

Behind the Scenes with Mel Carriker Writing Taming of the Oyster

In a relaxed moment when my guard was down, probably during a happy hour at a National Shellfisheries Association (NSA) convention, Sandy Shumway mentioned to a small group of us the high desirability of some one writing a history of NSA especially as the centennial anniversary of the Society is rapidly approaching (actually May, 2009). Looking hopefully at me, she asked if I might be interested in writing it. Startled, I hedged, and nothing more was said. I must confess the project was then farthest from my mind.

Realizing the importance, and yet the magnitude of the project, I continued to churn the request over in my mind. As I considered that I am the oldest living member of NSA, have held all of the NSA officer ranks, have known personally many of the shellfish industry and shellfish biology people going back to the mid 1940s, have attended most of the joint conventions with the shellfish Industry, have had the experience of writing my first book (my family biography, *Vista Nieve*), and am retired and could spent full time on the research and writing, I realized I really had no choice but to accept Sandy's request! So, as is my wont, having talked myself into the project, I looked forward with genuine enthusiasm to getting started.

But where to begin. As I typed a tentative outline of the content of the proposed History, I soon recognized that I would want to delve earlier than the renaming of the National Association of Fisheries Commission to the NSA in 1930 to its earliest predecessor, the National Association of Shellfish Commissioners (NASC) originating in 1908. And because NSA and its predecessors from their origins worked in close partnership with the shellfish Industry, this also meant going back to the start of the Oyster Growers and Dealers Association (OGDA) in 1908 and its later administrative organization the Oyster Institute of North America (OINA)! It further dawned on me that I would be writing the History through two world wars, a major United States depression, and an evolving shellfisheries technology in all of this across almost a century of time! I gasped! This was all much more than I had anticipated! But, there was no turning back now - and besides I was thoroughly enjoying the planning and the initial searches!

Then I had to face the mechanics of recording the notes and related information resulting from my search, as well as

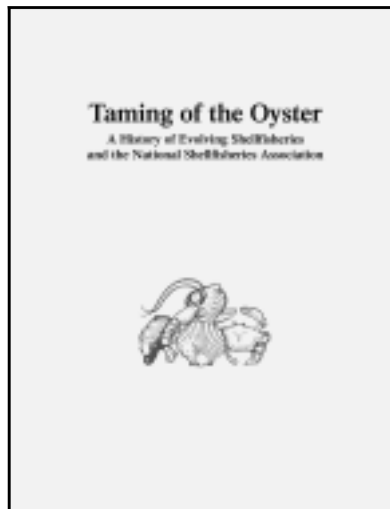
typing the actual text of the History. I had typed *Vista Nieve* on my trusty old electric typewriter, but this could not store the innumerable topics of the History that were growing more numerous with each passing week. So I purchased a Gateway computer, Windows 98, and a Hewlett Packard printer. After a short course in nearby Rehoboth Beach, the invaluable help of several of our College of Marine Studies (CMS) secretaries, and a few frustrating erasures, I found myself fairly at home with word processing, emailing, and storing information on some 60 windows and, of course, now using a standby Zip 100!

In the meantime several of us NSAers started passing the word asking anybody and everybody who might have historical information and photographs to loan them or give them to me. These general broadcasts were a total flop. So I turned to a personal approach; this paid off: I telephoned or wrote many of the NSA and OGDA, "old timers", and called the librarians of most of the east coast marine laboratories.

A wonderful telephone conversation with Libby Wallace, Director of the OINA, 1962-70, was highly informative; as was detailed correspondence with Roy Martin, Executive Director of the Shellfish Institute of North America, 1983-1999, which later became the Molluscan Shellfish Institute. The National Marine Fisheries Laboratory (NMFS) Laboratory in Milford and the NMFS Laboratory in Woods Hole helped generously sending me CDs with valuable photographs of the old Bureau of Fisheries laboratories and of Victor Loosanoff and Paul Galtsoff. Scott Siddall shipped me records that he had accumulated as past Historian. John Kraeuter from the Haskin Laboratory in New Jersey brought me boxes of the old NSA and OGDA-SINA files of Thurlow Nelson. Sandy Shumway mailed me xerox copies of a number of the NSA

