

FREEDOM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (courtesy Freedom public library)

July 29, 2002

Interviewer: Bette Bossi

Interviewee: Robert Fowler



BB: Bob, I would like to know where you were born and what the date was, please.

BF: I was born in Freedom Village on June 22, 1910.

BB: And where were you born, Bob, what building?

BF: I was born in the corner house.

BB: Right on the corner of the village here, what we now call the gray apartment building. Bob will soon be getting us a history on his great grandfather, his grandfather and his mom and dad, his parents.

BB: Have you lived in Freedom your entire life, Bob?

BF: No.

BB: And where did you go and why?

BF: When I was a baby, about two years old, my folks moved to Chelsea, Ma. and from there to West Newton, Ma.

BB: After you moved to Massachusetts, how did your schooling and your work history go?

BF: I went to the Newton schools and then I went to Babson College in Boston. In 1930 I went to work for a bank in Billerica which I had moved to. The Billerica Trust Company. All those years the property that I am now living in has been in our family's name.

BB: And what was it originally before you moved here?

BF: Alonzo Fowler, who was my grandfather. And when he passed away my Dad took the title and when my Dad passed away, I got the title. We used it for vacations periodically through the years.

BB: When you were here on vacation, did you hold any particular titles to any of the activities in town. While you were coming back and forth to Freedom on vacation time and weekends, you became the president of the Freedom Club of Boston. Could you explain to me why it had that name?

BF: The Freedom Club of Boston was established in 1902 by a group. The first President was Frank C. Wood; the year of 1901-1902.

BB: And where were the meetings held?

BF: They were held at the Unitarian Hall, Highland Avenue, Somerville, Massachusetts. I was President for the years of 1966 and 1967.

BB: Were there any other organizations or activities that you were a big part of?

BF: I was active in the Community Club. Also the Christian Church. I was active and held offices in the church. I was a trustee and the head usher and also I initiated the envelope system.

BB: Were you active in the Old Home Week Association?

BF: I was President of the Old Home Week Association in 1966 and 1967. I was also auditor for the town in 1977, 78 – three years. And a teller at the ballot box for about 15 years.

BB: Can you tell me anything about Old Home Week. I understand you were President of the Association from 1966-67. Tell me a little bit about the activities that went on.

BF: I'll go back to the old, old days. When they had the parade on Saturday, church on Sunday and then several days we would have all games...baseball games, playing Madison or Kezar Falls and one year they had a group of boys come up from Maine from a Jewish camp and they played ball. I don't recall who won. Way back they would hire ball players from the Red Sox to come up and pitch and also catch.

BB: How did you get Red Sox pitchers and catchers to come up?

BF: Well it was because we had Dr. Harmon living down there and a man by the name of Elmer Smart who was an attorney in Rochester. He was a great uncle of mine. And Albion Danfuss. He was born in Freedom but he was also President of the Cadillac Company down on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. And Arthur Black, an attorney in Boston...his father was at one time Governor of New York...he had a home in town. So with those kinds of people...they wanted to have the best kind of game they could have.

BB: So they actually contributed money to bring...

BF: Oh sure they did, yes, that's what I've been told.

BB: Bob, do you have any particular hobbies or talents that you have taken part in throughout your lifetime?

BF: No. I haven't. The only thing that I've ever been interested in is the people and the community and to help the community to grow. I try to help.

BB: Could you please name the businesses that were active in town, way back? And if possible their location?

BF: I have a book here and I would like to have you look at it and read the different businesses that were in Freedom around 1902.

BB: The printing is very very small so I will read it instead of Bob reading it. Bob has told me that all of these businesses that we are going to be naming were pretty much right in the little village of Freedom. We had a Mr. A.E. Durgin who was the dealer in fresh meats...all kinds of fresh meats, also hides and pelts. Mr. W. R. Kinsman, who dealt in fine monumental work in both native and foreign marble and granite. Mr. O.E. Drake and he was located in a building where you could buy dry goods, groceries, boots, shoes and rubbers. Hosiery and underwear. Glass, tin and earthenware. Extracts and patent medicines. Flour, and feed, Sherwin Williams paints. Oils and varnishes, hardware, farming implements. Grass, garden seeds, stationery, tobacco and cigars. They covered the whole gamut.. Then we have the store for Mr. E.I. Towle.

BF: That has been torn down. That used to be on the other side of the bridge.

