

**VIDEO: John Crandell: A lifetime neighboring the waves [1994]**

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[TITLE: "John Crandell: A lifetime neighboring the waves"]

[A Video By Timothy Bladen]

[Voice of John Crandell]

**[ St. Matthews United Methodist Church] [00:20]**

I've been working ...for 75 years. In 1918 when this. . . when Mr. Williams (?) started to build the St. Matthews Church. I got a job with him. . . and I had to tear it down. After we tore the old church completely down to its foundation, we used a portion of this foundation and we started to put the new church on that, plus we had to add a great deal to it – to make it as large as the new church was going to be. And... I stayed there until it was completed, inside and out, plus the steeple.

**[Concrete bridge: Route 234, Chaptico, MD] [1:09]**

We... dug the footings by hand and we drove the sheetings (?) around the footings with a big wooden maul. The majority of it... the forms... was built right on the job, except the arch timbers and... Captain Dick Archy (?) – he had a band saw in his boat-building place, and he sawed the arch timbers out for us. He was born (?) down West River and he hauled them back down, ready to set up. And then, then we... got ready to pour the concrete, we done it with a one-bag mixer. And we shoveled the material in with just ordinary shovels, counting the shovels for – so many shovels full of sand, so many shovels full of gravel, for one bag of cement. Threw the water in there with a bucket and wheeled it out on the job and dumped it. And we put in the back fill, and built the road back over the bridge with a... horses and slip scoops (?).

**[Concrete bridge: Route 547, Kensington, MD] [2:53]**

We did that one with a much more up-to-date...piece of equipment. We had the crane to come there and dig the footings out for us, and the ground was hard enough on the low side that it wouldn't cave in, and on the upper side of the bridge we had rock to set the concrete on. And the... we had a two-bag mixer with a skip (?) that dumped the material in the mixer... and a bell on it that rang every time the drum turned over so many times... we could dump it out. We couldn't dump it out 'till that bell rang. The slab had close to 900 bags of cement in it. We worked 28 hours to pour it, without stopping. We had a shanty built out on the job, with a cook (?) in it – every four hours, half of us would stop and go \_\_\_\_\_ and the other half would keep the concrete rolling as good as we could. That way we didn't have a cold joint.

**[Concrete Bridge: Route 235, Mt. Vernon, VA] [4:25]**

**[head shot: John O. Crandell speaking] [4:55]**

When Gordon fired me, he told me to get my tools, my clothes, and go, he didn't need me anymore. Well, I went out and got my tools, gathered up everything I could find... I needed, that belonged to me

[Type text]

and...uh... was putting it in the car when here comes Edwin out with all of his stuff. 'Cus Edwin said he wasn't going to work either if I didn't work. **[picture of Edwin A. Crandell]** Edwin and I got together a week or so after we was... after we had some time to think it over. And we came up with the thought that probably we should get somebody to back us... and... go to work out on our own. We asked a Simmons, which was uh... Nebbit **[picture of John Nebbit Simmons]** he was the oldest one. And he was the... I guess the best business man in the bunch, anyway (laughter). So, he said "sure I'll back ya – under one condition – that you hire Mr. Brundege to be the bookkeeper, timekeeper and keep things straight." **[picture of Clarence Brundege]** So that... we said "fine" (laughter) 'cus we didn't want to do it. And ... so we worked under those conditions until... well, just call it 1933. We had a very good organization goin'.. and in the conditions that... uh, we were working in, because they had a plenty of money to do anything we wanted to do. And that was a big help when everybody needed money.

Q: What were the things that you had to buy... that you needed to get started?

A: Well, main thing was a flatbed truck, and...uh, we used our own automobiles to go to work and come back in. We had one pick-up truck that we used, and that was it. We built the pile driver – a wooden pile driver, and we bought a hoist from out of DC where they used as an elevator to carry bricks and supplies up on the tall buildings. And that's what we used as the... operated pile driver.

#### **[Idlewilde] [7:38]**

And in... '35... we started building some walls and Idlewilde was the first one we built. And the county... funded that wall with a... and people paid it back with their taxes. We are talking about a wooden seawall built out of creosote lumber and galvanized hardware... with pilings driven in the ground and wooden sheeting (?).

#### **[North Beach Park] [8:37]**

We drove better pilings on those county walls, and some walls we drove anchor piles and put a long tie-rod – one through the front of the wall, back into the anchor system to stop it from falling over.

#### **[Franklin Mannor] [8:54]**

Nearly all the walls we built back in the '30s, and a little later on, have put in stones put in front of them – to stop the planking from \_\_\_\_\_, 'cus the hardware is gone, the bolts are gone, and it's just more than sittin' up there and nothing stabilizing it. Put stone in front of it to stabilize it, and then the... ah, sea can't get through to the dirt, because the timbers are pretty firm. Cost a great deal less to put stone on... up against the wall, than what it is to build a stone \_\_\_\_\_ alone.

