

## An Oral History: Emery Stokes



From time-to-time we like to run excerpts from oral histories of freedom people. These were collected by the Friends of the Freedom Library from 2002-2006; there are also remembrances from a 1998 recording. In this case we want to remember our dear friend and big community supporter, Emery Stokes (1926-2014). Below are excerpts from an interview by Lee Fritz done August 22, 2002. Minor changes to the interview's text were made by this editor for clarification of subject or chronology.

### **The Lower Village and family history**

When we came up (from NJ) we didn't talk about coming to Freedom; this part of Freedom was essentially Effingham Falls. It's called the Lower Village. And we always talked about coming to Effingham Falls. We knew there was a sign on the

bridge that said town line. We probably knew more about Effingham Falls than we did about Freedom. But you knew where you belonged because you were in the Freedom Old Home Week Parade.

This house (19 Eaton Road on Rt. 153) we live in now was my grandparent's and before that my great grandparent's. My great grandmother lived on Moulton Road, when she was a young woman – in fact they were married in this house – in the parlor of this house in October 1889. My grandfather owned this house and also the house across the street, which is now the Moore's. That house used to be Sam Stokes' house, my great, great grandfather. He adopted my great grandfather, Stephen Lary, who became Stephen Stokes. Stephen lived in Al Godfrey's house and was a wheelwright. His wheelwright shop was either across the street where the Nason Store is or was in the little building that used to be between Godfrey's house and our house. Samuel Stokes is buried up the street on 153; the tall white monument nearest the road.

My great grandmother (Sarah Frances Gordon Tyler Stokes) lived on Moulton Road until she was 17. She went to a Freedom school, not the central school that is now the Selectman's office, but a small school, probably up on Moulton Road somewhere. We have a framed perfect attendance award that she got at that school. She moved here with her mother when she was young and worked in one of the mills on the river. My grandfather, Dudley, started his medical practice after graduating from Dartmouth Medical School in 1888. They later moved to Rochester and he practiced medicine there until he died in 1936. My grandfather was the first person in Rochester to own an automobile. That

was way back in the early 1900's, probably 1905 or 1910. In fact he used to own a Model-T and Wakefield Hill was so steep you couldn't drive up the hill. You had to back up the hill because the gas tank was under the seat and it was a gravity feed system. If you got on a steep slope, you wouldn't get any gas in the carburetor.

Anyway, all of these houses (in the Lower Village) were built about the same time. All were built around 1820. They were occupied with full time residents until probably after the Civil War. And then people began to move to Massachusetts for better jobs and whatever. And whatever industry there was on the river went out of business. [Editor's note: See Carol Foord's 1999 "Ossipee Riverlands" book for details of old mills on The Falls]. They were no longer needed; tanneries were no longer needed. There were new methods of doing all of those things, and all the businesses became obsolete. Like the wheelwright. It became a lost art. Once they didn't have wagons but had cars, they didn't need wheelwrights. People don't know how to do that anymore. So these houses became kind of summer houses. I believe that this area flourished, from 1820 to 1875 or so, up to the Civil War and after. But after the turn of the century, things had really changed; particularly with the automobile coming in.

Back in the 1930's or mid '20's, there used to be an IGA store in Effingham Falls, now the antique shop on the other side of the bridge, and we used to go there for candy and ice cream as kids. Later on, my Uncle Lindy worked at the store summers. And there used to be a store next door to this house, between here and the Godfrey's – Cutting's Store. When I was 6 or 7 years

old, the store was empty. We used to go in there and play store. There was a cash register, and we'd save empty cans of peas and beans and whatever and put them on the shelves, you know. And then that store was moved; it was moved over on the Village Road. The house sits opposite Madeline Eldridge's house. They moved it over there, probably in the '60's, or so.



Cutting's store

Well, at that time the road that goes down Rt. 153 and meets the new bypass (Rt. 25) wasn't there. Rt. 25 came right through Effingham Falls and right there where Rt. 153 was extended to meet the Bypass was where the Black Horse Inn used to sit. It was a huge building. They sold ice cream over there. I never stayed there or anything. I just knew it was an inn and we got ice cream and stuff there. It burned down in the '50's or '60's, while I was in New Jersey. One time we came up here and it was gone.

And then, of course, there were the Nason's store across the street. It was owned by my great grandfather, Stephen Stokes, where he ran a wheelwright shop. We have a picture of that. My recollection of Nason's store was that if you went in there, there were a lot of old geezers there sitting around a potbellied stove. It was rather spooky, believe me. He used to collect old

cars too...must have been a dozen old cars all around...rusty too, because they were outside. Jessie Nason, he's the one who bought all this property around here. Every time anything came up for tax sale, he bought it. When he died, he had 50 lots all over Freedom...all over Effingham...all over, including the lot where my garden is. They were eventually sold off at auctions.

The bridge on the Ossipee River on 153—the bridge I remember as a kid was not the bridge they just tore down. It was long before that. The old bridge was replaced in the '50's – maybe 1956. It was a steel span bridge with two big arches about 1 ½ feet wide and we used to walk on those. Our folks would get really upset with us because it was quite a drop from the top of those arches down to the river. There were two big arches and the floor of the bridge was wooden planks. And what used to happen, I remember, was that we slept with the windows wide open. There wasn't much traffic, but there was some in those days. Whenever a car came across the bridge, you would hear the boards go bump..bump..bump..bumping up and down because they were all loose. So Freedom would fix their side of the bridge because the town line is in the middle, but they would only go to the middle of the bridge. So after Freedom fixed their side, the Effingham side still had all those loose boards and you would hear the...bump...bump...bump any time a car came over. And by the time Effingham fixed their side, Freedom's side had deteriorated to the point where the boards had all loosened up again and would make a racket. They never seemed to coordinate it and fix the whole thing at the same time.