BB: The other side...in the little Freedom Village. Then there was a C.S. McAllister. He was the barber as well as the hairdresser, and he also owned the ice cream parlor. That was part of his business. Elmhurst was the name of the property owned by a Mrs. Nan Merrow. She was the Proprietress. And it was located up on Andrews Hill behind Jean Robertson's house. The beautiful building has burned down. She advertised, Private Boarding House, situated pleasantly on high land, Freedom, NH, one of the most beautiful villages in New England. And you could live at this Elmhurst for \$6 or \$7 a week according to the situation of your room.

Here we have another fine example of the county newspaper. The Carroll County Pioneer, established in 1881. The basis of his advertisement says, bear this fact in mind. On January 1, 1904, we shall inaugurate a cash system and no papers will be sent out from this office unless paid for strictly in advance.

Now we have two businesses that were owned by a Mrs. J.C. Ferrin and Mr. F.O. Ferrin. Mrs. Ferrin was a dealer in millinery, dry and fancy goods, ladies furnishings goods, yarns, corsets, stationery, etc. Also ladies boots, shoes and rubbers. Mr. Ferrin dealt in filling your tummy with groceries, flower and grain, paints and oils, confectionery and cigars.

We now have the corner grocery store which is what we currently call the gray apartment building. This is the building in which Bob Fowler was born. It was owned by Cyrus Fowler. Everything can be found in this grocery store. First class department store and whatever you need can be supplied here. A delicious supply of fresh confectionery, choice fruits, refreshing cooling soda. Moxie, orangeade, etc. constantly on hand. Your patronage is solicited.

Mr. Herbert Prey of Freedom Village was the blacksmith. He worked on carriages and woodwork. Special attention was given to horse shoeing and edge tools. Mr. W.A. Bennett, the town undertaker and funeral director. Flowers would be furnished when requested. Next we have Mr. F.O. Ferrin, Rochester and Freedom, NH, express. This was a gentleman who actually ran a stagecoach line. He also did boarding and a livery stable and job teaming. Stage coach connections with trains in Center Ossipee. Special rates given to coaching parties during Old Home Week.

BF: Along with all these businesses, also was the Mill in the village, owned by Alonzo Fowler. It contained a planing machine, a shingling machine, a grist mill and a blacksmith shop, all run by water power. Down the river a little bit was the tannery. I can't tell you the name of the owner, but I can remember it, down by the library.

BB: Wasn't there a pants factory somewhere, Bob?

BF: Well, right, part of Gail Bickford's property. That was a business run by Mr. Drake and the clothing companies outside of Boston used to send up pants and vests all cut and he would take them and go out and ask the families – the mothers – if they would sew the pants together and the vests together and they would ship them back to Boston to be sold.

BB: Going back to the saw mill. That was owned by Alonzo Fowler – and who was Alonzo Fowler?

BF: He was my grandfather.

BB: When you moved in to Freedom, on a permanent basis, having retired from your work, that was in 1975, can you tell me what the town population was at that time.?

BF: I understand it was around 250 people. Along with that, when I was auditor, in 1976.7.8, 80% of the taxes were paid by non-residents.

BB: When the population was about 250 people in 1975, do you have any idea what the tax rate was?

BF: The house that I am living in was assessed for \$1700.

BB: And what taxes did you pay?

BF: My taxes were around \$43 or \$44.

BB: Can you tell us anything about what the pond looked like when you first came here?

BF: Well as I remember it, the Kidders owned a bathhouse and the Blacks owned a boathouse. And then about 5 or 6 lots down, there was another old house...I can't remember the name, right now...And from there to the end of the lake, it was just forest. The little pond which we call Round Pond, was full of snakes, trees, old trees, which I thought would stay that way forever. What opened up the road was when they put the bypass in. The Swayzee Corporation owned a big sand pit. They dredged that out to make the road. So they came in and out and when they were through they never closed it up again. They put a trench across the road into the main lake and drained it. And during the time I was President of the Freedom Club, Sam Martin was Treasurer, we went to Mr. Friedman, who owned Camp Robin Hood. And asked him if he could give us some sand...The beach was terrible and what we had him do was dump 40 or 50 loads out on the ice during the winter and when the ice went out, it settled down to make the bed for the beach. That was in 1966.

BB: Bob, I thank you very much for contributing to our tape, for letting us get this recording of your knowledge of what went on and I greatly appreciate being served a lovely fresh blueberry muffin and coffee that Bob's daughter made and now we are going to play the tape back to see how it sounds.