#### **[Cedarhurst] [9:48]**

#### **[Naval Research Center, Randle Cliff, MD] [10:35]**

On the Naval Research job that we... wall that we built there, they had designed the wall to be five foot outside the old steel wall that was standing (?) already there, but had rusted holes on it... and was getting ready to fall down completely. After talking to them and bidding...ah, when I bid on it, I had an inkling I could get them to change, but I couldn't \_\_\_ unless I got the job. I told them I'd give them (?) \$10,000 if they let me move it all in shore five feet – I mean ten foot further – five foot on the inside of the wall instead of outside the wall. The engineers also came back (laughter), with their final estimate... and they told me that I had received a great deal more benefits than \$10,000 (laughter) – they wanted me to give them some more money back.

Q: What did you tell them?

[Type text]

A: I told them I would donate some more money.

**[Curtis Creek Coast Guard Station] [11:50]**

One that the government runs and operates. That, we only put a portion of wall in, and ah... and fender (?) systems, new fender (?) systems, and new dolphins in order to keep the native (?) \_\_\_\_\_ in piles. But one of the first jobs that John (?) and \_\_\_\_\_ actually went in... from start to finish on.

**[Snug Harbor] [12:53]**

We placed that stone individually. We put a man out there... \_\_\_\_\_ operator, to keep it smooth and level. It takes a little less stone in the end, and ah... it's less apt to get misplaced, you know, from heavy seas.

Q: And why is that?

A: Well, some people don't care how jagged it is, because they claim it knocks the sea down... busts the sea up. I mean... that's the two, two theories... putting her up real rough.

**[Thomas Point Park] [13:39]**

The state was going to put that stone up around Thomas Point. We explained to them what the county was doing (?) – digging a ditch, I should have said, and putting the \_\_\_\_\_ down and coming up to the top of the wall on the ground ...

**[Alexandria, VA] [14:05]**

... and then putting some toe-wall (?) stone which was the heaviest stone we got and the biggest stone we had we put down in that ditch, as anchor systems to stop the other wall from sliding. We tried to get it as smooth as we could get it. It didn't take no more stone, it only took more time.

**[Ocean View, Norfolk, VA] [15:00]**

We built about... 37 jetties at Ocean View. The \_\_\_\_\_ ... it was supposed to be 175-foot long, but ah... we built one of them that wasn't quite that long, and we built two longer ones. One of them, one of the longest ones was 600-foot, were it washed (?) all the way back to the highway. We had three very high pressure pumps that... to put the piling in \_\_\_\_\_ the ground with, because all of it was sand except one pier and that had a hard pan (?) in it. And the way the water came up... must have been iron ore.

Q: What does a jetty do?

A: Ah, they, ah... more or less equalize the sand up and down the beach...ah, because the beach to scour (?) in one place and build up in another, these jetties equalize that. They fill up from one direction nearly... the sand moves nearly all the time from one direction. Maybe certain times of the year, when the prevailing winds are different, like maybe in January, February and March – we might have more winds from the northeast or north, where in the summertime the prevailing winds are more or less from the southwest, and most of the \_\_\_\_\_. North winds are so much more severe than what the south winds are the best \_\_\_\_\_ part time of the year, until (?) they're the ones that do all the damage.

**[Uncle Billy's Pier] [17:26]**

The latest pier we had built up to that time was Uncle Billy's Pier. And... it's still standing there yet. The late '30's, let's say... that will take care of it.

**[North Beach] [17:52]**

[Type text]

That was a commercial pier more or less – even had a hotel on it and whatnot.

**[Bladensburg, MD] [18:18]**

A very complicated job, but a very thorough job. It was engineered very well and it is very stable. I think we used the best of the wood that could be bought in it. We even sent down in the south and bought up black gum, that nobody would think about using around this part of the country, for the deck on it. It just will not rot, if you can hold it down... it will cock, it will turn up, twist and turn... but it won't rot. Now we put 60 nails... 60 penny nails through it, but we had to bore a lot of it. It was somewhat dry and we had to put very large nails in it to stop it from twisting. While we were building the wall, they were dredging the channel, and dredging the marina out, and by the time I got done building the wall, and they had completed the dredging part of it before I got done with the wall. And I got \_\_\_\_ to bring my little scow out to drive the piles and things – I didn't have two-foot of water to float my scow in, and they dredged it down to a seven-foot depth.

Q: What kind of time period are we talking about between....

A: Ah... maybe two months.

