

Interviewee: **Mayor James D. Crudup**

Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Ward Bucher, Ryan Craun, Julie Ennis**

Date of Interview: **(to follow)**

Location of Interview: **(to follow)**

List of Acronyms:

JC= Mayor James Crudup, ED=Ernest Demby, WB=Ward Bucher, RC=Ryan Craun

JE=Julie Ennis, LG=Linda Garoute, NW=Noah Waters

[Begin Transcript: 00:09]

ED: Good morning, Mayor.

JC: Good morning.

ED: First off, I'd like to say thank you for doing this with such short notice, I appreciate that. I guess we start off, how did you become a mayor of this community?

WB: Well Ernie, ask first the name, so you know his name.

ED: What's your name, sir?

JC: James Crudup, the Mayor of the Town Eagle Harbor.

ED: Alright, thank you. How did you become a Mayor of this town?

JC: Well, I've always been interested in the government of the town. I've been associated with the town for approximately 50 some years. And the past 10 years, I've been very active in the governing of the town, and we have a board of Commissioners. So, I ran for Commissioner I guess about 10 years ago and I thought then that I could probably contribute more if I became a Mayor. So, a couple years after I became a commissioner, I was then elected as the Mayor of the town.

ED: Okay. Where the interests come from?

JC: I've always been interested in politics. As a matter of fact, when I first started college, many, many years ago, my major was Political Science.

ED: Okay. So I'm gathering that you've learned about political figures, maybe there were some around here that kind of drew you to this area?

JC: Not necessarily here, but all over the nation, and all over the world.

ED: Right. So what is the political climate here in Aquasco?

JC: In Aquasco or Eagle Harbor? Which one?

ED: Eagle Harbor.

JC: In Eagle Harbor there is a lot of apathy. Because it's a resort community, people don't take it as seriously as they probably should if they own a property here, just a lot of apathy. But then again, there are lot of folks

who want to see the town grow, and maintain the culture and so forth because that is a part of our history.

ED: In your experience here, have you seen any changes or growth in the culture and in your community?

JC: Oh, absolutely! I mean first of all when you look at a resort community, you have to understand that we were never intended to be a full-time town. Therefore, you don't have certain infrastructure pieces that you need, you don't have the population that you need, a lot of things are lacking. But over the years, because more and more people decided to live here year-round, we've had to meet those challenges head on, and that has become quite, quite interesting.

ED: Right. What kind of feedback from the community are you getting as far as the changes in the development of the town?

JC: Well, I think most folks agree with sustainability, and what we have envisioned for the town. It's been a slow process, and we've had some folks who had the ideas about which direction of town should go in, but overall I think we have the majority saying let's move forward with our vision of becoming the paradise on the Patuxent.

ED: I understand. Historically, as far as the town's history, do you think that will be preserved, as far as growth can bring a lot of different elements as far as change to keep it rooted and what naturally is.

JC: Well, I think once someone understands the history of Eagle Harbor, and how was founded and incorporated and so forth, they would have to respect that, and if you own a property here, you want to support those envisions of the town. You have to first understand before you can really commit.

ED: Right. Do you feel like the people that don't own properties around here right now have that respect?

JC: Well, the other thing that is a challenge for us is a lot of folks don't live in the area, that don't own a property or they can't get here, they own unimproved property so there's not a great deal of interest. So, but the folks who are here and have homes here are very interested on what goes on in the town.

ED: Alright.

RC: Hey Ernie, as you converse, I'm picking you upon all that stuff. It can be a little bit easier if you can edit it just later for some reason. If you just nod instead of voicing affirmations to his comments. You know, ask a question, let him speak, and if you need to cut it later.

ED: Okay, thank you!

WB: And Ernie, let's ask some questions about the history.

ED: Are you connected to this town in any way?

JC: Absolutely! I'm connected because you know I own a home here, of a property in the town, so definitely connected.

ED: I mean like any family history, or are you the first?

JC: I'm the first who owns property in the town, but a buddy of mine many years ago invited me down. He owned a store, he was the Mayor of the town in '63, 1963, and I became interested in the town then, and a few years later, I decided to buy some property in the town.

ED: Okay. What is it like, in the 60's?

