



# Matton Shipyard Oral History Project Report

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

Prepared by Sound and Story

2017

Photo credit:  
Matton Shipyard employees, courtesy Spindle City Historical Society

---

---

# Matton Shipyard

## Oral History Project Report

The Matton Oral History Project was commissioned by the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, with funding support from the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Eileen McAdam of Sound and Story was hired to conduct 11 interviews. The goal of the project was to interview former employees of the Matton Shipyard to inform ECHF's planning and to generate interpretive opportunities for *The Matton Shipyard: Preservation and Adaptive Reuse Initiative*. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor put out a call to the community for potential interviewees through public meetings, networking with local organizations, newsletters and social media. Interviews were recorded over a four month period beginning in June 2017 through September 2017.

### The Matton Shipyard

Matton Shipyard, established in 1916, is located on Van Schaick Island in Cohoes, New York, at the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. Matton is a rare surviving example of an early 20th century civilian ship building and repair facility. More than 340 canal & tug boats, police boats, submarine chasers, and other vessels, were built by Matton up until the early 1980s. At its height, Matton employed more than 300 people.

### Process

A list of potential interviewees was developed by the Erie Canalway NHC. Initial contact was made by Erie Canalway through a letter explaining the project. The consultant followed-up and made individual appointments for the interviews. A total of ten interviews were recorded. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Seven interviews were conducted in participant's homes or the Erie Canalway offices. One interview was conducted at a local library, one at a construction site and one over the telephone via a recorded Skype conversation. The interviews were recorded using a Sound Devices 702 digital recorder and a Rode shotgun microphone. Interviews were recorded in mono Wave format (.wav) at 24 bit 44.1 KHz. MP3 copies were made from the .wav files. The .wav files serve as preservation files and the mp3s as access copies. A photo of each interviewee was taken and a release form signed. A biographical profile and interview summary was written for each interviewee.

---

## Documents and Files Included in Project

- Mp3 and .wav files
- Transcripts
- Release forms
- List of topics and questions used in the interviews
- Photos of interviewees
- Biographical Profile and Interview Summary
- Final written report
- Five audio stories

## Quick Look at Interviewees

Name	Age when began working at Matton	Job or Relationship	Years Worked or involved with Matton	# of Years Worked
Bob Collins	18	Shipwright – cabinet maker, crane operator,	1972 - 1973	1.1
James Desroiers	17	Welder	1977 - 1978 approx.	1.5
Robert Davignon	20	Welder	1965 - 1966	1
Richard Davis	22	Hired as a mechanic but later became a machinist	1979 – 1984	5
Frank Galle (father John Galle)	25 approx.	Son of John Galle	Father	45 approx.
Robert Gamache	18	Draftsman	1970	< 1
Ellen Gamache	NA	Lived on Hudson River in Troy across from Matton	1951 – closing	NA
Robert Hill	18	Naval Architect	1970 – 1972	1.5
William Hunt	23	Stockroom Manager	1953-1973	20 years

## In Their Own Words

---

Marc Limeri	23	Naval Architect	July 1977- September 1980	3 approx.
Patricia Wright	NA	Daughter of Francis "Rip" Snyder	1943 – 1953 approx	10 approx.

Each interview was guided by a list of topics and questions developed by Erie Canalway NHC and the consultant. Excerpts from the interviews have been organized loosely under prominent common themes. Time markers are included and refer back to the complete transcripts.

### Boat Launch

All interviewees remembered the launching of the tugs. Workers felt pride at their accomplishment and community members were amazed by the process. Boats were partially built on land parallel to the river. When the hull was complete, it was time to launch the boat into the river where the rest of the construction took place. Naval architect, Bob Hill explains the risks of launching a boat this way:

*And side launching is very tricky. You have to worry about the stability of the boat when it hits the water. If it's got too high a center of gravity. I attended a fishing boat launch when I worked for Gilbert where the boat went down the waves with the band playing and everything. Promptly rolled over and sank. [00:54:00] Yeah, I don't believe they (Matton) ever lost one. I don't believe they ever lost one.*

Many interviewees including Rick Davis, Robert Davignon, Robert Hill and Robert Gamache provide vivid descriptions of the launching of the tugs. Here is how naval architect Marc Limeri remembers it:

*The actual launching was actually really unique. We ordered some huge timbers to build the sliding ways, as they're called, and we were ordering timbers that were two feet by two-and-a-half feet thick and by 30 or 40 feet wide. I didn't know you could get wood that that was that [00:33:30] big. We'd order a bunch of those. We built three sliding ways. They would go from the building ways down to the water, and then you'd built some cradles. On each of those ways you'd build cradles up around the hull. Again, all really big timbers.*

---

*Then to hold the things in place ... This wouldn't happen in a big commercial yard, but this is our small yard in the old-fashioned way we did things. They used some big [00:34:00] ropes, causers they'd be called, but they were ropes, and they were probably three or four inches in diameter, and there were three of them. We had three sets of ways, so there were three of them tied around the end of the building ways or the end of the cradles that we built. Then tied around to a ... They would hold this metal device that was hinged over the end of the sliding ways, and the ropes would go around that.*

*Then on [00:34:30] the day we were set to do the launch ... What you had to do is you had to transfer the boat from the building ways, which is going to be stationary and stay on the ground. We had to transfer the weight of the boat from the building ways to the sliding ways or to the cradles that were on the sliding ways.*

*To do that what they did is they put some wedges and dozens of wedges ... We had about 40, [00:35:00] 40 or 45 guys in the yard. Three were designated as the launch guys, so they didn't have to participate, and then there was a couple foremen, so we had about, almost 40 people, close to 40 people, that were going to drive these wedges in. We had them stationed around all three ways on both sides of the boat, so we had six groups of ways, so we had six or seven people on each of these cradles.*

*Each of them had, were responsible for about three or four wedges. [00:35:30] We had dozens of wedges, small wedges, that were maybe ... Start at zero and went up to two inches maybe, maybe three inches. Maybe they were a foot long. We had all those set up all the way up and down the cradle. Again, I said the boats were big. The hull was probably 25 to 30 feet off the ground. The bottom of the hull was about four feet off the ground. [00:36:00] People had to be on ladders and that sort of thing to get ... because the cradles went not quite all the way up, but they went up 20 feet anyway.*

*What the foreman would do, he'd have everybody drive your wedges, and they'd ... They all had sledge hammers, and they'd be pounding these wedges in to try to get such that the boat would get on the cradle. Then they'd examine and make sure that it was there, and you'd have them drive the wedges again a little bit more. When [00:36:30] he was satisfied, then we'd cut the ...*

---

*because the boat, again, is still sitting on the building ways, and it's welded down. It's held down by some ... There's little plates every couple feet or so.*

*He'd have some guy go down with a torch and cut all those plates free. Then the boat was sitting on the cradles on the sliding ways, and all the weight is on the cradles. Also, I forgot to mention this too, there's a ton-and-a-half of grease on those sliding ways. Between the cradles and the sliding ways, we greased it. It was probably about two or three inches thick of [00:37:00] a film of grease to make sure the thing actually slid.*

*Then when all was ready and the foreman was happy, he'd get the ax men, as they were called, because they had some axes that looked like they came out of the Metropolitan Museum, the Medieval Exhibit in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were, no kidding, this curved blade that was probably 18 inches long, and they were sharpened to a fine point. Like I said, the building ways, the sliding [00:37:30] ways or the cradles were being held on the sliding ways by these ropes about three or four turns that were about three inches thick each, each of the ropes. The foreman would give a count, count down, "Three, two, one, swing," and they would swing their axes. The idea was to cut all three of those ropes with one swing that one time at the same time. They did that.*

*Actually, when we did the Joan, the boat [00:38:00] sat there for a second, and I said, "Oh, my gosh, what do we do now?" Then it started to slide, and it picked up more and more speed. It's quite a spectacular ... It's a sideways launch, which is not an end launch. A sideways launch makes this huge splash, and it goes well over. Then the boat rolls a lot too. You can't have anybody on the boat, because they would get thrown overboard. It rolls over. You almost think it's going to keep on rolling, but then it swings back. A couple back and forths, and [00:38:30] it settles down and it's launched. It's quite spectacular.*

*We had the champagne bottle too. You have the christening thing. You got to do that, so we have that about the same time when the ... That's about when the foreman, he has to time that. When they hit the bottle he does his countdown and (sound effect).*

---

For all who watched it was pretty exciting. Jim Desrosiers who was still in high school when he participated in a launch remembers thinking:

*This is pretty sketchy. It went in, it looked like it was gonna sink at first because that one prop hit so it rolled up, but then it righted itself. It was pretty impressive. It was a lot of steel going in ... Just pushing it into the water.*

Professional photos were taken before the boat launch and copies given to the workers. Many interviewees still had copies of their photos. Rick Davis:

*It was the whole gang, everybody that worked there, standing in front of the hull. It's up on the ways, it's what the ship would look like before it's launched, the ... This is where they would do the bottle of champagne. It would stand up on the stage, I guess you'd call it, up on the bow in the front, with [00:41:00] the red, white and blue material draped over the rails and everything. And just everybody in front of it.*

And it was a time to celebrate for everyone. Marc Limeri:

*We always did the launching on a Friday, and we did it Friday morning, because he (Bart Turecamo) just gave the workers Friday afternoon off. He'd pay and they'd bring in a big catered lunch and that sort of thing.*