**[Ocean City, MD] [20:18]**

That was \_\_\_\_\_ there... the fishing pier. The piles were made around to 30-feet to 55-feet in length. We planned on putting an ending down at least 12-feet, so after we got out in deep water... after where we used the 55-foot pile... and put them butt first in the ground, not the little end in the ground. When I started that pier, there was a very little bit of sand there. After the 1962 storm came along the same year I started that pier... the north jetty had been built... \_\_\_\_\_ west of the harbor (?)... \_\_\_\_\_ and that caught all the sand as the storm ... moved down the shore and held it there. Now they have acres of sand there where they didn't have... where at one time on a high tide, the water was running right under the sidewalk... right up under the side of the boardwalk. I started when I got there, maybe 40 or 50 feet, when the storm hit... and then I had to turn the machine around and get myself back to solid ground again... turn around again and go out again. I went a whole lot further than what we planned on ... due to.... he wanted to get out in 12-foot of water... that's why we used those 50-foot piles. And due to this storm bringing all the dirt from up... all the sand from up north...to the end of the beach, and bringing it down and piling it up against that jetty. I had to go a lot further out... to get to 12-foot of water.

**[Annapolis City Dock] [22:47]**

**[Annapolis Yacht Club] [23:49]**

**[C & D Cannal (sic)] [24:15]**

We built nine piers in the canal for people to fish off of... and two fire hydrants, one for each side of the canal for the fireman to get their water out of. It was the same time that the Bethlehem Steel ship hit the bridge...the highway bridge and put it out of commission... and made it so much easier for us to work in... 'cus no ship traffic could go through anymore... 'til the bridge was fixed.

**[Fort Washington Yacht Club] [25:28]**

**[Rod 'N Reel, Chesapeake Beach, MD] [26:13]**

We scribed (?) the boards to the pile so that... .. so there was a very small crack, if any... so that the ropes on the things that they moor their boats with, can't get jammed in it.

Q: Well, how do you scribe it... that's what I want you to say.

[Type text]

A: There are so many different ways... you can take a pair of calipers and go around there and scribe. You can take a rule and cut a circle around... and, stay a certain distance off from it... you know...

Q. ... I see... like with a compass...

A. ...like a compass. The piles are not round... they are in one sense of the word, but not true round.

**[Point Lookout State Park] [27:00]**

**[St. Mary's College] [27:38]**

**[London Town Publik House] [27:54]**

We also put the pier at London Town... we donated that as a gift to help people to get to it by boat.

**[Smallwood State Park] [28:11]**

[Crandall standing on bridge] Pretty view...

**[Alexandria, VA] [29:38]**

**[Baltimore Yacht Club] [29:53]**

**[Back River Marina] [30:20]**

**[Baltimore, MD] [31:02]**

We also built some bridges across the docks... were the ships used to come in, so they wouldn't have to go around the head of the dock... they could walk directly across from one dock to the other, which was quite complicated. They were... had an awful lot of \_\_\_\_... they were arch bridges and ah... a little complicated to build.

Q: How did you get, uh... those piles the right depth?

A: I guess we just drove the piles and sawed them off... at the right height [laughter] where ever the piles stopped... when they got firm enough, then when we cut them down \_\_\_\_ them off... then they were sawed off to get the arch, and they also had a lot of \_\_\_\_ that way, so they wouldn't shake... 'cus they got up pretty high in the center.

**[USS Barry] [32:09]**

We got the job of mooring a practically new destroyer...right in the Navy Yard. It had just come off the railway and they put steel plates on the side of it... on... down near the corners of her bilge lines. Put three up each side... three big plates. We drove six steel pile down, well below the mud (?) line... and on top of those piles we had a... heavy chain that ah... was a inch or more in diameter... the metal was... and carried it over and bolted it into the plates and welded it on.

**[Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary] [33:17]**

We built a bridge across \_\_\_\_ Bay... we had to build it strong enough to hold a crane on it. And ah... it had two severe curves in it... reverse curves... I'll just say a reverse curve, not two. It's a reverse curve, like that, and we had to saw the plank on the bevels so the decking would be more or less at right angles to the curve, or ... and that's about all... very complicated, slow moving job.

[Type text]

Q. Why was this complicated?

A. Well, the curve wasn't true all the time. You had to keep changing your bevels on your boards. And the second thing was, you could only build one pier at a time... one \_\_\_\_\_ pile, put the cap on it, fix it, so you could walk the machine ahead on it. Done very much like I done that one down at Ocean City. Well, they wouldn't let you walk on the marsh... you'd disturb the marsh.

Q. OK... so you couldn't disturb the marsh, so you had to build your own platform ...

A. Yeah, for your equipment to work over. We could take three piles out, which was enough for one bend (?)... we could take the truck out and bring the lumber out. And the crane would place it for us, but we had to bolt it in place and put the tower up... the \_\_\_\_\_ tower. I built that home (?) in \_\_\_\_\_ deck. And I sent it to Baltimore and had it galvanized and then hauled it back to the job with a big hydraulic crane to come in and set it up on top his tower.

**[ head shot, Mr. Crandall] [35:40]**

Things are getting more complicated, more costly. But, when I started out, everything ... there was such a bad depression, so it was hard to do. Yet, labor was so plentiful, but part of it was you didn't have the proper equipment. Took longer to do jobs... and a lot more men to do them.

Q. What does it take to keep a family business going for sixty years?

A. Well I've been very lucky. We never had no problems. It didn't take nothing... it just fell into place.