JC: Much it is like today. Really. a whole lot has not changed. The town is basically the same as it was 50 some years ago. The only difference is we probably added maybe four five new homes, that's about it. But otherwise, there's not a great difference between yesterday and today.

ED: That's interesting. Do you feel like there, do you feel like that is a good thing or a bad thing that it isn't that much different than it was?

JC: I think it's probably a good thing in the sense that the community is still one and which you can walk around and feel safe, and it seems that everybody is friendly and wants the same thing. It's not like an urban environment where you have lack of better word, crime and so forth, we don't have, we have a very little crime in Eagle Harbor. If there's something might be a broken window, might be a barking dog, but we don't have those other major crimes such you have in most urban areas, so that's something nice about this community.

ED: It seems like everyone around here kind a works with each other, you know, it seems more than a community and more like a family in a way. It seems everybody is connected in some kind of way.

JC: Well, in a sense it is. We could be, we could be closer. But overall I think we get along fairly well, with the communities around us and with the neighbors right here in the town.

ED: Do you know if many of the people who live around here know about the history, how much historic relevance is here?

JC: No, I really don't. We have, we have, we started having Black History programs and we have one set-up for February, the date hasn't been identified but we had one last year, and a year before and we want to bring that history out, and let the folks know that we need to share it, so that we can keep it relevant.

ED: We're hoping that what we are doing now will eventually help make that happen.

JC: Oh absolutely. I think this is a great project.

ED: It seems kind of, I don't know how to word it, it seems like a lot of the history around here is like tight information that the people don't necessarily want to give out. Do you think there's a reason for that?

JC: Well, I'm not sure if I'm going to hit the point that you are trying to make, but I don't think that it makes a whole lot of difference to go back much more than a hundred years because the town was founded in 1929, so that's when our history started, the town of Eagle Harbor started. Now, other folks in the community in this Aquasco area, their history goes back a lot further, so obviously they would be more to capture. But for Eagle Harbor, we want to move from 1929 forward.

ED: Sounds good. What's the religious aspect of life around here?

JC: Well, that's interesting! A lot of the local folks are Catholics. Okay? Which surprised me. I would have thought being a Black American would be Baptist, but not in this area, mostly Catholics.

ED: I was expecting here lot of Methodist and things like that, it was surprising. Is there anything that you would like to say about this area that we haven't hit?

JC: Well, I would like to say that we have a vision of becoming the paradise on the Patuxent. We know that we need to build our economic base. We don't have interestingly, in this small community, we don't have any businesses. We survive all for property tax, which is something that's very difficult to do. We need businesses and we're looking to develop our Truman Point Park, which is located down the street here, and make that a great waterfront for boating and waterfront activities. And, we think that it might give us the economic base that we need. We also are thinking about tourism, folks coming down to visit, and explore the history down here in Eagle Harbor. We have a lot of summer activities. We planned to have food trucks down during the summer when folks come down for boating and bicycling and so forth. So, our greatest challenge right now is economic development and building a base to sustain the community which we don't have right now.

ED: Okay. How does the Eagle Harbor, town of Eagle Harbor fit in to the whole Aquasco area as, as what's the relation between Eagle Harbor and Aquasco?

JC: I think the relationship is one of neighborly, they know that many of the folks don't live here permanently, they respect that. They like using the facilities that we have when we have the park open, and they enjoy celebrating with us when we celebrate different things. So, I think we have a very nice relationship with the community.

ED: When did you buy your property?

JC: Well, as I said I came down in 1963 and interestingly, my buddy at the town who was the Mayor said and I'm quoting him the best I can, he said "Young boy, you ought to buy some property down here." I said "No, I'm gonna buy me a new Corvette." So, I ended up buying a new Corvette back then. And then some 10 years later, when I came down for a picnic with some property owners, we walked around the town and I said "Whoa, there's a house for sale we ought to buy it". So that's how it happened, I think that was in the 70's.

ED: Was that from people that you knew?

JC: Yeah, we had, we had some friends who own some property down here. And they have a big picnic every year, so we would come down and picnic with them and walked through the town and so there's a cottage that was for sale, and that was how we got a bought property.

ED: Do you think that rejuvenating the historic element of Aquasco will help you get that outcome of your historic sights and things like that, will that help?