*Also, the people who lived across the river from us, they would see that the boat's getting painted. They'd say, "No one's getting near." They'd give us a call and say, "Hey, when's the launch," because they would have parties. They'd set up tables and they'd invite their friends and [inaudible 00:32:57]. It was a pretty exciting event. [00:33:00] We'd string the boat up with banners and flags and pennants and stuff like that. We'd paint up the hull so it looked all bright. Actually, that's the last time we'd be able to paint it also.*

Ellen Gamach who grew up directly across the river recalls the launch parties her family hosted:

---

*My father always knew [00:04:00] when there was going to be a launch, and my parents made a big deal out of it. Assuming, of course, that it was a launch taking place on a weekend or on a holiday, if it was going to be launched at 10 o'clock in the morning, they would serve coffee, soda, donuts, and invite family, friends, relatives, neighbors, everybody. [00:04:30] If it was an afternoon launch, it would be coffee, beer, soda, and sandwich fixings, and some of the other ladies would bring ... It would kind of turn into a potluck if it was in the afternoon. The other ladies would bring salads and so on. The best part of it was that you didn't have to listen to all the boring speeches.*

*The launching was the big deal for us. Of course, they launched the tugs when they were mostly, but not completely finished. I think most people have the idea that a launch is the boat [00:03:30] going in backwards, like the big cruise ships and so on. It wasn't like that. These boats here were launched sideways, and they would come down over a rail and they would hit the water sideways and there would be a tidal wave practically coming across, but our property was about 12' above the waterline, so we didn't.*

*It was a very festive occasion, and I would be running around screaming with all of the other [00:07:30] children. The big moment that everybody waited for was the launch itself. The foreman would give the signal and the workers would remove the final supports and the tug would just slide over rails right over their heads, because they would duck underneath it. We could see that. It was very [00:08:00] exciting.*

Although workers would be given Friday afternoon off after the launch, some workers had to come back on Saturday, as Marc Limeri explains:

*We always did launch on a Friday, like I said, because no one did any work the rest of the day. Then they were off for the weekend, but actually the next day, Saturday, is the most important day, because that's the day we have to put the engines in. The heaviest thing on the boat is the engines. There's two of them, and there's also some reduction gears, [00:40:00] because the engines spin at hundreds to thousands of RPM and propeller spin at tens of RPM, so you have these things called reduction gears too. It's sort of like a transmission in a car.*



---

*That was on the next day, Saturday, so I went back to the yard to watch that event. The engines had been shipped in and had been waiting there. We had our crane operator. We only had about half a dozen [00:40:30] people. We had the crane operator, a couple foremen and a couple workers. We had the boat tied up to the pier, and we loaded the reduction gears in first and then the engines. The boat, which had been riding pretty high in the water, now was pretty low in the water because that's the big weight.*

## **Physical Layout**

Interviewees were asked to describe what they remembered about the physical layout of the shipyard including smells and sounds.

Robert Davignon describes the general layout of the yard:

*There was a night watchman's shack, they called it, where they had a guy after hours stay there through the night just for nobody breaking into the place. And then from there, you went upstairs in the next building to an office that was actually the Matton family [00:12:00] was still involved in it back then when it was built. And they had, oh god, a storage room for plumbing supplies was in a part of the building.*

*Then you went to the next building and that was known as a layout building. That upstairs it was a loft and you had layouts, on the [00:12:30] floor was a lot of chalk lines, they called it.*

*And then it was down into a little plumbing shop they had there. Then you had the ways where the boat was built on. And that was on the river edge there.*

*[00:13:30] It was a big I-beam that was probably, I don't know, 100 foot long. And that's where you started to build a vessel. And then, let's see, you come down from there, you went into the supply shop or when you needed welding rods and stuff like that. They had a guy in the, they called it the [00:14:00] crib, that's where you went to get parts and whatever you needed. And they had a man in there to, a person watch what you need and when you ask for it. And then from there, you went down to another building, the ones on the right, going back towards the road going into the place, and*

---

*let's see ... that was the machine shop and the carpentry shop.  
[00:14:30]*

Rick Davis describes the machines in the main building and in the machine shop:

*In the main, big building that's still there was a couple machines. There was a brooch machine, a lathe, a drill press and some small grinders. A lot of the machines were run with an overhead belt system, which was kind of antiquated at that time. It was kind of neat to see these old belt run machines.*

*They had [00:12:30] electric motor on one end of the building and had a large belt that went up to an overhead system and that would spin the shaft that ran the length of the building. On the shaft was various pulleys that would go down to different machines, and that's what would run the machines. What you would do is you over type your machine, basically there was a big wooden handle, and you would slide it to the [00:13:00] left or to the right, I can't remember for sure now, and that would push the belt onto the pulley and start the machine going. And vice a versa, you'd pull it off and that would stop the machine. It was quite old, but it did the job. It was pretty neat.*

*If you're facing the shipyard from the water, to the left of that building, in the back, there was a big building, [00:13:30] which right now, since I've been down there, is just the cements lab. That used to be where the machine shop was, that I basically worked in and we did a lot of the work in.*

*It didn't have the overhead. It was more modern. It was all run by its own power, its own electric motors and stuff, [00:14:00] but it was still ancient. It still had signs on it that said, "This machine conforms to all war products." Or something similar to that. They were still old machines that were bought and put in, but they were new compared to what was there. They were operational. They set them all up nice. They had all the ways ground and leveled and lasered and everything. It was pretty interesting just to watch that go into effect.*

*There was [00:14:30] some really long lathes and some smaller ones and the vertical turret lathe and a drove press. It was two*

---

*good size lathes. I know one of them was of almost a full length of the building, and that's the one we would turn the wheel shafts on and stuff. As a matter of fact they would stick out through the door because the wheel shaft was long. .*

Bob Collins recalls the carpenter and machine shops:

*The carpenter shop shared the weathered monitor barn with the machine shop. The aged wooden floor, walls, and ceiling inside the carpenter shop were dry and raw and covered with fine sawdust from decades of boatbuilding. I remember it was sunlit most of the time and smelled of wood, dust, and tobacco smoke. High above, running the length of the shop in the raised center aisle, was a line shaft. Back in the day, similar to the sawmill, this system of pulleys and flat belts brought power to the machinery throughout the shop. During my tenure, it was only used occasionally. As the long, wide belts picked up speed on those occasions, it felt as if the entire building became the machinery. It rattled and rumbled and roared.*

*In contrast, the machine shop was dark and cold. I think the machinist's name was Al, but I don't remember. He was a short man who always had a stubby black cigar crammed into the side of his mouth. At the time, the machine shop was a place for filthy work by filthy hands. It was coated black from splattered coolants and cutting fluids. Sharp spiral turnings and metal chips and swarf were everywhere. It smelled of oils and solvents and kerosene and industrial gases. For some reason, that's where we ate our lunch. (I recall the metal lathe being struck by lightning during one of those lunches.)*

Frank Galle's father even grew vegetables on the property when the Matton's still owned the yard:

*There was an area behind [00:33:00] the offices that is ... was just a field. He let the men plant gardens there ... tomatoes, whatever they wanted to plant. I can remember when ... my father was Italian, my mother was Polish, my Polish grandfather lived with us. My father grew a horseradish for him so we could have fresh horseradish.*

Robert Gamache who grew up nearby has an early memory of the shipyard dog:

---

*My first memory of Mattons is riding my bicycle past Mattons. It was kind of a gravelly road and the railroad track [00:01:00] was still alongside of it at the time. What I called the junkyard dog would come flying out. There was a small shack there, and he was mean and nasty and barking at us, and we were always just worried that somehow he would get out, so they had a dog that would protect the property that they kept fenced in to a small area along the perimeter in the front where people would be, and it gave you the message that you weren't supposed to go in there.*

And William Hunt remembers some unwanted inhabitants:

*I'm talking back now before they tried to clean up the river, and north of Matton's was a dump, really, and in between the dump and Matton's was our parking lot, and of course the [00:30:30] field for Matton's, but the garbage drew the rats, and river rat is ... God, some of them are as big as cats, and this was before d-CON. They were all over the place. I got out of my [00:31:00] car a couple of times, parking my car, and stepped on a rat's nest, and they would peep out just like a little baby. You'd think it was a baby you were stepping on. It scared the heck out of you.*

*Another thing I never thought to tell you, the Mohawk River and the Hudson River, Matton was in between, and it was only maybe 12 foot to the top of it, but the rats had tunneled through nearly [00:31:30] all the way, so when the Mohawk River rose high, sometimes it would come through those rat holes and out on Matton's side rather than going around and down the actual river, so we had to contend with that.*

*Oh yeah, but when they finally came out with d-CON, I had I think eight or 10 stations throughout the yard [00:32:00] over there, where twice a day, I'd go out and I'd put d-CON because it was new to the rats in the areas, and I'd spread the d-CON in three or four different places, maybe more. I forget now, but when they would go, when they eat that stuff, it made them want to drink, and they would go to the river to drink, and once they drank something, it exploded inside of them and they were gone. [00:32:30] So I would have to go out every morning with the rake and push the carcasses into the river so they'd be washed downstream. Every time ... What the heck is that?*

---

William Hunt also recalls the occasional flood:

*There's a big lake north of here. It was put in for flood control and they were in touch with Matton and some days, especially when it was high water on the [00:33:00] river, they'd call down to me and they'd say, "Matton?" "Yeah." "We're going to release some water. You better take care of your guys down there."*

*So what happened, I get on the phone to Mrs. Matton, tell her, she said, "Go tell the guys to go out and move their cars because it's going to be inundated out there, and what we'll do, is we'll take everybody and put them on our truck and we go down to the 112th [00:33:30] Street bridge and stay there until the water had passed." Well, boy. In the meantime, we knew that stuff was going to come, so we had everything one to three feet off the floor in all of those buildings. Even all of those buildings were maybe four feet off the ground, we went another two or three feet to save whatever was in there, and [00:34:00] it was more than once that I'd go in the front door of my stockroom and there was about a two-foot step to get in, and the water would come up so fast that it would be coming in the front of my stockroom and I'd have to go through the back and out the window in order to get out without getting my feet wet.*

*Well, it depended on the weather of course, but it happened two or three times while I was over there, and you'd be surprised the things you see floating down the river. I mean, chicken coops, chickens on top of the coops trying to stay alive, and all kinds of stuff. We'd have the wires up on one end of the building, and something would happen and the wires would be pulled right off the building [00:35:00] and float away with the rest of it.*

*We had one time, this was good, I don't think you've ever heard of them, but there was a [DelMarco 00:35:08] cigarette distributor here in [inaudible 00:35:11], and somebody broke into that place and robbed it, and I'm talking cartons and cartons, okay? They had these big boxes that I think were like 20 cartons in each box, and these guys stole [00:35:30] a bunch of that stuff, and it come out in the newspaper that the authorities were looking for them, and of course, I guess they figured they were going to get rid of the evidence, so they dumped all of that stuff in the river. Well, we're down on the dock, and these pin, they got a point on the end,*

---

*loggers' tools, and we were pulling those. [00:36:00] I never had to buy a cigarette once.*

Some like Rick Davis reconstruct the smells:

*There was just so many different smells. Smells of the river. Sometimes you'd get the fishy smell, the watery smell. I had smells [01:05:00] of cooling and stuff from working in the machine shop. I can still smell this ... When you're turning the steel and the blue chips are coming off and it was hot, and you could smell that, and you could smell the cooling when it was cooling. I can smell the heating elements and stuff when we're doing the stainless steel bearings, [01:05:30] because we had them wrapped in almost, not really in asbestos, it was kind of a fiberglass matting that we had, and it had a weird smell to it, I can still get that smell in my nose now. There was all kinds of different smells and feels and ... but I can remember the smells of even wood burning all day when they had the barrels standing around in the wintertime.*

## **Compensation**

All interviewees were asked how much they were paid and what benefits or bonuses they received. Because the interviews range from 1951 through the closing in 1983, the wage paid workers varied greatly.

Robert Davignon remembers that in 1965:

*I was paid whatever minimum wage was an hour back then. It was only, maybe it was 3 bucks an hour or so.*

Rick Davis who began working in 1975 was paid quite a bit more:

*It was basically a 40 hour week and I believe I was getting five dollars an hour to start and benefits and I got to ride in the work with my dad.*

*Well, it was just the benefits of having insurance. [00:03:00] Health insurance and things like that, which were important to me because I just got married.*

---

*Yeah. There was a vacation and stuff like that, but it at this point I don't even remember how many days vacation I had. We did celebrate the holidays like anything else. We'd get a turkey for Thanksgiving and I think we even get we got [00:03:30] a turkey and a bonus for Christmas things like that, but as far as vacation time I really couldn't tell you. I can't remember.*

Jim Desroseirs

*Started out at \$8.50 an hour ... \$8 an hour, but I got 50 cent night differential. So that's where I started at."*

Frank Galle does not remember what his father made, but commented on the change when Bart Turecamo owned Matton's:

*Once Turecamo did take over, my father was ecstatic because I believe they got huge raises, they got a union ... all kinds of benefits and everything, which he had never planned on having working for Matton. It was ... [00:25:30] you got paid and that was it.*

*Yes. [00:28:00] He was never a union person until they came in and did all this for him. He was very happy, as was I. I'm sure my mother was too.*

Bob Hill naval architect who began work in 1970:

*Oh I remember exactly, \$150 a week, which was okay money for then. For me that was tremendous. [00:41:30] And \$150 a week. And Bart, I remember Bart asking me what I was getting paid. And I told him and he said, "Well how many degrees you got?" I said, "Well I don't have any right now." "What? I'm paying you \$150 a week and you don't have a degree?" He said, "Do you know what you're doing?" I said, "I'm learning." He said, " [00:42:00] You're too honest." But yeah, \$150 a week, I remember that. I remember looking at my first take home check, it was like \$108 or something and thinking, "Oh my God I've got \$108. Now what do I do?" Gasoline was \$.28 9/10. I could fill my car up a hundred times.*

Marc Limeri, also a naval architect began work in 1977 about seven years after Bob Hill says:

---

*I was paid, my initial salary was \$14,500, which, compared to my classmates at the time, was pretty decent. [00:11:00] but I will say that evidently the raises I got over the next three years didn't really keep up with what my classmates were getting, because when I did leave and took another job, I got a [00:11:30] substantial increase in pay.*

William Hunt, one of the earliest employees interviewed began work in 1953 states:

*[00:01:30] You're going to find this is kind of funny because at that time, the top pay was \$1.90 an hour, and New York City had the union shipbuilders, and they were making \$1.95, so we were pretty good. We were only a nickel under the going rate at that time.*

William Hunt also remembers the difference in pay:

*There was a pay scale on the tugs, and they had one pay scale for if they were working in the river. They had another pay scale if they were working on the ocean, [01:02:00] and they had a third pay scale if they were on the Great Lakes, and you wouldn't believe it, but the Great Lakes was the one that was more, you got more money to work there because it was more dangerous than the lakes or the river, and as I said before, there was about seven to 10 on the tugs as crew, and they worked eight and four, eight and four, and their off time, [01:02:30] all they did was read and sleep.*

*And the best job on the tugboat is the cook. The cook, he got his regular rate as the other guys were getting, but on top of that, he got, I think at the time, it was \$1.49 per meal per day per man, so you multiply that all out, and the cook's got quite a fistful of money to [01:03:00] buy food for the crew, and the idea was if that cook could keep his crew happy, it didn't make any difference to anybody how much he spent as long as he kept the crew happy, and whatever he could save, he'd put in his own pocket, so that was a pull to get a cook.*

When asked if they received any health insurance William Hunt responded:



---

*Oh, no. We didn't have anything. We didn't have anything. No. The only thing we had was our pay, and if you didn't like it, you went some place else, which a lot of guys did. And [01:23:00] then if we had a job, as I said, the cadre stayed there, but if they ran out of welding work, then the welders were laid off. If they ran out of corking jobs, they were laid off, so it was only the main cadre that stayed there for any length of time.*

Bob Collins recalls an effort to form a union:

*I loved the work, but after thirteen months, I realized that I couldn't make a living at it. The Mary was gone, and the yard was in decline. A couple of the guys decided we needed to form a union. Mr. Turecamo flew in and held a meeting in the lunchroom. I didn't know we had one. He told us that we were all just his "hobby," and if we tried to unionize, he'd close the yard down around us. I didn't like the idea of being any man's hobby. I quit in August of 1973. I took a job for New York State, sitting behind a desk. The pay was better; it was eight and a half less hours a week; the paid time off and holidays were unbelievable; there were break-times; the benefits were fantastic (including the retirement I now enjoy); there were even heat and air conditioning. I hated every minute of it for almost thirty-eight years.*

### **Day to Day at the Yard**

Many workers spoke of the harsh climate working outside all year on the Hudson. Robert Davignon recalls one way workers tried to stay warm:

*... we'd store bottles of wine up in the chimes, they called it, where we were working. And like I said earlier, it was cold there. Well, if it was cold, you screwed the cap and took a sip.*

Bob Collins learned a trick for keeping warm outside in the winter from one of the yard's steelworkers:

*I remember an act of kindness from a steelworker who, regretfully, I didn't know well enough to remember his name now. It was a cold, windy winter's day on the river, and the steel deck of the frozen Mary was drawing every bit of body heat out of me right through the soles of my boots. I couldn't work with gloves on, so my hands were numb. He must have seen my*

---

*discomfort. He heated a six-by-six scrap of steel plate with his cutting torch and gave it to me, warning me not to touch it directly. It worked great — several times that day.*

Workers like stockroom manager William Hunt had it a little bit easier:

*Oh, boy. The winter was something over there and these buildings [00:29:30] were only clapboard. There was no insulation in any of them, so you had to have a fire going all the time, and if you were sitting in front of the stove, you'd have to turn around to get your back warm. That's how it really was. I had a stove [00:30:00] and the guys used to come in there because I had the stove, and we'd have lunch together.*

And Frank Galle recalls how both winters and summers were hard for his carpenter father John Galle:

*There was no heat in the wintertime, no air conditioning in the summertime. Sometimes, in the hull of a steel ship, he would come home half frozen and exhausted or he died of the heat in the summertime, especially in the ... I can't image being in the hull of a steel tug for eight, 10, 12 hours a day working with the summer sun beating down on you. It had to be a sweatbox in there. In the winter, I know they had salamander heaters, which helped some, but still, you're standing on cold steel all day.*

