

Interviewee: **Harold Bryant**
Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Julie Hawkins-Ennis, Linda Moore-Garoute, Noah Waters, Ryan Craun**
Date of Interview: **January 23, 2020**
Location of Interview: **Eagle Harbor Community Center, Eagle Harbor, MD**
List of Acronyms: **HD=Harold Bryant, RD=Robert Davis, JN=John Newsome**
BT=Beverly Jean Wills-Taylor, ED=Ernest Demby, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis
LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun

[Begin Transcript: 00:20]

ED: Let start off by stating your name.

HB: Hey, my name is Harold Bryant.

ED: Thank you for doing this interview Harold. I guess we'll start. How long you lived in Aquasco, Eagle Harbor?

HB: I've been living here for almost 10 years now.

ED: What was it brought to you to this area?

HB: My grandma, and my grandfather were some of the original settlers here.

ED: What was their names?

HB: Patton. Hellen and William Patton. And if you look at the archives, you'll see them, like what Mr. Davis was telling you in the gardens, cropping and doing things of that nature.

ED: That was like your family business at that time?

HB: Well, that was just that they did for the neighbors in the neighborhood. So they would allow people to visit the garden and take whatever they wanted and things like that. My grandfather was a cab driver. So this was his like, as Bob would say, his stress relief, his relaxation, and eventually he said that he was going make this home, and so that's what they proceeded to do.

ED: How long you've been around here?

HB: Maybe, since I was four? And we started out with the one particular house on the corner and then my family wound up buying the whole last block on here, all the way from the street to the river. So, this was what they chose as their home. My grandfather had mostly daughters and one son. So, he just wanted a place for his daughters, they can have refuge, they can have fun, running out of here – away from the city, because he was a Washingtonian to. and So, he did exactly what he said, he made this his home.

ED: What do you remember most around here being a child?

HB: Man, if you you want me to really tell you that? I remember when there wasn't no running water, and my grandmother would make us go to the well, and put water in the well, and we was little teeny fellas – me and my brother, but then we had to take the wagon so we could haul the water back. And at that particular time, it wasn't running water, so we hauled the water back and then we would all get to the metal tub. Like the boys getting in the metal tub and take a bath, and the women would be separated off. But, it's so many things in terms of history. I remember, we used to have what we call Potty. Were you will use at the bathroom and we have to take it out. Things like that that stick in my mind. And just walking around the town. And I don't know if ya'll had the chance to meet Bertha. She is the treasurer. And I used to always walk past her house and I was say "Hop on the bus, Gus". So now, she just call me Gus . Ever Since I've been a little, I was only five then, so, it's 40 years she'd been calling me Gus. So, those are some of the things that I've really remembered – that stick to me, embedded in me.

ED: Looking back on it and seeing how we lived now, did that feel like hard living to you at that time?

HB: Well, you didn't get the opportunity to know if it was hard or not because you were so young, you was made to do it. And then I spill the water either while you are coming, and if you spill you gonna get some more. So, you had to be very very careful. And just like Mr. Newsome (John Newsome) was saying, you could walk out in the water and you could just step on the clams, and the oysters and things that in nature. And you could fill-up the metal thing with a hundred of them easily. You could go out here... back before they had all this advanced technology, we had what we call sailing nets. And a sailing net is a big old net, and a little guy such as myself, you get on the low-end, and the taller guy, me and my brother get on the big-end... and you take one big old scoop, and bring it in. Now in that net, you will have a bushel of crabs, two bushel of crabs, you have licensed plates, you have beer bottles, you got everything to come out in that river, then you got to pick through it and separate it. It was one of the things or one of the luxuries I think that people in the city never had the opportunity to experience – just eating crabs, because that's the enjoyment. And the way that I know that because you can eat the crabs that you want but, when that was all set and done, you gonna sit with them and pick the rest of the crabs and pick all the meat out of them. So that way later on, after you finished eating crabs, you can make crab cakes, you can make other things and have dinners – potatoes, all that kind of stuff. So you make all the best out of it, nothing goes to waste. You don't want to do that way either, you do it that way, you might go in the river, too. And then if don't eat it right, you have to get up from the table, too. If you didn't pick them crabs right, you had to get... my grandmother would pop in the head and say "that's it for you, no more for you, you get out of here.". So those are some of the things that I have remember. But, I came here to live here, to keep my family's legacy.

ED: Do you still have family around here or it just you?