JC: Absolutely! It adds to the history that's all through Southern Maryland. And, it actually brings a lot of things to the forefront that I didn't even know about. I didn't know there was the first "Black" commercial airport is right up the road here and I doubt very seriously if many people would even know that. It's a historic sight and nice site to visit. Coupled with what's going on or what was going on in Eagle Harbor and Cedar Haven and all through this area, there's a lot of history. A lot of folks are very interested in it, and we want to position ourselves to be able to take advantage of the economic opportunity when it does occur.

ED: That's fantastic. Great, great. Well, I do not have anymore questions for you Sir. Anything you want to

add?

WB: About the speedway?

JC: The racetrack?

ED: Yeah.

JC: Well, as a matter of fact I did bring my car then to the racetrack many years ago. Aquasco, I forget, I think it was called Aquasco Speedway, I forgot exactly because that has been 50 years ago. But yeah, that used to bring many folks there but not necessarily to Eagle Harbor, and that time a lot of folks would tell you that the speedway was a drawing card for this area, the town.

ED: Was that like a quarter mile track?

JC: Yeah, it was a quarter mile track.

ED: Did it have a nickname?

JC: I am trying to think what it was, but it, it doesn't come to mind.

ED: Okay. My father used to tell me about a racetrack called 75-80

JC: No, I don't think it was 75-80, no.

ED: Okay. That's all questions I have, sir.

JC: Alright.

ED: Appreciate your time.

JC: Thank you.

WB: Okay. I think it would be helpful if you, if you could tell us a little about the history of the town. You mentioned that it was built in '29.

JC: Incorporated in '29.

WB: Incorporated. But if you could, this will benefit other people who are viewing this recording. If you could tell us about it.

JC: Okay.

WB: How it came to be, and how it changed things and so forth.

JC: Well, I think the importance is that when the town was incorporated; it was incorporated because blacks could not go to the other beach and resort areas in the state, and all around the country! I mean we could not

go to Chesapeake Beach, we could not go to Ocean City, we couldn't go to a lot of places, so some forward thinking Black Americans at that time decided, "Well, let's buy some land on the water, and allow our families to have the opportunity to enjoy the summers crabbing and fishing and boating and swimming, and that's basically how it got started. The founders of the town were mainly from the Washington D.C. area, not from the Aquasco area which is interesting. And one of the things that you have to consider when you think about that is the more affluent Black Americans where in the cities at that time. One of the founders, Mister John Stewart is a first black owner of a business, a funeral home in Washington DC, in 1900. He established Stewart funeral homes and still going today. He was the lead for those individuals who decided to incorporate the town back in 1929. And from that point as I said earlier, we didn't have an infrastructure, so you didn't need one in the summertime. You just come down from May through August. What do you need with snow plows? What do you need with improved roads? If you could get in here and get to your cottage that's all you really needed. Or if you had a tent set-up or whatever you had set-up at that time, because you are just using it for the summer months, and to enjoy the water, fishing and crabbing and those kinds of things. But as time progressed, people realized that this would be a great place to live all year round. Especially with the improvements in the roads. Route 5 was improved and expanded. Folks decided, "Yeah, I could still go to work in DC", where most of them worked at that time, and get back down here within an hour or so, and live a nice quiet life. So I guess it was probably late 50's early 60's people started deciding that they're going to live here all year round, and that brought its own set of challenges as I said. Then you got to worry about snow in the wintertime, you have to worry about keeping the roads up, you have to worry about cutting trees and grooming the landscape, and all the things that come with that. So through the 60's there was some small growth that picked-up a little bit in the 70's, picked-up small in the 80's, and recently, we've had a great deal of interest and folks wanting to move to Eagle Harbor permanently. And that has caused the government, the board of commissioners, it's the government of the town, we elected every two years, and that board then elects the Mayor from their five commissioners, and we decide and work with the community to improve the community and provide those things that are required. So, the improvements have taken place for the past few years. We now have a town office, we never had one before. We now own Truman Point which we never had before which I think is an ideal acquisition, because as mentioned, back in the early days we believe, I haven't seen anything that says it emphatically that they were slaves, transported in and out of Truman Point. But I would believe from the history that they were because of all of the tobacco in this area so that was quite an accomplishment for the town. We've started identifying historic sights. Our Artesian Well is where most folks used to get their water, 50-60 years ago. Well up until recently within the past 10 as expensive to have wells dug, so they just decided to do one community well, and that's how we got our Artesian Well, so we've identified that site which is down in the water here as a historic site. We also dedicated a stream. Well, a creek that runs through the town to Mary Coleman, I think she was our first female Mayor, and that was back in the 60's. So the history of the town is something that we were very concerned about.

