

ROBERT "ROCKY" WYCKOFF

Rocky Wyckoff, of Parkertown, first "got his feet wet" in the bay from the 24-foot and 26-foot pole garveys of his grandfather, Gene Gale. He explored the local waters by himself at an early age — when he was 14 he rowed down Tuckerton Creek and across the bay in a little garvey-type rowboat. He would row over to Heather Island, Middle Island and Storey Island to tread and tong for clams. By age 16, he could command his grandfather's 26-foot boat.

He later built his own 25-foot clamming garvey, as well as the more common smaller, 10- and 12-foot versions. The value of these boats had already gone up from the \$26 his grandfather got for building a 26-foot clamming model in the late 1800s.

But Rocky's tales of prices paid for the bay's plenty amaze the buyer today. Years ago, Rocky used to go oystering at the mouth of the Bass River and along the Mullica. In the late 1950s schooners from the Delaware Bay used to come in and buy the catch, at better-than-bargain prices. At one time, clams sold for 50 cents a thousand or five cents for a hundred. Usually Rocky got between \$1 and \$1.25 for a thousand clams. Rocky also remembers a restaurant in that area where, around 1945, you could get an oyster sandwich for 50 cents. Its prize was four or five big oysters lying between the bread.

As a waterfowl guide for the Middle Island Gunning Club for four or five years, Rocky enjoyed duck hunting. The best part, he said, was sitting on the water in a boat watching the ducks decoying into his rig. He made his own decoys — geese, black duck and brant.

Other forms of hunting weren't as much to his liking. He went rabbit hunting one time, but didn't care for it and never went again, he said. He hunted deer with a club in Tuckerton, and the only deer he ever shot was crippled.