HB: I am the only one in my family that lives here on a regular basis but, they still have houses all up there.

JE: What's the name of the street?

HB: This is Patuxent Boulevard, I'm on Patuxent Boulevard. That is Wilson Drive? And my aunt, you know my aunt.

JE: Yes, I know here.

HB: She is Commissioner. So those are some of the things I remember being here. But, I wouldn't trade it for the world.

ED: Right

HB: Too much peace. My mother them said “psht you would never make it down there, You’re a city slicker”. I said psht! And we’ll see. And I still been here, still being here.

ED: They didn’t know how much they’ve rooted in you from four years old.

HB: Yep. And I don’t plan going anywhere. I plan on helping the betterment of the town and things that in nature, as we keep on moving forward.

ED: What do you see as far as the future?

HB: Like I said, I would like to see a museum – number one. I think that’s very vital to not only the people that’s here now, but the kids. Let’s just say for instance, if they’re family left them land or property, and if they couldn’t quite adjust, at least they could come and visit. They could go in to the museum. They can see some things and that might resonate in them to want spend more time. But there’s a lot of things that you can do to attract kids. I would like to see more kids involved. You can open up the community center, you can have movie nights, you can have game nights. You can do hotdogs, hamburgers. I kind to lean towards food and kind to lean towards cooking. I’m pretty good... I don’t brad on too much of nothing because I don’t think I’m that good at nothing. I’m pretty good at cooking – I can burn. And I can burn better than the average woman. And I do know that. But that’s a good favor of her because that’s less work she has to do. And they told me “A happy wife is a happy life”. So I tend to do the best I can in that aspect.

ED: Sounds like you got the blue prints.

HB: I don’t know that but I’ll keep on trying until I get it.

JE: But going back to the kids, that was a great idea.

HB: Yes

JE: And bring in like a movie night and I think about that to attract kids.

HB: Or something like... say like when they have their town meetings. And just start going something right after their town meetings. Like a little cook out, a little light simulation. Something that they can enjoy, that would keep them here. Not just like business as usual, enjoy yourself. That’s one of the reasons why you’re here.

JE: And that would grow as memories...[unintelligible]

HB: And then the kids could start enjoy it, and they’ll learn to be cooking. They’ll start cooking. Because, who doesn’t like to eat – so that might be a passion that they can find themselves to do. So anything that is constructive is welcome. It just has to be constructive.

ED: That’s a lot coming from you, knowing a little bit I know about your story that you were here. Youv’e seen the city life, but you choose here. It says a lot about this area.

HB: Definitely

JE: Do you know anything about Chalk Point? Did you have any relatives that worked in Chalk Point?

HB: No

LG: And do you know how did it affect the crab population, there's bundle of seafood and crabs around here?

HB: That particular aspect, the plant and things like that - I'm not sure not how it affects it.

LG: But do you still see lot of crabs like before? Because I heard that it wasn't. Now, there's not as many crabs and fish and all of that, because...

NW: That's not true.

HB: Yes

HB: There still here.

JN: Crabs out here are like crazy. Now, the crabs are wasn't on the bay couple years ago as much as plentiful. But as years went on, they start coming back. But you could go out on up here, they will go out and catch couple of fish and crabs.

LG: What, now?

JN: Yes

HB: A lot of commercial crabbers, they're here, they launch from down here. And this is what they do in the summertime – they're commercial crabbers.

LG: If you look down over Cedar Haven, they don't have any types of crabs over there.

NW: Yes

HB: That's not true.

NW: Yes

HB: That's not true.

JN: The thing is, I've have to go up the National Resources and turn some people when... because the people cross the bridge, over cross here, they would come out and drop those nets. All the way across here.

LG: From [unintelligible] County?

JN: Yes

LG: Wow

JN: They would come over and drop those nets. That's down here, at the low-point down to Cedar Haven. They would drop the net because the current is coming around, and that where the crab and fish are coming, and they would catch them. Then, when I mentioned that "gated" thing, we have so many Spanish coming down and they would bring those campers and they would park right there. And the park and planning has put up barriers so they can't get in there anymore. And because we used to go down and get our little boat and marched down because of the ramp there, and go out there and catch all the crabs we want. Last year I had to gown there to Benedict to report... this people catching little tiny crabs and cook them right on the spot? You can go down there now and see where they had a lope, fire burning down there. And they would cook every little thing they caught. Now these netters, that's probably why we don't have the fish we know we have to because they was catching. They left them out there. They left these nets out there for over a month.