[CONT.]

JC: The mayor and the board of commissioners have a lot to do with, well actually they've set the whole trend on what's going on in the town and what's going to happen in the town. But I think were in position now where we have to look at continued development. More and more homes and more and more folks coming to enjoy the paradise on the Patuxent which we like to call our self.

WB: That was very great! Can you tell us a little about, I don't know a significance of Truman Point. Was it now, is it a park, or?

JC: Well it is a park. We call it our park. It started out as a tobacco port many years ago, and they brought tobacco in and out, it was one of the biggest tobacco ports, in, in the state. But recently, it was owned by private owners for several years, I forget. We bought it from some investor who thought that they could develop and put a hotel down there and houses, and they found out that it is mostly marsh land, and there you can't do a lot of development. The laws prohibit a lot of construction. So, we ended up buying it from the

speculators I'd like to call them, and we've been very happy with the acquisition, and we actually now have it fenced-off to protect the area because we have a lot of folks that were going down, leaving trash and not respecting what was going on. At that time the pier that we have down there, the parking lot, all of things that we have, the investment, we have the electricity for lights if you wanted to do something at night. We also have sanitary facilities if in case you wanted to go to the bathroom if you go down fishing with a peer, that kind of thing. So we make that available to the community, if you own a property on the town you can get a key to the gate, you can go in and out, do as long you follow the rules. If you don't own a property here we charge you a small nominal fee and you can use the park, and that works very well for us. But Truman Park is definitely a historic site because of the tobacco and the history that goes along with that, and it's in its rightful place now in the town of Eagle Harbor's hands.

WB: So how about this building? Was, was this a house or?

ED: Ward, would you like to sit over here?

WB: Yeah, I figured it out.

ED: Yeah, thank you.

JC: No, it was never a house. It was always a scene of small black building that has been expanded and added to. When I first came down here it was just a small scene of a black building with our house. And over the years we've had indoor plumbing and expanded to what it is today, and it was still expanding and improving the communities, and it's the focal point of the town. We have our meetings here, we have lot of activities, we actually rent this property out to town property owners, and they've had weddings here, they've had parties, birthday party, you name it. So it's the focal point for the town and it's been improved over the years and it's continued to be upgraded and improved.

RC: Would you like to go over any statistics of the town.

JC: Yeah, we, with this being census year we are engaged in doing census for the town. The last census I think we identified 65 permanent residents in the town, and I doubt if its increased that much from the last census, and maybe another five - eight people, so we might have 70-some if I had to guess. But the town has seen slow growth and it's all right with us. We don't want to be a big development with townhouses, and all. We don't want to be a Chesapeake Beach. We like it the way we have it. I like to call us the Mayberry of Prince George's County.

WB: And do you all have other town employees? Is there a policeman, or anything like that?

JC: No. Interestingly, we don't have any employees. We, the Board of Commissioners, the five of us along with our clerk treasurer and committee heads, we can appoint committees to do different things, pretty much run the town but we do not have any paid employees. When we do have to get some specialized expertise, we simply pay on a fee for service basis so that we don't have to do all of the social security and all the deductions and those things. And that's very seldom that we have to pay fee for services.

WB: And how about boating, sir? Historically, been a lot of boating?

JC: Yeah, we've always had a lot of boats in Eagle Harbor. If you ride through the community, you'll see a lot and most them are not functional now. But we do have a lot of boating and we actually have folks who have to pay to use Truman Point to launch their boats. We have a couple, we have, we have three or four

commercial crabbers, they go out and fish, go out of Truman Point Park, and so there is fishing up and down the Patuxent River. I am not sure it's right behind us, but I know you can go north and south on a river and catch all kinds of fishing, crabs and so forth, a lot of crabbing.

WB: Can you talk about the commercial boats, what was it like back in the '63?

JC: No. Actually, '63 I didn't have lot of activity and lot of connections with the Eagle Harbor town. I simply came down with a buddy one Saturday and helped them run a store, and that was about it. Going back to the mid 70's I can say that there was not a lot of boating, but people did have their own small vessels in Eagle Harbor, and they would go out and crab and so forth, but we never had any real large boats in town.