Rick Davis remembers the daily routine of the shipyard, but also how each day could be different:

*You would just clean off your area at the end of the day and everybody would basically say their goodbyes till the next day. The next day you'd start all over again, but every day [00:52:00] actually was different because you were doing something different or a different part of the ship was being built, so you'd see that going on.*

Frank Galle when he visited the yard with his father, John Galle, recalls:

*I can remember being there lunchtime when this huge whistle went off, telling people to get back to work. I think they got a half*

---

*hour [00:29:00] for lunch, and if you wanted to keep your job, that's all you took was a half hour. Yes. [00:30:00] It was ... It sounded like a steamboat whistle. I never saw it, but I could hear it. I don't know where into the shipyard it was, but it was there. Like I said, everybody would listen to it and do as they were told. If they didn't do it they wouldn't have their job.*

*Nobody left the yard for lunch. Well, you didn't have enough time, and back then there weren't very many places to go. What I remember [00:45:30] is everybody came in with their black lunchbox and their thermos, and that was it. They came in in the morning and left to go home at night to sleep.*

William Hunt who managed the stockroom describes his daily routine:

*I knew Mr. and Mrs. Matton fairly well because every day, whenever I would give our stockroom to the men ... Well, I had [00:08:00] to keep control of the tools, too, but the things like nuts and bolts and anything that you would use in the house, you would probably use on the tugboat, so I had to have all of those supplies. Dishes, knives and forks, pots and pans, and I had to keep control of that stuff and write it down as it was taken out, and then at [00:08:30] the end of the day around four o'clock, I'd go up to the office and give the paper to Mrs. Matton, and she'd look it over and we'd go over it together as far as what was needed, and she would process an order to resupply the stuff that I had given out.*

Mr. Hunt discovered the rope he kept in the stockroom could serve as a nice resting place:

*Well, as you know, a tugboat has ropes on [00:13:30] it, and you can see them coiled [inaudible 00:13:33] and I had different footages [00:15:00] for each tug depending on where the rope was going to be used and what it was going to be used for, and one thing I used to go and take the coil of the rope out, and get a little space in there, and I found out it was a hell of a nice place to take a nap inside the coil of rope. You got enough space there for a man to get down in there, and you had rope, nice smell all around you, you'd go right to sleep. I did that a couple times.*

Mr. Hunt also remembers his morning breaks:

---

*Johnny [Bendan 01:11:31], we always took a 10 minute break in the morning around 10 o'clock, and we'd get kielbasa, and I had a couple of kielbasa and we'd cook them up for a few minutes and have them with our coffee on a big roll, and honest to God, I can taste that grease now, but you couldn't [01:12:00] buy the stuff now because health-wise, it was probably killing us and we didn't know it, but man, honest to God, we'd enjoy that. It would be a cold day, and that break, and oh jeez.*

Marc Limeri naval architect describes his daily routine:

*I didn't have to check in. I didn't have to punch a clock, let's put it that way. There was a clock for the yard workers, but the office workers, we didn't punch in. I would go up, and it would depend. Usually if I did, most of the time I was doing the purchasing stuff, so when I did that, I would just go into that little office, and the guys would send up what they wanted either on scraps of paper they'd written, or sometimes [00:16:00] we had a form that they were supposed to use that they rarely did. They usually sent up scraps of paper. At lunchtime, we would, the secretaries and I, we'd eat lunch in the lunchroom we had back there.*

Many interviewees described how jobs were flexible and people pitched in where needed. One duty Naval Architect Marc Limeri was not happy about:

*The purchasing part was not what I expected. That was not what I was trained for and not what I was really interested in doing. [00:18:00] The other parts, though, I did enjoy, making up some of the drawings and talking with the guys down in the yard about what they needed and trying to solve some problems and things like that. I did enjoy that.*

*Actually, what I liked about the fact was I could do everything. A tugboat not being so big and the yard being very small, I was involved in everything. I was involved in the engine parts. I was involved in the equipment for the towing, windlasses and things like that. I was involved in stuff in the pilot house, the galley, the paint..*

---

Pat Wright offers a different perspective. Her father Francis “Rip” Snyder didn’t work in the shipyard, but was a crew member on Matton’s fleet of tugs:

*[00:01:30] My father was working for Matton's at the time when we were young. When we started to get a little bit older, my mom kind of objected to it because he was on the boats for two weeks and home for two weeks. She didn't like him being away from us so much when we were little kids, and he eventually quit Matton's.*

Pat’s Mom still made sure the children got to go to work sometimes with their Dad:

*Many, many, [00:02:00] many times. Yes. Many times. When my dad was coming down through the flight of locks, my mom would pile us all in the car, and we'd ride up to one of the upper locks, maybe Utica, and he'd put us on the boat and bring us down through the flight of locks. It was very exciting. Going up and down in the water, I mean we were just thrilled to tears. When my brother got a few years older, my [00:02:30] father took him on several trips with him out to the Great Lakes. All the way out through the canal ... from Cohoes. And he just was thrilled. I think that's why he went in the Navy.*

*And to be a girl to be on a boat, it was very different. [00:04:00] They were all men. Yeah. Very, very few girls. Not many girls at all. In fact, I don't ever remember seeing another daughter on one of the boats, all the time that we did it.*

*There were bells. There were whistles. There were noises, yeah. Because of my dad, and with his job he was always going up and down through the locks near us, so we saw a lot of 'em on the boats [00:14:30] itself. She would always make sure that if he was within 30 miles of us, we were gonna see him. She'd pile us in the car and take us to wherever he was, and like I said, let us get on the boat and come down through the locks. It probably was illegal. It probably wasn't very safe, but we thought it was a heck of a lot of fun.*

*[00:15:00] He'd write to her. We have letters of hers that he wrote to her when she was in nurses training and he was on the boats. He knew what his schedule was gonna be, so she knew where he was*

---

*gonna be, pretty much. He'd call her from a payphone when they tied up, and say "We're going to be in Utica tomorrow," [00:15:30] and she'd pile us in the car and take us to Utica the next day to meet the boat!*

*It was big big big, to a small child. It was noisy. It was hot. They were always doing something. They were always busy. They always had something to do to take care of the boat, or docking it, [00:17:00] or going through the locks, or making sure they were going straight down the canal or whatever. But it was always busy. Everybody had a job. There were only two or three men on the boat at a time. "Stay out of the way," out from under people's feet, and "Be careful. Don't fall in the water!" The most important thing. "Don't fall off the boat." [00:17:30] So we learned that very early, or else we wouldn't have been allowed to go.*

*But like I said, it was big and noisy, and I can remember the engines. The vibration of the tugboat when the engines were running. The whole boat just vibrated with the engines. It was very, very, very [00:18:00] tactile. Very tactile. Very exciting for a little kid.*

*They had a galley, and my dad was a fairly good cook, even though he never cooked at home except for breakfast once in a while, 'cause my mother was a very good cook. He liked good food, so he taught himself how to cook in the galley [00:18:30] on the boat. He always ate well. Always. Because he didn't like bad food. So he did a lot of cooking on the boat.*

Passing through the locks was particularly exciting for a young child:

*When we got there, of course they were tied up, and the water was up, so they were elevated. They would be coming usually down the canal toward Cohoes and Waterford, so we were lowering. They'd get on the boat, and they would be tied up with ropes. [00:21:30] The water would start going out of the lock, and you'd start going down, down, down. The walls of course are coming up alongside of you. It was a sensation of not claustrophobia, but being enclosed, because you'd see the cement walls and then all of a sudden the front gate would open, they'd take the ropes down, [00:22:00] and you'd start out into the open canal. It was always a thrill. It was like, "Oh my God! How'd they do that?" It was so exciting, because*

---

*you could hear the water, and you could hear them releasing the water and pumping and pumping and pumping. They'd loosen the ropes so the boat could lower in the water without getting hung up. Being tied up [00:22:30] was always a thrill too, because there was an art to it. My dad was really good at it. He could throw a rope pretty well. Getting the tug tied up correctly in a lock so you don't bump the walls and you can loosen it when the water goes down, it was an art. There was a definite art to it. My dad was really good at it, from what I understand.*

## **Boat Construction**

Interviewees spoke in depth of their respective jobs. Many people remembered the mold loft. Marc Limeri describes it in detail:

*It was a pretty old-fashioned yard, the way you build things. Above the cafeteria or the lunchroom actually. It was a lunchroom in the other building was a mold loft, [00:58:30] In the mold loft, they had the old-fashioned way of building ships is you would draw the lines out full size, and then you can make templates for how to cut the plates for the steel, for the hull, and for the frames and that sort of thing..*

*You would lay down a set of plywood, and you'd draw a grid. You'd mark up feet, height, and to the distance each side or length, depending on which way, which set of plans you're drawing. Then you would actually, from the naval architect's drawings [01:00:00] you'd get offsets. You could take measurements or maybe the architect might provide you with a table saying, "Here's what the points are," but the real traditional ways, you would take it off the scale drawing. You would measure it and say, "Okay, it's one inch, and one inch equals so many feet as listed on the scale," and then you'd actually put that actual distance.*

*Then after you lay out all those points, then you would take a ... They were called a spine, but I guess in a full-size [01:00:30] thing it would probably be a thin piece of wood that was bendable. You'd set at each point and you'd draw a line. First, before you did that, you have to check the line and make sure that it's what's called, "Fair." "Fair" means smooth.*