HB: Absolutely

JN: I met with one of the coast guards. I've shown them this is where it was, they pull the net out of there but these people, after about several weeks, when they knew that they were gone, they would put them back out there. Now, if we could get somebody to come when we call and somebody say the nets are there again, and they would send people down there and we probably we could get the fish and stuff back.

RD: Because that's the key, working together like. We must start working together, the two towns must have pull together.

ED: Was there anything else you would like to add, or?

HB: No. If that's it for you.

JE: I have a question.

HB: So with your grandparents, did you ever hear anything that they told you about Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor? Because they were part of that African-American group coming from DC to Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor. Did you know about anything that they passed down to you?

HB: I just heard a little bit about a hotel at the point.

JE: Really?

HB: I heard from my mother that were was a store like, I was say like a "Juke Joint". Somewhere where you can go. They have music and drinks like that and dancing. Dancing on wood floors, it was part of they entertainment. Part of they entertainment were they didn't have to travel as far. You see what I'm saying. They could walk and walk back home. And enjoy themselves while they were doing it. So that would be a blessing for them as they stayed down here. My family they would have to come on weekend but they couldn't go home, they had to stay all week, so you have had things to do. But my granddaddy and grandma, they would make you work, and they're not fun. It ain't all about having fun. So that's what they did.

JE: That seems to be the story.

HB: You are allowed to have fun, you got to work first. And then you're allowed to do whatever. But those other things I mentioned earlier were very important too. About the water and things like that. I think it's very important that that particular body of water needs to dredged again. By any means necessary, it needs to be done, because it has taken away from the height of the water. It's something that needs to be

done.

JE: Anything else about the hotel? I keep hearing about this hotel?

HB: I am not too familiar with it, but I know that there was one and if I am not mistaken, when slaves used to come in, that was like a storage spot. It was something like where they stayed until they were prepared on how they were distributed. How they were going to even sold, or how they were going to work – tobacco or be sold on that particular point.

JE: On that point, but not the hotel?

HB: On the hotel and the point.

BT: The club, was River Front Inn because my dad and mom used to take me there. I would be sitting at the back of the car while they were in the club, River Front Inn, dancing. They would bring us out a little plate of food, so you're right. There was a hotel there. I never saw the hotel, but I did know about the club because I saw that, I was there.

NW: Did you ever hear any about semblance or history or anything to do with runaway slaves. Underground? People escaping on the water, was there ever mentioned?

HB: I didn't get any of that information.

NW: Another question is... because sustainability does not exist in reality with our youth involvement. Because people can plan sustainability but if youth are not involved, it does not sustain for the future. So what do you suggest in some type of positive involvement, intervention regarding the youth.

HB: Some of the things that I mentioned earlier. One being a museum down here, that they can see, with someone that is actually in the building that can explain it to them. That they can tell them... I think the average child in this time, they have heard of the word slavery. But they don't know too much about the word slavery. So just to bring them up to current. Exactly what it was, exactly what was taken place, exactly what transpired. And let them know, number one – they are somebody. Number two – you can do whatever you want as long as you put your mind to it. And number three – that this is part of your legacy, your history. It's part of who you are as a people, so it's important for you to know.

JN: But you know, the other thing, you haven't go to George town, you see the canoes and everything. Hardly seen by Blacks out there at the canoes, because they are afraid of going out of there in the water. Once this river is cleared up and cleaned up, there will be something great like that. I scuba dive, but this wouldn't place for scuba diving because it's not deep enough, it's not clear enough either. Even in the Chesapeake Bay, it's too murky to scuba dive. But if the water is clean enough to teach kids how to swim, instead of having to go to a swimming pool, that's the worst place that you can go. But you've got open water here, this would be nice, let the people swim. Then you will the canoes, paddle boats – they can go out there. That would bring plenty of people here, I think.

JE: And can I say that, since he (Barry Jose Campbell) brought up swimming and being from St. Mary's County and I grew up in Chesapeake, and they got this this that Black people don't swim – it's not true. Actually my grandmother told me how she learns how to swim, and she would tell me she lived on the water on Breton Bay in Southern Maryland. She said they would be walked out to the tall grass and get crabs about this big.

But we are Afro-Americans that's a stereo type, we all grow up swimming because we lived on the water, and that's part of our history. Because some of moved away from it, like he (Barry Jose Campbell) say, go to George Town. We all also like water. We lived by it, that's where we started.