WB: And was there ever steam ship service to here?

JC: Well, that's going back history before my time and before the incorporation of the town. But there's a history of steamboats coming in with the tobacco and so forth. I had also heard that where tours and so forth on the Patuxent and they would come in by boat, but I'm not that familiar with that. The history books have recorded that.

WB: So back in '29 when incorporated I guess people were driving model A Fords and so forth, but it was suburban modeled access I guess.

JC: Yeah, I would assume that because you had to get here from somewhere and there was no public transportation obviously. No busses or trains or anything, but there was, someone had mentioned that the train did come fairly close to Eagle Harbor. I mean, there's a train going into the plant, train tracks. So I am not really sure but I've never seen that occur but you would have to have some way to get here. I believe most folks would come here by automobile.

WB: And which plant are you speaking of?

JC: I'm talking about the Chalk Point Power Plant that's near us and was put in probably in about '60 to '63 time frame, and it brought with it its own environmental concerns for the town and we tried to work with the plant to make sure that the town is protected from any environmental issues as best we can.

WB: So do you all, Noah, Linda, have any subjects that you'd like the mayor to address?

LG: A little bit of Wilmer's Park?

JC: Wilmer's Park? Well, Wilmer's Park is back up on Brandywine road. It's at least probably 5-8 miles from here.

LG: But it did, the people who used to come here, did they also visit Wilmer's Park?

JC: Well, that would be a drawing attraction, "Come to Wilmer's Park and say let's come drive down to Eagle Harbor and see what's going on.", that was probably true. The folks that would come to Eagle Harbor would go to Wilmer's Park. Wilmer's Park was a park that provided entertainment for mostly Black Americans. I had a lot of the headliners like I guess James Brown, you name it all kinds of entertainers would come to Wilmer's Park. And, Wilmer's Park as I said is only 8-10 miles from Eagle Harbor. So it was a nice connection because they could come to Wilmer's Park and can come down to the beach area and enjoy the water.

WB: I've heard that referred to as "The Chitlin Circuit".

JC: That's what they call the black entertainment circle in this area.

NW: You might have wanted to share your future sustainability plan and your future aspirations.

JC: One of the things that we did in my administration that I am very proud of, this board has been together for two or three terms now and we looked at what was going on in Eagle Harbor. We looked at the history and say "We've got to start doing on a strategic plan". We never had a strategic plan before and we sat down and decided that where we wanted to go with the community and what we wanted to do. And we looked at several factors that any municipality or township or city would look at. We looked at the economic base and what we need to do to stay solvent because money is always an issue. We looked at development and what we wanted to see happen over the next few years. And, we looked at the environment which is very important. We have an advisor who helps us with our environmental issues to make sure that there's not excess pollution in the airways or in the waterways or in the ground for that matter. So, we identified about five areas to go ahead and try to envision what we should be doing over the next five years. And we developed the very "outstanding" as we've been told, strategic plan and it's posted on our website. It talks about the town progressing over the next, I think we looked at a five-year period. So we are about ready to redo it to expand another five years. Also, it was accepted by the state of Maryland and we were certified as a sustainable community which is something we are quite proud of. And we know that if we follow that plan, we should be able to sustain this town and keep it solvent and preserve the history. We are very proud of that, and I am very proud of the board that I've worked with to develop that plan.

WB: Well thank you so much for coming in and sharing all of that knowledge with us. That's really great.

JC: My pleasure. We want to share our history with the community, with the state and with the folks throughout. Let me just add this, we have a fairly good relationship with the powerplant even though some of their goals and objectives go counter to what we want to do, we still have to get along with them. But we had some visitors that were coming in to the plant, and the plant manager called me and said "Mayor, could you entertain and show these..", and they were Asians, from China and places nearby in that area, and they came over and they were really, really, almost fascinated by the fact that this community was run by blacks, and it was founded by blacks, and the things that we were doing, so we are very proud of the community. Everybody comes in and really likes the town of Eagle Harbor and the history as we have explained it to them.

WB: That's a wrap!

ED: Thank you, sir.

JC: Alright, very welcome.

[End Transcript: 29:28]