---

*You can imagine if you have a long curved line that you've laid out with some points, that you might see an inflection or a dip in the curve or something if you stood on the side and looked at it. If you did that, that means [01:01:00] your curve's not fair, and you would adjust the points as necessary to get a nice, smooth curve. You still had to stay fairly faithful to what the naval architect had, because he did all his designs as far as the buoyancy and the righting moments and that sort of thing. You couldn't go way outside, so you had to stay fairly close to what they had. That was the old-fashioned way.*

*Yes. It's called a mold loft. Because those lines, from a design viewpoint those are called the molded [01:02:00] lines. The drawings you see on a naval architect are called the molded lines. It's like a mold, like if you were talking of a clay pot or something, we have a mold, and you put the ... That's where that comes from.*

*After they did that, after you had that, then you'd take paper or heavy-duty card stock type of thing, [01:02:30] and you could trace what you want it to be for the plate. That they would get cut out. Then they'd take that down to the steel and lay it down and draw the outline. Then the guys with the torches would cut the plate out, and then you could take it to the hull and fasten it up.*

Rick Davis explains how the boats were built on land:

*What was pretty cool is they had a big I-beam, which ran parallel with the river, and on the I-beams were these blocks, and the blocks were set up [00:25:00] at a certain height. They were like a little ... I don't know what you would call them, like a Y-block. They would be welded on top of this I-beam. It was a very large I-beam, the length of the ship, and these blocks have been welded on top and they were at different heights.*

*What it did is the keel would sit into that, which was ... I believe it was one inch wide [00:25:30] piece of steel by probably eight inches ... Well, it was one inch thick by eight inches wide and then it was a length. It would sit into these little holders, I guess you'd call it, and that's the shape of the keel would be. Then they worked off of that and they would make a skeleton. They'd build up all your steel [00:26:00] out the side and they build the skeleton of the ship, which would be all the outsides.*



---

*It was built on land. Then the blocks were every, let's say, 12, 14 [00:26:30] inches apart, set underneath the keel. So, the keel set in and had the shape of the keel, how it swept up or in the front or whatever. They would build a skeleton to that. What else was different was when they built it, they built the very front of the ship, the bow on the ground, in front of it. So, the bow [00:27:00] was not built on the rest of the ship, it was built nose up in the air, I guess you'd call it, in front of the ship.*

*They would build the skeleton and then they would call in lots of, lots of welders because they'd have to skin it to put the steel on the outside. So, you'd need a lot of welders to put all these big steel plates [00:27:30] up. They would have to put the steel plates in place and weld them and everything else. Then once the skins and everything were on, they would pick the bow up-*

*Yes. We had a big crane, matter of fact, they had an old crane when I first started there. It was all levers and its head crank to start.*

*But he had all these big levers he'd have to pull and push to make it go up and down, the guy, his name was Artie and he did all the ... He ran the fork trucks and the crane. It wasn't too much after I was there they got a new crane, which was all hydraulics, that was amazing. It was a big crane, 100 ton crane. [00:29:00] You could do everything with your fingertips, as opposed to these big huge levers. It was a pretty neat setup.*

*Anyways, they would weld on to the sides of the bow and then they would pick it up with the crane and my dad was actually one of the specialty welders and specialty riggers there, and he rigged up the bow and he had [00:29:30] just got a new person working with him. He was like a fitter, helper type of guy. And they had rigged the bow all up and they had picked it up. And you would pick it up and then you would rotate it, and then you would go forward and almost snap it into place, get it lined up. Once it was [00:30:00] lined up, the welders would put it in place, but I remember my ... I was out actually watching him do this. His helper was underneath. They got it all lined up to this I-beam and the front of the skeleton itself, the ship, and it fell. I think it was like 18 to 20 tons and it just hit the ground.*

---

*And the guy had just come [00:30:30] out from underneath it. Luckily no one got hurt, but they could feel it and hear it from miles away. There was no there was no damage to it, but there was a lot of flack about what made it happen. My father felt bad, he thought he rigged something wrong, then he found out what had happened, is one of the clamps, the Cosby clamps that held the cables together, broke. [00:31:00] Once one broke it would create stress on the other ones and they would just pop apart. So, when one broke it broke the others and fell. It was not man error this time, it was actually mechanical error, something actually broke, but they were able to pick it up and put it back on and get it welded.*

Bob Collins describes the yard's circular saw blade and his experience using a two-man chainsaw:

*My uncle (John Galle, master shipwright/cabinet maker) was a true craftsman, an artisan. He could shape and fit the clear Honduran Mahogany we worked with — first time, every time — as if he were spraying it out of a can. He was an easygoing gentleman who spoke with a thick accent and softly whistled or sang long-forgotten songs from his boyhood days in Italy.*

*The wood was purchased in log lengths. My uncle cut the logs at the rotary sawmill, which was near the carpenter shop, and milled them into all of the boards and trim that were needed for the first Mary Turecamo, the wood-grain-painted tug.*

*On the few occasions that I worked in the sawmill, it was terrifying. The circular saw blade was four feet (give or take) in diameter, and it had removable teeth for sharpening that were known to fly free. My uncle would operate the carriage that moved the logs to the blade. My job was to hold a board against the unpredictable speeding belt that brought power from the motor in the corner of the three-sided building to the saw and make sure that the belt didn't leave its path. In 1972, the sawmill (like the whole yard) was well over fifty years old, and it showed it. The mill was deafening, and the sawdust at times was so thick I couldn't breathe.*

*I spent a couple days on the deadly end of a two-man chainsaw cutting fenders for the tug. Unlike a conventional chainsaw, it was powered by a loud towable air compressor that stank of diesel. With both hands and locked elbows, I held on to the short upright handle on the end of the long bar while the sharp chain whirled directly at my midsection, coating me with sooty rubber.*

---

Many people commented on the care that went into building each part of the boat. Master Carpenter John Galle was remembered by many including his son Frank Galle:

*My father was very proud, because unlike a tugboat, which was basically just a tugboat, these were gorgeous inside. Everything was perfect. But, my father was that way anyway. He didn't believe in using molding. Everything had to fit perfectly, which annoyed [00:11:30] me greatly, because I wanted to get it done.*

*Unless it was perfect, it wasn't going to go anywhere with him. I guess that's why he was the master craftsman. The only woods they ever used in the tug were teak and mahogany.*

John also remembers how they made the wood grain effect on the steel hulls:

*They paint on what I'll call a base coat. They're ... let's say [00:31:00] it was either light or dark, whichever, and I don't know which, because I never watched them do it. But, he described it to me.*

*They let that dry. They would put a second coat on over it, opposite, if the bottom coat was light the top coat would be dark, or vice versa.*

*They would take, to me it looked like a giant cone, and while the paint was ... the topcoat was still wet, they would go down and, with this comb, and make designs in the paint to make it look like wood. Part of the ship, the [00:31:30] topcoat would show through, in other parts, the base coat would show through. It looked like it ... come out different shades. They would fashion some things to look like knots in the wood on it. It was just amazing.*

Bob Hill also remembers how important the paint job was to Bart Turecamo:

*And Turecamo had another unique thing about their boats. The way he painted the outside they looked like wood. I don't know if you've seen any pictures of the Turecamo boats built, you can't tell they're steel [00:31:00] until you get very close to them. He had a*

---

*guy come from Florida, he's an elderly gentlemen who only wanted to retire, but Bart wouldn't let him. He could bringing him up to Matton and to New York to repaint the boats. And he would put in a base color and then he would have the combs and the sponges. And the next thing you know it looks like it's wood. It's beautiful, [00:31:30] beautiful boats. And woe to the crew who didn't take care of that paint job. I can remember Bart dressing down people in the shipyard. He'd get them in there about the condition of their paint on their boat. And then he'd be screaming and yelling at them. "I didn't spend this money so that you can make it look like trash."*

Rick Davis, the machinists describes his role:

*We were responsible for making the wheel shafts, the rudder shafts. We would make the bearings for the wheel shafts and the rudder shafts and shrink them on. We would make ... On the shafts ... It that wasn't just a straight shaft. You'd have to put tapers on it. You'd have to put threads on the end. We'd have to make this [00:15:30] huge knot that, once the props were put on, or the wheels we call them, you'd have to tighten this knot on behind it and we'd have to make the wrench for the knot and the wrench would go on, you'd have to hit it with sledgehammers to tighten it up. We'd make that and anything else that needed to be machined. We did a lot of the piping.*

*Anyways, they did a lot of piping and [00:16:30] things like that, and a lot of the plumbing. They would need a lot of the flanges and stuff turned or made or board out. We'd do things like that. A lot of times we'd just sharpened drill bits, because they did a lot of drilling and things like that.*

Bob Hill apprenticed at Matton right after high school in 1969

*And when I got out of high school I couldn't go to college so what I did was I called Matton, had an ad for a draftsman in the local paper, in the Troy Record. I remember seeing that and thinking, "I can do this," because I knew how to draw now. And so I went over there and I interview with a guy named Jack [Parrow 00:11:24], he was the yard manager then. And he hired [00:11:30] me because he wasn't going to find any Naval architects in Troy, and he needed somebody for the boat they were building now. So I had never done*