HB: Some of our first exposure.

JE: Some of our first exposure. All of us, all I remembered is water. And she told me they would learn by people just throw them in the water.

HB: I was about to say, throw you off the end of the peir.

JE: That's what my grandmother said. They threw her off when she was five.

HB: They will make sure get back. But you going off the end of that peir too.

JE: And I'm saying all of that to say– that is what this area is, history with us. Because what I know about Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor, and I didn't know until I got on this project. It was a huge... it was African-Americans, swimming, picnicking, and fishing and all that stuff that some African-Americans don't think we do, but that's what this area did. And to bring that back... like you said to bring the kids, but kids love it once they've experienced, they'll grow up and will pass it on to their kids and that's sustainability – people stay and to pass it on. And this area is beautiful so that's why we have it on here because... and you're telling us a lot, like wow. So thank you for wanting to make it better, because that's all we wanted.

NW: Before we finish, as residents who lived in the town, what do you think it is that we can do better to contribute to the wishes and ideals.

HB: One thing, come together more. Share information. You are nothing without information. Come together and try to pull together resources to help one another. That's the one main thing that we can do to help sustain this town or help bring people together or help get things to come. Let's just say its five of us, you might know somebody that can do certain things, I might know somebody that can do certain things and we can put up all of our resources together to achieve a common goal. There's nothing more beautiful than that.

JN: But starting here, I had mentioned earlier, like a brochure or something. And like if I'm in Cedar Haven, I can get around to everybody and give a brochure to each one of the people there. Because if they don't know what's going on, they are not coming here and just walked up to the community center. But the more we put this information out there, and maybe they can have a meeting here, little cook outs, you have certain kind of days here in Eagle Harbor, and then invite these people.

LG: Just to have a community day.

JN: Exactly, and then invite them over and say, Look, let's get together and talk to everybody. Let's get together and put these two place together. We can have a whole area out here. And I think most people would get along with that. I really believe that would.

RD: I really do too because she [Linda Moore – Garoute] already started that. She comes into the meetings here.

JN: See, I didn't know it.

LG: But guess who directed me here? Maryland National Capital Park and Planning. Because they've said that we could be more powerful if we work together.

RD: There you go, unity.

LG: And they called the mayor, not me. And said this is what's going on, and so are you going to welcome? And the mayor said "of course!". Because he has a beautiful, wonderful sustainability grant. I mean not grant but, application out. That has been approved, it just needs someone to work it. And the people who work it, is the community. So we can do that, it need all, everyone.

RD: Unity on the community.

LG: And collaborative effort – is number one, everyone working together. Now, you may not agree on everybody.

HB: But we can agree to disagree.

LG: Absolutely. Respectful.

HB: As long we can agree to disagree, everything would be just fine.

BT: One sample is, everybody should have a view of this river. I live on the hill and we have complained time, and time again I've been down here like 30 something years. Why is that on top of the hill – we can't have a view of the river. We should have a view and I moved down here 30 something years ago, we had a full view of this river. But when we bring it up and meetings, it's like goes on the top of peoples heads. What I've been told is... me as the citizen down here, I have to be the one to write the letters to the different home owners and ask them to cut their trees. I don't think that's my own responsibility. That's the responsibility of these commissioners, directors, mayor – whoever is down here. Why can't we work together and get something like that? It goes nowhere. That's why I have no involvement in this community.

JN: Well somebody, if you think that you need a view, then you have at least let these people know what support you are looking for and that you can't do it by yourself.

BT: I've already done that. I can't get anywhere.

LG: But guess what? She has a right by law for that. Because you get a blocked of view to a historical site like these. That's called view shed.

NW: It happened to me.

LG: Take for instance, they want to go on the power plant over on the other side of the sky way. Next to... that blocked the view from George Washington.

RC: That's because of the Mt. Vernon view shed. That's in cooperation with Mt. Vernon on the other side of the river. But I don't think that's a necessarily law for or other historical area's as well.

LG: Yes it is. Historical area is a historical area.

RC: Right. But I mean I know specially for Mt. Vernon.

LG: But this said the group, the community had to get together and go out there. Just one to two people can't come out. It takes a community to come out, and a lot from the mayor.

JE: Thank you so much.

ED: Appreciated

RC: Great job.

HB: Thank you.

[End Transcript: 26:48]