

Golden, H. O.: A Man's Work^[1]

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H. O. Golden: a man's work

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#)"^[2], *News & Observer*. Published 6/12/2005. Copyrighted.
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I visited Hildred "H.O." Golden at his home in the remote fishing village of Stumpy Point, on the far edge of Pamlico Sound. He has been a commercial fisherman all his life and, by reputation, one of the finest. Now 81, he is part of the last generation of Carolina watermen who grew up building their own boats, making their own nets, and raising or catching pretty much everything that their families put on the dinner table. A soft-spoken, fastidious man, deeply devoted to his church and community, he is known for his uncompromisingly high standards of conduct on and off the water. We talked all day about his childhood years and the remarkable way that he built his first fishing boat, and then he sent me home with some mighty salty oysters.

In H. O. Golden's words:

"I grew up in Sealevel until I was 17 years old. It was just a small fishing community. It had several stores and a big oyster shucking place, steam house, one of the biggest on the coast. Women shucked the oysters and the men handled the shells. The shell piles, I never saw such big piles in my life. They looked like mountains. In the summertime, the old sailboats would come and load them up and bring them different places and sell them to the farmers. Put them on their farms for limon. When my dad was coming along, there was no power in boats. It was all sailboats. They had a rough life. Core Sound was shallow. In the wintertime, the cold weather would run the fish to deeper water, so they worked around the mouth of Neuse. They were away from home, and with sailboats it was too far from home to come back every night. Most of the time, they'd spend a week. They had camps around on the edges of the place, but if they were away from the camp, night come, I went a many a night with them. Daddy would go off sometimes two weeks at a time. I imagine I was probably 7 or 8 years old the first time. We camped right on the boat. You start young, and most all of the other kids would be doing the same. 'Course now, I wasn't worth as much then as I was later on. A kid that age, you're going to fall down to sleep anywhere. I'd get under the bow of the skiff, throw my head back and fall to sleep. After we got ready to set the net around the fish, I was mostly catching mullets; sometimes other fish, but mostly mullets. They were a night fish. The way we found the fish, we listened for them in the water. You could hear them. They'd be jumping, flouncing, in the water. We pushed the net. Instead of sitting around shooting the breeze, talking, telling tales, in them days, you told your tales while you were working. If you were off on a fish trip, when you weren't fishing, when the weather was bad, instead of sitting around loafing, you did the same thing at home. If somebody came to visit, they didn't sit there and twiddle their fingers. They'd sit there and tie net. All the nets we used were knit in the home. When the womenfolks weren't cooking or cleaning, they'd be tying net. They enjoyed being out on the water. I guess it's the way I was raised. Sometimes during the day, when we didn't have fish to clean, we'd get out in the marsh or woods wherever we happened to be tied up. We'd get around, do different things. I remember after the war, I came home and started building a boat to go to work with, a 42-foot boat. Like a lot of boys back then, I followed more or less right into what my father did. And I guess I thought I could do most anything with tools. I had a landing barge, one of these government landing barges that the ramp lowered down. I had a neighbor over here and I got him to go with me. We went through Croatan Sound, up Alligator River, and right up the head of Mill Tail Creek. I had a crosscut saw. Didn't have chain saws then. We cut them trees, and I rigged a snatch-block up another tree over the creek and run the pull lines back in there through that snatch block. I started the boat up and run down the creek, pull it. Then I lowered the ramp down and I had block and tackle, so I could pull them right up that ramp, load the boat. Must have had 20, 25 trees. I had her full. Coming back, we made out fine until we got down here this side of Marshes lighthouse. The wind shifted that evening. Blowwwwed. The bark from the trees had got the bilge pump stopped up and I couldn't get to it to clear it out because of the wind. There was a little sawmill down here at Engelhard, right on the creek. I knew the fellow that run it, Mr. Long. I went down there and unloaded them, and he sawed the lumber and dressed it. I loaded it on the barge and went to Sealevel and I told him I've been known to do foolish things all my life. But without borrowing money, that's the only way I could do it. I wanted to do it myself, and I never did want to borrow any money. I was just different, I guess."

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