---

*this in my life and they hired me. And they had me working under a man named Tony [Emerling 00:11:48] who I was eventually going to replace. And Tony spent some time showing me what he was working on and the piping [00:12:00] systems I was going to have to draw. And I remember spending gobs and gobs of hours at RPI's library trying to learn very quickly what I had to do. And I did. And so that was the year and a half I worked for Matton was working in the design office up there, doing drawings for that boat and the one that came after it.*

*Well usually the first thing I did was get yelled at by Jack Parrow because he needed something I hadn't completed. And then that was followed by you had a number of drawings you were responsible for doing within a time window. when the boat left the shipyard with a set of drawings they reflected what was really there.*

Mr. Hill recalls learning an important lesson about ship building he never forgot:

*There were some really good people at Matton. [00:19:30] The yard manager on the ground in the yard was a fellow named Marty [McGary 00:19:34]. And a jovial sort of fellow. But he was a hard guy. And the first job he gave me that required any design was he had a tug in there from the Turecamo fleet that was the Port of Albany Tug. And they would use her for doing ship docking in Albany. [00:20:00] And they wanted to refit it with a sewage holding tank because initially the sewage went right overboard in all these boats. And so he said, "We're gonna put a holding tank in," and he took me down the engine room and he said, "Now measure this up right here. This is where the tank's gotta fit and you've got to make it fit around all these things. So make sure it's gonna work."*

*So I drew a tank up and was very proud [00:20:30] of myself, went down, measured everything five times, and Marty sent the tank over to the metal shop to be built.*

*Yeah, it was built there at Matton in the steel fab shop. And what happened, well he called me down there one morning, he said, "Well we got your tank done. You want to come down and look at it?" And so I came down, it was still outside the boat. And I said, "Well what's the matter, doesn't it fit?" [00:21:00] He*

---

*said, "Oh yeah." He said, "We measured it and we checked it, it's going to fit like a glove in there. So there's only one thing you forgot." "What's that?" "It's got to get through a door. And you made it too big for the door, to get through the door." "Oh." So they had to cut it in half and take it through in two halves and reassemble it in the engine room. And I heard about that for many months.*

Mr. Hil remembers the high quality that Bart Turecamo demanded of his boats:

*[00:29:30] And if you look at the work that went into a Matton boat, when you looked at the quality of it, the welding, these guys were not high tech welders, but they were very good welders. The ship fitting, which means that the way the parts fit together, and when they welded them together they looked like they belong together. The design work, Merritt Demarest, who designed [00:30:00] the boats for Bart, was just a wizard at this. His boats were beautiful. They had very nice shapes to them, very beautiful shear lines. And so I was really working with the best. And all these guys, Johnny Galle was amazing. When you look at some of the pilot houses that he had outfitted with these ... [00:30:30] The pilot house on the Mary Turecamo was covered with a wood called afrormosia. Who's ever heard of afrormosia? But Bart, that's what he wanted and that's what he got.*

### **Social Life and Relationship with Town**

Although the interviewees had very good feelings of camaraderie with their fellow workers, few remember socializing outside of the job.

Robert Davignon is one who recalls:

*A lot of times on payday, we stopped and there was a bar in Cohoes, New York, which was out on the end of the, can't think what they call that street there, anyway, but there [00:21:00] was a bar up there and a lot of us would go up there and ... excuse me, have a few beers and stuff and then go home.*

*Bob Collins describes his not-so-endearing relationship with one of the yard's steelworkers:*

---

*When I was hired, I took the work away from one of the steelworkers who also used to do some of the woodworking part time. That didn't endear me to him. Paul was a big man, leathery skin with deep creases, steely deep-set eyes, and thrice my age. He was nails-tough and scary-quiet, but when he did speak, there was gravel in his voice. He used to eat each of his sandwiches at lunchtime with four bites. He used to fold over a plastic six-pack yoke so there was only one ring; then, he'd put two of his surviving fingers through and pull it apart as if it were a smoke ring from his ever-present cigarette. I tried it once and couldn't feel the tips of my fingers for months.*

*One day, we were both working in the same small bunk room. He was grinding something, and I was putting plywood on the ceiling above us, being careful to stay out of his way. In the center of the ceiling was a round electrical box for a future light fixture. I needed something round to use as a pattern to cut the hole, and I didn't want to stop working and go back up to the shop. He had a fire extinguisher with him in the room. The top of it was perfect. So I picked it up, turned it upside down, and drew my circle on the plywood. I had no idea that that was how you activated the old brass and copper extinguisher. In a matter of seconds, my boots and lower pants were covered with brown foam. And so were his. It didn't do much to foster our relationship.*

Harmless pranks occurred quite often. Rick Davis recounts a few of them:

*There was one woman. She was a welder that worked there and she was tough. I didn't [00:42:00] know her that awful well because she was basically a temporary welder. A lot of the welders were temporary, because we didn't need welders a lot. I mean, they did need them, but not as many throughout the ship building, but when you're a skin, putting the skin on the outside, all the outer skins of it, you need a lot of welders, so they would hire a lot of them. You'd get a big influx of people [00:42:30] and then after all the skin was done a big outflux of people. She was one of them, but she took some hard hits as far as people busting on her.*

*A lot of us were young. We were in our 20s and having fun. She was in the outhouse at one point and got tipped over. Whoops. [00:43:00] Just stupid things like that. We used to do all kinds of things. We used to make settling cannons and blow them off. We used to shoot wooden rockets over across the river into the town, I forget what's it, Troy on the other side or whatever. And God knows what they landed on. We'd had these cups of paint. We'd be*

---

*done with a painting of it and they'd set them on fire and let [00:43:30] them go down the river.*

*There was guys, they'd put ... They'd find fish or something laying on the side of the river and put it in somebodies welding helmet, inside their glass or something, or you'd could put sardines juice on their welding [inaudible 00:43:45] so when they went to weld it would really stink. I was hung over the heads of the ship by my feet for being stupid. Just a lot of your normal, [00:44:00] I guess you'd say kid stuff, but we did a lot of work.*

*It was a menagerie of different people, but everybody got along. Everybody helped everybody. It was outside, so it was cold. They had barrels, like 55 gallon drums you'd burn wood in the keep warm. I was lucky I got to stand in the machine shop, so I'd be warm [00:45:30] the whole time, but I felt sorry for some of the guys. You had to work outside during a winter*

*So, it was interesting. I met a lot of people there, a lot of nice guys, a lot of smart people. I don't think there was one person there I could say I didn't like.*

Jim Desrosiers:

*It was just like pretty much any other construction site. Everybody kind of joked around. Everybody got along. Nobody ... There was no issues with who's doing the job, who's not. Everybody came and did their part. [00:17:30] It was a good time.*

Frank Galle:

*I can only remember three or four of the men that my father socialized with. Later on when [Ture 00:24:21] took over, my father associated with the [Tarricamos 00:24:25], maybe because they appreciated what he did for their house.*

*There was Cark [Fran 00:24:29], who I think was [00:24:30] a manager or something in the shop, and just a few of the guys, but not many. My father always said, "Look, I' too damned tired to do anything after I get home from working 12 hour days out in the cold or in the heat." He just wanted to relax.*



---

*There were Jim White, who was the guy who was the outfitting foreman there. He's [00:27:00] the guy who actually had to get everything built. And he was always willing to share information. That was the nice thing about Matton, you never had anybody chasing you off, "I'm too busy," or anything. These guys took a lot of pride in what they were building. And they spent time with me. I probably learned more in that year and a half at Matton than I did in any other part of my career.*

Marc Limeri:

*... I liked it. I liked the fact, one of the things that I really also liked was that it was a small place, and you knew everybody..*

*I met the people in the yard. They were very friendly. I didn't have any issues with anybody in the yard. The general foreman, [Bert Fobear 00:13:22], was a really nice guy. He helped me a lot. [00:13:30] Carl was the head machinist, and he also was very nice, helped a lot, and a stock person. Everybody was really pretty nice.*

*I didn't know of any problems with any of the workers to any of the foremen or anything like that. It was pleasant. I enjoyed the time [00:14:00] working there. Eventually I moved to Cohoes so I could be close to the job, so it was very convenient. I'd get done at 5:00. I'd be home by 10 after 5 or so, go swimming in the community pool we had. It was very nice in summer.*

Pat Wright whose father worked at Matton had a sense of the connection:

*There was a brotherhood that was connected with working on the boats. It was, I wouldn't say a privilege, but you had to be good at what you did in order to stay working for Matton's. They did not hire bad people. If you knew your job, you could keep your job. But there was definitely a brotherhood of boatmen. [00:33:30] I know my father stayed friends with several people he worked with for a long, long, long time.*

## **Accidents**

---

Minor cuts and accidents were handled by William Hunt the stockroom manager:

*If a fellow got hurt, they sent him up to me, and if it was just a bandaid or something like that, I had a medicine thing there, a medicine kit, [00:13:00] to take care of something like that, but if somebody got something in his eye, then I'd have to send him up to the office because I ain't ever played around with eyes. That was one thing I would not do.*

But some interviewees remembered much more serious accidents. Robert Davignon:

*Yeah. Now, I got one other story here with it. I give you the name of Bob Henry. He was the yard superintendent and he was a young man from Washington State. Matton had hired him to run the shipyard, but when we were putting the propellers on the boat, [00:29:30] there was two propellers, twin screw they called it. And we had scaffolding up and we had chain hoists on there, so you could manipulate and raise the wheel and put it on to the shaft of the tug. Okay? Once that was done, then they put the nut on the end to hold it. [00:30:00] But as they were trying to be, what do you call them now? Kind of get the one propeller up, the pad eye that held the chain hoist broke and the wheel was only hooked on one then and it come down and swung through the scaffolding and snapped and come down [00:30:30] and Bob Henry was standing underneath that and the wheel come down and chopped both his legs off.*

*I was, at that time, I was running what they call a cherry picker or a grove telescopic crane, on wheels. And I was right close to all this when it happened and I ... I don't know how I did it so fast, but I [00:31:00] got the boom over there and stuff where they could get the chain back on it and get it up off, but it took both of his legs off. And he was a young man. He wasn't an ... I always in the back of my mind remember that. I mean, it was horrible. Horrible thing.*

Interviewees also remembered a couple of smaller accidents where fingers were lost. Again Bob Davignon:

*Well, they had a bank of [00:33:00] welders, in other words there was six or eight of them underneath the little shaft and that's where*

---

*all the welders' machines were. And this one guy, Dave Hatley, he was wanting to see if this machine was running. Well, rather than hit the switch, he stuck his finger in where the fan was and the thing was running. It chopped his finger off. [00:33:30] So, and that was when somebody asked him, "Well, how did it happen?" He said, "Well, I went ..." "Don't do it!" he says. He was going to do it again, put his finger in the fan!*

Rick Davis:

*I think the worst thing that happened there was a (not intelligible), John Fitzpatrick, we used to call him Fitzy. [00:53:30] He was one of the ... He did the plumbing. He did all the plumbing stuff. He was one of the plumbers. He had come into the machine shop and we had this big standing grinders and they were 460 powered.*

*He had come in and he was making tent [stakes 00:53:58] because he was going [00:54:00] camping. So, he's grinding them on the grinder wheel, next thing I know, I hear him yell. And he yells, "Oh, I think I hurt my thumb." Then he looks down and he goes, "Oh no, I don't have a thumb." He took his thumb off on the grinder, that actually pulled it right off. I remember they rushed him to the hospital, got the thumb into [00:54:30] a cup of ice and stuff, but they couldn't reattach it because it wasn't cut off, it was actually ... Like it was pulled off.*

*I remember with their new crane, one of the help laborers got into it at night and decided he was going to play with the crane, which is a big no, no to start with. Well, he swung around he had the power lines with it, and luckily no one got hurt, but it wrecked the cables on the [00:55:30] crane, so he got fired and it cost him a lot of money to have the new cables put on the crane.*

And Frank Galle remembers once when his father got hurt:

*He loved his work. I can [00:08:30] remember one time he did get his hand caught in a machine, which he was out of work for just about the entire summer. It was a giant [plainer 00:08:38] that plain the wood so it was smooth on both sides.*

*He was pushing it in. I don't know if he wasn't paying attention or what happened, but, it caught his arm. His arm and hand only went*

---

*through the rollers, stopped just before he got next to the blades. But, I mean, they had to cut his wedding ring ... on his ... off his ringer, because it was [00:09:00] crushed.*

*But, that didn't stop him. As soon as he was able to go back to work, he couldn't wait to get there.*

William Hunt also remembers when a winter accident cost someone his life:

*The fellow that I worked with, Johnny Bendan, [01:21:30] he was in his early 40s, probably, and he used to do the same job I did, and one night, he was taking the notes up to Mrs. Matton and this was in the wintertime, and he come back down, there was a cubicle where they had the time clock and you had to punch that, and you walk out to get your car or whatever.*

*[01:22:00] And because it was slippery and everything, I think that he slipped and hit, when he fell, he hit his head on the cement floor and somebody found him there, and of course, they called, at that time it was the Leonard Hospital, and they took him over there and they made him wait nearly four hours [01:22:30] to make sure he had insurance of some kind before they'd do anything for him. He wound up dying a few days later, but hey, those things happen.*

### **The Dry Dock**

The dry dock was describe by a few interviewees. Robert Davignon remembered it well:

*Well, it was made out of wood and it had, [00:37:00] let's see, four ... well, picture a square or a block, and then inside of it was one end was hollow or the end of it and then all the way through it. So you had two sides on it which were about three to four foot wide. And then you had valves in there [00:37:30] and stuff that run by compressors. And that would allow, to pump it out, you would raise the dry dock, or else open the valves and fill it and it would sink it. So, that would make it possible to get whatever you were trying to raise out of the water. Sort of follow me on that?*

---

*That was used for ... if he wanted the ... he owned a fleet of tugs then. So, if one of them got damaged or had an engine problem, they'd bring it up through up the Hudson and [00:38:30] it'd come through the federal lock and go over to the shipyard. And then he would sink the dry dock and then they would float the tugboat in there and frame it up with bracing. And then start the pumps and pump the water out and as you pumped it out, it would raise the boat up. Similar to a lock, the lock in a canal. You know, you throw them in, they close the gates, the only thing with [00:39:00] this didn't have gates on it.*

And in the winter time they had to make sure the water around the dock did not freeze:

*Well, in the wintertime, that thing would be frozen into the ice around the dock. Well, we had saws back then, they were two man saws. And they were probably six foot long. And they had big teeth on them. What you did is when you started at one end and about a four foot width, you'd have two guys on one saw and two guys on [00:35:30] another. And you just started cutting up and down like up and down, up and down. And then you'd cut so much out of the four foot slot and then break it off with a hammer or a wedge and then pull that pieces out. So now you had a trough for water moving all the way around the dry dock and through the wintertime, that kept it from sinking. [00:36:00] But, I think back, everybody took turns cutting that ice with the two man saws.*

William Hunt also remembers a couple of “accidents”:

*And one of the things that we were always careful of, the men who worked on the tugs, now there were usually seven to 10 on the crew, depending on the size of the boat, and they were all told [00:03:30] not to use the restroom while the boat was on dry dock because there were guys working under it. Well, every once in awhile, somebody would forget, and it was kind of messy. But as I say, each boat had its own set of blocks so that they knew once that boat was on there, where they were going to go and so forth.*

### **Margaret Matton**

Only a couple of the interviewees worked when the Matton's owned the yard. Each of them had strong memories of Mrs. Matton.

---

Robert Davignon:

*Margaret, [00:50:00] she was like a guy because they had all kinds [inaudible 00:50:05] and one guy said that they were up in the office one day and she was hollering at one of them on the phone because she'd like to give orders to the boats and stuff, rather than have a dispatcher. And that's when she told this one guy just ... he said she said, "I just sit up here eight hours a day, [00:50:30] and what have I got to show for it?" She held her hand up and she had a diamond ring that was the size of a quarter.*

Willima Hunt remembers Mrs. Matton fondly:

*She was some lady. As I said, there was seven tugs, [00:09:00] and each one of those tugs had a captain and a crew, and she could swear and curse as good as anybody in the whole place, and she was on the third floor, and if the tugs were going up and down the river, she'd have her binoculars out of the third floor. The building is still there, I believe, and she would be able to see what was going on [00:09:30] on that tug and where it was and what they were doing and so forth. So she was quite a lady,*

Mr. Hunt remember one time when a new tug was returning from being inspected by the Coast Guard. Mrs. Matton spotted something not quite right on one of the returning tug:

*But when the thing was over, that is the test, it was accepted by the Coast Guard, the government, but they had food and drink, and of course liquor, on the tug celebrating the passing of it, and this was a ritual, too, and [00:21:00] it was just certain ones, certain fellows from the yard that were on that, the old-timers, or more or less worked their place to be on it, and of course Matton himself. Anyway, the last boat we built, new boat, they were coming back home, back towards Troy, and as I say, Mrs. Matton would stand up in the third floor [00:21:30] office and look down, and she could see where they were coming in.*

*Well, I don't know if you know Troy at all, but where Matton's is, about a mile, a mile and a half below there is what they call the federal lock. Anything above the federal lock is state and anything below that is federal, and she spotted the new boat coming up to the canal and she called down to me, [00:22:00] and I had one of*

---

*these loud speaker things so you could call over. She says to me, "Bill, I've got these guys on my ... I can see them coming up the river," and she says, "They're flying the American flag upside down." I said, "Jesus. They must be drunk," because that's a sign of distress, like SOS.*

*[00:22:30] So she says, "Have you got that loud speaker of yours?" I said, "Yeah." She says, "You go down on the dock and you holler down to them to change the flag." She says, "We got ... " They had representatives of the industrial magazine on the dock with cameras and people to write up a story for one of the industrial magazines. She says, "You go out on the dock and you use [00:23:00] that thing and tell them bastards to turn that flag up where it belongs." "Okay."*

*So I hung up the phone and I get the horn and go out on the dock. "Freddie, fix the flag. It's flying upside down." They could hear me all over Lansingburgh, all over [inaudible 00:23:22], and people would come out and wonder, "What the hell's going on?" And here I'm, "Freddie, fix the flag. [00:23:30] You got it upside down." Well, you know, I'm not sure if you're from here, but there's the 112th Street bridge, and once they hit that, then it's only like a quarter mile to Matton Yard, so finally I got through to Freddie and they fixed the flag and flew it right. I'll never forget that, honest to God. But anyway, I guess [00:24:00] we ought to change the subject.*

Even Patricia Wright as a young girl can recall her impression of Mrs. Matton:

