

Walter Sargent Commercial Fisherman, Kodiak
Interviewed by Josh Wisniewski and Marissa Wilson 01/22/2022
American Folklife Center.

- 0:00-05:00 Born in 1937 in Kodiak. Mixed heritage. Indigenous heritage dates back thousands of year Non-Native heritage goes back to great grandfather who came to Alaska as part of transfer of power from Russia to the United States. Early days in Kodiak life revolved Alaska Commercial Company (ACC). Great grandfather was agent for ACC. In charge of collecting payments, not well liked. Growing up in Kodiak. No paved roads. Military buildup source of infrastructure development. Salmon fisheries, Seattle and Prince Rupert based halibut schooner fleet. Jigging herring for .10 cents a fish for halibut bait for schooners.
- 05:00-10:00 Razor clam fishery on mainland at Swickshack. Working on tender FV *Pretty Penny* at age 12-13. Passing on fruit to fishermen while tendering. Clam fishing, working west. Using a mechanical windless. Hydraulics in late 1950 change fishing. Power blocks for seiners and crabbers.
- 10:00-20:00 Different types of seiners. Full purse, ½ purse, and hand purse. Full purse set and start pursing. ½ purse bring in part of seine and start to purse. Cranky outboards. Cannery fleets, lease boats to fishermen. Friend builds 28 ft seiner and asks Walter to run it. More canneries in remote areas historically. Seining in local areas. Beach seiners camp on fishing grounds. Using larger boats to tow jitneys, small seiners, with shallow drafts. Creek robbers. On the job training. Running seine skiff at 15. Dreaming on running own salmon boat. College and army after High School. Catching up with changes in fishing while gone. Coming home in early 1960s hydraulics come into fishing.
- 20:00-30:00 Using hemp line fishing shallow. Three persons on deck for salmon boat before hydraulics. Technology changes fishing. Making more sets. Seattle seine fleet fishing from Southeast Alaska to Sand Point. Changes in fishery regulations, having to limit fishing to a certain area. Changed fishing dynamics West cost seiners, bigger boats, better gear, bigger crews. Rehangng nets. “Mind boggling” changes in technical efficiency. Limited entry “increased” number of people allowed to fish an area. People lied about fishing history to qualify to fish in an area. Boat too big for salmon at time of limited entry. Had years of fishing history. Limited entry, better control of fleet limit open access
- 30:00-40:00 Fishermen pay into management and enforcement. Going into enforcement. Working on the *Resolution*, state enforcement boat 90 ft steel crabber. No marriages survived for those on boat. 10-11 months away from home. 1960s fishing progression. Struggling to get job on deck. Federal management favors draggers “trawlers” Crabbers lobby to eliminate trawling from crab fishery. Early crab pots, light weight, round and stainless-steel mesh.

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- 40:00-50:00 New styles of crab pots. Making heavy gear. Keeping floating tanks in bays to hold crab. 1960 square rectangular pots Nylon and poly lines change fishery. Dad made nets in Seattle. Technological change eliminates jobs, opposing limited entry. "everybody's fish" public access cannot be privatized. Opposing black cod and halibut privatization. Researching impacts in other countries. Limiting the percentage of the quota that any one boat can own. IFQs as conservation tool. Against privatization. Halibut fishermen as advocates for the resource.
- 50:00-60:00 Opposition to trawl fisheries due to habitat destruction. Growth of local halibut fishing fleet around Kodiak after crab began to decline. Seattle halibut fleet fished slower. Started fishing in 83-84 with circle hooks. King Crab closed in 1983. Historically 90 million pounds of crab harvested annually. Crab consolidates in large piles ADF&G raise size limits. Crabbers oppose, identify big crabs as guards for the crab. King crab over-fished, mis-managed. Fishery managers "like to be heroes". Getting first boat in 1967 the *Addington 65'* wooden halibut boat. Fishing Dungeness crab off south end of Kodiak. Crabbing year round.
- 1:00-1:10:00 1964 earthquake, hills ungluate, waves surging in town. Boats banging into buildings. Wave breaking over Woody Island. 1960s 30 pot limit.
- 1:10-1:20:00 Oregon fleet moves to Kodiak with 100 pots, lifting pot limit. 1967 30 pot limit eliminate pot limit, 1983 king crab crash. New boat *Lucky Island* 58 ft limit seiner long fishing season [1:13-1:14Background off topic conversation] Looses 65 ft wooden boat rounding Spruce Cape, Heavy seas, hits "dead head" partially sunk log, stoves in planks fleet comes out to help. Cannery supports getting a new boat the *Irene G* renamed it *Major* after the sailing ship great grandfather came to Alaska on. Fished boat 35 years. Salmon, crab, halibut, crab. "If a season is open, you fish". Current boat Afognak Strait. Boat doesn't sit idle, likes to bump into islands.
- 1:20-1:30:00 Partners son puts boat on the rocks. Pot fishing for Pacific Cod. 1980 pot cod fishery develops in wake of decline of crab. [Discussion over State access to Federal cod quota] bringing more Federal cod quota into state waters. Disputes between pot fishing boats and draggers. Getting involved in conservation, opposing privatization. Joining Alaska Marine Conservation Council. Speculation if work had an impact, citing decline of chum and king salmon in the Yukon River.
- 1:30-1:40:00 Opposing privatization of crab. No controls on crab rationalization. Fleet of 200 boats reduced to 70 in one year. Kodiak fleet hit hard. Federal mismanagement of fisheries. Marginalization of small boat fishermen in support of industrial trawlers. IFQ qualifying years, fishing success of Kodiak fleet. Catching 70,000

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lbs of halibut in 24 hours. Different approach to pace than Seattle halibut fleet. Kodiak boat fish more aggressively and run more gear, fish around the clock. Alaskans protest IFQ. Cheating during qualifying years frustrating to see it rewarded. Kodiak opposed rationalization. Testifying before North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC).

1:40-1:50:00 Fish politics, by catch reduction, catch share program, processors own access rights. Catch share programs, processors owning access rights. (Side conversation) environmental change. High school, skiing until the end of May. 1940s-1950s 8-10 feet of snow. 1960s things start getting warmer. Cold crabbing season in 1980s had to idle to avoid making freezing spray. Changes in prevailing winds, more variability. Winds switch around more. Weather forecasting technology compensates for increased variability. Salmon following winds. Sockeye as surface fish.

1:50-2:04:03 Prevailing winds will move fish, salmon fishing Cape Hepburn Cape Alitak, rich productive area. Underwater topography, currents and upwellings. Mismanagement driven by greed. Cost prohibitive for people to enter fisheries. Fishing dynasties.

2:04:03 End of Interview.