Proceedings not in our CMS library. John Kraeuter, Walter Canzonier, and I, with Alice Cronin's permission (Gene had passed away earlier), drove to Annapolis and searched the Cronin's basement for NSA-OGDA records; alas, there was none there. Apparently Gene's records had been shipped to the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences library, and from there went to the Haskin's Laboratory library. So probably I already had all that was available. To all of this I added my extensive collection of relevant correspondence dating from 1942. Then John Ewart and I filed the correspondence individually, chronologically in cellophane envelopes in two large notebooks for ready reference. We did the same with NSA newsletters, going back, incompletely, to the earliest available mimeographed copies in 1956.

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But I still lacked the earliest historical records. The Rutgers University Archives and the Smithsonian Archives were unproductive. As were the NOAA central library in Silver Springs; the National Fisheries Institute Library in Arlington; and the U. S. Department of the Interior Library. Then a contact with Clyde MacKenzie synchronistically alerted me to the invaluable store of old shellfisheries records in the Fishing Gazette, which began publication in the late 1800s. Clyde suggested the New York City Public Library as a source for the news journal, but borrowing from them turned out to be complicated. I was told by the librarian that the only other library in the country to hold the Fishing Gazette is the Library of Congress. I checked. Yes, they have the full series - but one year and the publication is illustrated! So, happily, I spend a week in Washington, D. C. going through the Fishing Gazette and other old news journals. I came back to my office in CMS with a two-inch thick stack of xeroxed articles! I now had most of what I needed.

I then started reading my sources chronologically, entering relevant notes, quotations, and comments, by subject and by year, in the appropriate windows in my computer.

Little by little, painfully it seemed at times - Sandy Shumway and I collected about 100 photographs, mostly of people, to illustrate the History. Photographs not already on a CD we entered on one to provide optimal reproduction during the printing process.

Now I could no longer procrastinate. I had read all my sources, and my computerized notes and comments were ready. I could begin writing. I must confess, though, as I faced my computer that first morning I felt a bit intimidated, not only by the enormity of the task ahead of me, but by the hurdle of coming up with the phrasing for that first sentence! Well, I typed what I thought at the moment was a brilliant beginning (which changed many times in the course of the writing), and continued motivated by rising adrenalin. I was now psychologically ready to go on.

I decided to present the History in chronological order using the annual joint convention as the center piece for each year. This was logical as most of the activities of each year were summarized in convention news releases and newsletters. From these also came the trends in the shifting, sometimes complex, interrelationships among the industry men and scientists. Correspondence, newsletters, and after 1940 my personal contacts, gave me the background for writing vignettes on several of the leading personalities of the associations, for example, able, feisty Henry C. Rowe, first Vice President (1909) of the OGD, Charles R. Bacon, highly respected first President of the NASC (1909-1911), and Paul S. Galtsoff, scholarly President of NSA (1939-1941).

So each day in my office at my computer (I now wonder how I ever managed without it before) I reviewed and revised the previous day's writing, and wrote a few new paragraphs. And so it went for weeks. Finally the first draft of the manuscript was completed. Sandy sent copies to some 12 reviewers. Many helpful comments came back, and these were duly considered and where pertinent included in the final revision. After several readings by Sandy, and a final, final reading and revision by me, the manuscript, with prints and CDs of the photographs, were sent to Sheridan Press for printing. You have seen the final publication: Sandy and the Sheridan people did well.

I started the research for the History in 1997. Seven years later the book was on sale at the NSA booth at the 2004 Aquaculture Conference in the Honolulu Convention Center, Hawaii. What kept me at my computer all those weeks? An intense interest in the subject, of course, but more than that, writing a memorial to all those plucky individuals, both shellfishermen and oyster biologists, who have given so much of their professional lives to taming the oyster.

Mel Carriker

Taming of the Oyster

A History of Evolving Shellfisheries and the National Shellfisheries Association

by Dr. Melborne Carriker

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