*Yes, Maggie Matton. I had met Maggie Matton a couple of times. I was only a tiny girl, and I don't remember her physically. I don't remember what she looked like, but Maggie Matton was quite a woman to be [00:25:00] tempered with though. She was a tough old bird! None of the guys messed with Maggie Matton. None. She was quite a person.*

*No, just that she was a fair, tough woman. And she knew her business. She was a good businesswoman, from what I understand. The feeling I remember is that they respected her. But she could be tough if you crossed her. [00:26:00] You didn't want to.*

---

A couple of people remember the story about the electric suits.  
Robert Davignon tells the story this way:

*[00:47:30] Well, one story I heard when Margaret Matton was alive, she was up in the office up there and they were ... boats back then, they had what they call an up and down pilot house and the reason for that was, when they got in the canal, there was 240-some bridges I think in the Erie Canal system [00:48:00] and they were low, so that when they make these pilot houses, they would raise and lower to get under bridges. And that was in the fall I remember the story I heard was they were coming up the canal or down the canal and one guy was complaining [00:48:30] about there was no heat on the upper house because all's they had was a steering wheel up there and no enclosure. So, when they got down the river, he called Margaret Matton on his marine phone and she said, "There'll be an insulated air force suit waiting for you down there."*

*So when they got down there, somebody brought [00:49:00] it out to him and he put the thing on. And it was an insulated thing, but it was nice. But it was made for inside somewhere, not to be worn outside. So, he had it plugged into a 110 outlet and when they got going, the thing shorted out and it started shocking him. He pulled the boat back into the yard. He called Margaret on the marine [00:49:30] phone and told her, he says, "Get yourself another Eskimo. I quit."*

### **Bart Turecamo**

Bart Turecamo was also remembered by many. Rick Davis:

*He really had heart and soul and [01:00:00] he loved the shipyard. That was his baby. He really liked it. He would come to the shipyard and I remember he would walk around. He'd have a hard hat on, he was a little short, heavy set guy and he had a nice camera. He would just walk around the shipyard, and I never really had a big conversation with him or anything, but he would take a lot of pictures and just, I guess, loved his [01:00:30] shipyard and.*

Frank Galle remembers his father thought very highly of Mr. Turecamo:



---

*Whether it was because of union or him, I'd like to think it was because of him, because he seemed like a nice person. When he ... he'd come in, sometimes my father would get a call to go pick him up to drive him to a hotel or something from the airport, or the train station, whatever, or however he happened to be coming in.*

*Yes. Yep. He'd get a call. I guess at that point, maybe they were sort of like friends, so he ... whether it was because my father respect him as the boss or whatever, [00:35:00] living in the old days where you did what the boss said or you're not gonna have a job.*

*He was more than happy to go and pick him up, but it ... I know my mother and father occasionally went out to dinner with them when they were in town. My mother said that it all happened because he appreciated the work my father did, which, he just took as something that he could do.*

Bob Hill spoke about Bart Turecamo's insistence on quality:

*Bart Turecamo was very very big on quality. One [00:28:00] of my jobs that I had to do as the draftsman was I had to go get Bart at the airport every time he flew in. And Bart, there were days Bart was just in horrible moods. Bart was a very vocal Brooklyn guy. He had grown up in the construction industry. And he was used to getting what he wanted. And he would.*

*At first when I would go pick him up at the airport [00:28:30] he hardly even talked to me. So I had long hair back then so I was some hump jump hippy I think was the way he put it. But then when he figured out I was serious about what I was doing he would talk to me. And he would tell me, he would say, "You know what? It doesn't take any longer to do something right than it does to do it wrong. So I don't ever want to hear," and of course he used very poetic language, "I don't ever want to hear that you did something stupid where [00:29:00] you didn't think it through," he says, "Because I'll fire your butt as quick as ..." He would get all animated, and then he'd calm right down. He was a tremendous guy. But you can see he wanted quality in his boats.*

*Oh God yes. Yeah, to this day I design boats that cost more money to build than other people's designs because [00:33:00] I learned that if you don't do it right you just ended up spending more*

---

*money years later in a shipyard fixing it. So it was one talk I had with Bart on the way to the airport where he said, "I know I yell at people and everything," but he said, "The thing is that I have to pay to run these boats, and I want to pay for it once when I build it. I don't want to pay for it every year [00:33:30] in a shipyard at more money than it cost me to build it to repair it."*

*So an example of something. The boats have what are called pipe guards on the side. They're these half steel pipe sections that were welded along the length of the boat to [inaudible 00:33:49] as fenders, to protect the hull. That's what their job is. They're there to absorb impact. Not on Bart's boats. They're there for looks. [00:34:00] And boy, I heard him get on a guy who he happened to have a captain on the phone, the boat had just come into our yard to get repaired and Bart had gone down just to look at the boat. And he saw that the pipe guards had several dents in them. He called the guy at home and I could hear every other word was an expletive, yelling and screaming at the top of his lungs. "I don't put those things on there so you can put [00:34:30] dents in them! They're not there for a fender, they're there for looks! I tell you, if I ever see that again ..." He gave him quite a dressing down.*

*And later the captain came back to the boat when it was ready to go out of the yard again and I met him and I said, "Were you the guy Bart was talking to?" "Oh yeah, that was me." He said, "I wasn't even the one who put the dents in them," but he said, "You just say, "Yes Mr. Turecamo."" [00:35:00] And he said, "You put up with that." But he said, "I know when I get on a boat that Bart built it's going to be a good boat."*

*Oh yeah, oh yeah, sure. He's a hard guy to work for. He expected a lot. [00:51:00] He yelled a lot. But he really wasn't a bad guy. He was okay. Of course I got to talk to him in situations where other people didn't. So yeah, I would say [inaudible 00:51:17] back there.*

Marc Limeri recalls what a typical trip to the shipyard by Mr. Turecamo was like:

*He usually came up once a month. He'd fly from Islip Airport, and he wouldn't come if it was raining. He did not fly in bad weather, so if it was raining at all he didn't come. When he came, he would*

---

*get picked up. We had a company station wagon. There was an older, another general foreman, who had retired before I showed up, so I never worked with him in the yard. His name was Marty ... and I forget his last [00:21:00] name. I'm sorry. Marty had been the general foreman for years. He developed a close friendship with Mr. Turecamo. Usually Marty would go pick him up. He'd come to our yard. He'd get the company wagon, and he'd drive it down to Albany Airport and get him.*

*He'd come up and he would, Bart Turecamo, he would go down to the boat and he'd look. He'd spend maybe a half hour [00:21:30] touring the boat and seeing what was done and how it was going. I think he probably talked with the foreman down there too about what was going on. Then he'd spend most of the rest of the day in his office. Usually, like I say, he had a lot of business contacts. Then about 2:30 or so they'd drive back to the airport because he was catching the afternoon flight back to Islip.*

### **What they took with them**

Almost everyone interviewed felt the impact that Matton had on their lives even if they only worked there a short time.

Rick Davis:

*Yeah. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about people and working with a lot of people, because before that I didn't work with groups of people that big. I realized that, Jeez, everybody could get along working together, which was neat when you got a big group of people like that [01:02:30] and everybody comes together all the time. I also brought a lot of the technical stuff. Reading of [Mikes 01:02:41], I do that now, some of the electrical stuff, because like I said, we would be pulled out of our job ... I helped pull wires and stuff on the ship at times.*

*I do wiring and stuff in my job now. I use a lot of the things [01:03:00] that I learned there in my job skills now, that I probably wouldn't be able to do the job that I'm doing now if I didn't learn a lot of this stuff there. In that short time I was there I learned an awful lot.*

---

Jim Desrosiers who began working nights at Matton when he was still in high school because his high school teacher insisted there was no better place to learn welding.

*I can weld in any position. If you can weld in a shipyard and fit you pretty much weld anywhere in any position. That's pretty much all I did in the Navy. I was a diver in the Navy. Changed sea suction valves, repaired hull damage. All kinds of stuff like that on the ships. I spent four and a half, five years, in the Navy. Schools. More welding schools, more fabrication schools. [00:12:00] Ran cranes, you name it. Caps and cranes. The whole nine yards, rigging ... And it all came from the roots of kind of working with tugboats.*

Bob Hill who eventually started Ocean Tug and Barge says:

*No, I can tell you that I wouldn't be where I am now if it weren't for that shipyard, and for people [00:59:00] who took an interest and said, "Hey, you can do this." And it's a wonderful thing for people who are in a position where you can encourage people to do something you should do it because it works.*

### **Objects Interviewees Have Saved**

Many interviewees mentioned physical objects - mementos, movies and artifacts – that they have saved.

Frank Galle: plywood from loft floor where you can still see the drawings on them; mahogany side rails used for beds his father constructed that were used in the tugs; his father's notebooks where his father noted dimensions of things he was making at the yard; 8 mm movies of tugs being launched; an old ship bell from one of the tugs; his father's draft card deferring him from service because he worked at the shipyard dated 6/24/42; his father's hard hat.

Ellen Gamache thinks she has movies of the launch her father took from across the river.

Robert Hill has drawings he worked on and a set of battens and weights built by John Galle.

---

Pat Wright has letters her father wrote her mother when he was away from home on the tugs.

Rick Davis has newspaper articles he's collected and many home photos he took while working there as well as some the photos of the crew before the launch.