets new rules for Va. crab harvest," Smithfield (Va.) *Times*, January 31, 1996, p. 1.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>ii</sub> "Long range blue crab forecast is gloomy," Smithfield (Va.) *Times*, Mar. 24, 1999, p. 12.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>iii</sub> Ronald and Nancy Rowe, interview with Jessica Taylor, July 14, 2014, recording and transcript, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032084/00001>, 20.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>iv</sub> Godsey, 2014, 21-23.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>v</sub> Arthur "A.J." and Thelma Hurst, interview with Jessica Taylor, July 13, 2014, recording and transcript, Tidewater Main Street Project, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00032082/00001>, 10.
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- <sup>cx</sup><sub>vii</sub> Kevin Godsey, 2014, 12.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>viii</sub> C. Scott Hardaway, Jr., Donna A. Milligan, Carl H. Hobbs III, Christine A. Wilcox, Kevin P. O'Brien, Lyle Varnell, and Shoreline Studies Program, "Mathews County Shoreline Management Plan," Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary, 2010. Virginia Institute of Marine Science Center for Coastal Resources Management, "Mathews County," Sea Level Rise Planning Maps, [http://ccrm.vims.edu/climate\\_change/slr\\_maps/VA\\_maps/MPPDC\\_Mathews.jpg](http://ccrm.vims.edu/climate_change/slr_maps/VA_maps/MPPDC_Mathews.jpg).
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>ix</sub> Peter Contu, "Sea level rise could cost Virginia Beach billions of dollars, study says," Hampton Roads (Va.) *Virginian-Pilot*, January 29, 2019. [https://www.pilotonline.com/news/environment/article\\_54a6f7be-19cc-11e9-a249-237d551545f7.html](https://www.pilotonline.com/news/environment/article_54a6f7be-19cc-11e9-a249-237d551545f7.html).
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>x</sub> Charles Victor Hudgins, 1991, 37.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xi</sub> Charles Victor Hudgins, 1991, 22.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xii</sub> Virginia Institute of Marine Science Center for Coastal Resources Management, "Mathews County," Sea Level Rise Planning Maps, [http://ccrm.vims.edu/climate\\_change/slr\\_maps/VA\\_maps/MPPDC\\_Mathews.jpg](http://ccrm.vims.edu/climate_change/slr_maps/VA_maps/MPPDC_Mathews.jpg).
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xiii</sub> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 2.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xiv</sub> Kerry Hall, 2019.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xv</sub> Kevin Godsey, 2014, 14.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xvi</sub> Kevin Godsey, 2018, 57.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xvii</sub> Kevin Godsey, 2018, 63.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xviii</sub> Kevin Godsey, 2014, 39.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xix</sub> Gilbert Hall, 2014, 17.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xx</sub> Helen and Charles Lee Forrest, 2014, 10.
- <sup>cx</sup><sub>xxi</sub> For statistics on sea level rise and displacement of working waterfronts on the Middle Peninsula and across Virginia, see "Virginia Working Waterfronts Master Plan," Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (Hampton Roads (Va.), 2016): [https://www.hrpdcva.gov/uploads/docs/7A\\_Attachment\\_Virginia%20Working%20Waterfront%20Master%20Plan.pdf](https://www.hrpdcva.gov/uploads/docs/7A_Attachment_Virginia%20Working%20Waterfront%20Master%20Plan.pdf), 1-159, esp. 40-46.