When I was a kid, Highwatch (now Lakeview) belonged to the Watts and it was a dairy farm. They had prize beef cattle. (The house) was fully furnished, oriental rugs and all that. But nobody ever stayed there. I believe his wife may have stayed there a night or two, but no more. They had a herdsman up there that cared for the property and they had, I think, Black Angus cows. Then, of course, they owned the Farm by the River, where they had prize Guernsey's. We used to buy milk from them – unpasteurized – the cream on the top was unbelievable. They did have a route...they delivered the milk to (our) house. The guy who was in charge of the Farm by the River was Charlie Cash, Sr. He lived in Al Godfrey's house. His wife, she made doughnuts every Saturday morning. Whenever we were up here, you could smell those doughnuts as soon as she started cooking. We'd go over there and she'd give us the doughnut holes. Charlie was herdsman for the Farm by the River. This was in the '30's, before the war.

### **Youthful adventures**



I can remember one time we took the train up; we put our bicycles on the train and we had to change in Dover and then we came up to Center Ossipee. We biked in from Center Ossipee and this was in February. And then we climbed Green Mountain, and this was February 22, in five feet of snow on

the trail. I think there were four or maybe five of us ...we kept putting a new guy up front to tread the snow down for the guys behind. It was exhausting to make a path. I was in high school then, 16. One of the guy's fathers had a cottage down on Province Lake. We stayed there a couple of nights and here in the Freedom house maybe two nights. That climb up Green Mountain was really something else.

We used to climb Green Mountain and Mount Chocorua and yes, we did know about the ice caves. I've been to the ice caves many times. Last time I was there, it was overgrown and difficult to find. In fact, one time my sisters and I went up to the ice caves and decided to take a shortcut on the way back. We got lost and wandered about for hours. I thought we were going to spend the night on the mountain. Finally I climbed a tree and we followed a brook and came out on Rt. 25, down by the lower bridge. My father was picking blueberries where we came out.

### **On fishing**

But the most enjoyable part of coming up here was fishing in Pine River, back in the '30's. Beyond the Old Iron Bridge, maybe three miles beyond that, there's an old farmhouse that sets on the left side of the Green Mountain Road. We used to stop at that guy's house and get permission to leave the car and we'd walk down through the meadow to the river that meandered all through the meadow. There were beautiful deep pools there. We crawled up on our hands and knees. If you walked right up there you would scare the fish and the fish would take off. We'd drop the line over the edge of the bank until you got a bite. Then you'd go down to the next corner and drop

your line. It was a lot of fun fishing off that meadow.



By the '50's they stopped haying that area and the whole thing grew up into woods. So after that we used to go up to Wilkinson Brook, which is out near Pine River State Park. We'd wade down into the Pine River and fish that river to where the meadow used to be. It was great fishing. My grandfather knew these places and my father knew and I went with them. My son, Eric, too, has been. It's something you kind of grew up with.

The other activity on the river that Eric loved, and my father loved, and my grandfather and I all loved, was to go down to the river and catch hellgrammites. They are little...well not so little, big insects that are underneath the rocks and what they used to do is take a big screen, about 4 feet square. You put it between the rocks and lift the rocks in front of the screen. The hellgrammites would float down to the screen. The hellgrammites were fine bait for bass and if you go down to, what doesn't look like a dam at all, but if you look up the river from the bridge, there are logs sticking out of the river on the right hand side.

Well, that was part of one of the original dams on the river. In fact there have been three or four dams: one down here, one up river about a hundred yards. And it was all lined on both sides of the river with factories. (This was before the turn of the century.) When I was a kid we'd walk out on those logs and there was a big rock out there, and where the dam was, it dropped off pretty deep, maybe 15 feet of water. And the bass were just lying there. You couldn't keep a hellgrammite on your hook. As soon as you threw it in you had one. It was great as a kid because you could catch fish just as fast as you threw the bait in.

### **The fire of '47**

The other thing I remember was the fire of '47. The guy that saved our house was Charlie Cash, Sr. (and Al Godfrey's father, John Godfrey.) He started a back fire behind this house and his house and burned back up toward the river. Everyone was against his doing it. They were afraid the wind would bring the fire here sooner, but he said it was the only way we were going to stop it. But, none of them wanted to do it. So he finally just started it himself, and then everyone had to pitch in to stop the fire from coming this way and make it go the other way. They burned out several hundred feet back up the river so when the fire came up to that point there was nothing to burn, and it burned itself out. And of course the fire jumped the river channel between Leavitt and Berry Bay and went up Green Mountain. The only thing that stopped the fire was that the wind shifted and it burned itself out. But it was a

pretty scary time. It looked as if it was going to wipe out these houses. But Charlie Cash, Sr. really saved the whole Lower Village.

### **Freedom Old Home Week**

I can remember being in an Old Home Week Parade in Freedom. I must have been 10 or 12—maybe younger...might have been 9. It was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I was Sleepy. We had costumes and masks. Some young girl dressed up in white. It was neat. They dressed us in that house on the left as you make the turn into the village off the Village Road. It sits up on the Bluff. It's now owned by Cindy Davis. We'd change into our costumes and stuff. That's about the only Old Home Week I can remember being in in those days. I probably wasn't up here during most Old Home weeks. But I do remember that one. [Editor's note: As many know, Emery and Ellie have been integral to the success of Old Home Week since they retired here to Freedom; they served on that committee for many years. Ellie still gives input on ideas to this day!]

### **Stories and ephemera wanted!**

We want to make sure as much of Freedom's history gets preserved as possible. So, if you have stories or an oral history or old photographs, maps, print articles or other ephemera, we would love to have a copy. Please contact a Board member or call John Shipman at 539-5799. Thanks!

