

Betty Richards: Now, can you tell me about William Cleverly?

Howard Atwood: My great-great grandfather. Well, that's the one that was in the War of 1812 and went to prison there. You want to make a separate story out of that or add it on here?

BR: Yes. You can go ahead. Tell me all about – tell me all about when he had the store, your great-great grandfather.

HA: Is that thing going?

BR: Yes.

HA: Do you want it added on there?

BR: Yeah, sure.

HA: During the War of 1812, the British Navy come in and surrounded the Cape and shut off – supposedly – all connections of getting on and off the Cape. Because at that time, you take a stagecoach – go from Boston to Provincetown – used to take two days. There was no road where you could have teams or anything come through. Everything, all the supplies that come in from Boston and New York, come in by packet, which were small sailboats. The only way that they could get by here during the War of 1812 was to sneak through the lines at night in the dark and go into Boston and get a load – or New York – and then come and sneak back in again. My great-grandfather Cleverly was on a packet that was captured, and he spent two years in [Dartmoor] Prison in London as a prisoner of war. But of course, when he come back, he and his store up there [inaudible], which, at that time, was the center of the town. Of course, since the roads and railroads and all that [inaudible]. It moved down to where it is now. One of the things was – that is all, as my grandmother told us – my brother and I – the story about him. I was telling that story up one day in front of the paper store. In those days, you had to go get your paper [inaudible]. But gee, this fellow [inaudible] to ice the refrigerator cars. Gee, this fellow's [inaudible] says, "Yes, I remember him." It was Jim (Peirce?), who used to live next to the Methodist Church. After he passed away, the church bought the house, tore it down, and made a parking lot out back. He said, "Yes." In other words, you go in off of Gull Pond Road – there's a road that leaves off the left. He lived in that second house in that lane as a boy. He said he remembered him. He used to come out on the platform in front of the store like that. I don't know if there's any more than that.

BR: Could you give me the names of your grandfather and grandmother on your mother's side of the family?

HA: I don't remember what my grandfather's name was. My grandmother's was Phoebe L. Snow. See, that is her married name: Phoebe L. Snow. What the heck was his? Yeah. That going?

BR: Yes.

HA: My grandfather – I don't remember what his first name is. I'd have to do quite a lot of digging to find out or go up to the cemetery and look. But he went to sea like the majority of them did. He used to sail on the [inaudible] boats going down to the South to get bananas. He was a cook on one of their boats, going down and bringing bananas up. This time, the last trip he made, he went down and got the fever. Coming up, he was pretty sick, so the boat went into Newport News and put him ashore into a hospital. But he died there and was buried in Newport News. Of course, I never saw him. That was all before I was born. But my grandmother – mainly, what she did – my uncle Joe, the son, I think, was in the place where he had a home. She always went and kept house for him. But I don't remember him ever having a regular job anywhere or anything like that. But my grandfather – of course, on the banana ships, which later become the United Fruit Company – now, what the heck was next?

BR: Give me your father's name.

HA: Well, my dad was John Kemp Atwood.

BR: Where was he born?

HA: He was born here in Wellfleet in the lighthouse.

BR: In the lighthouse.

HA: In the lighthouse, the original lighthouse. It was on Mayo's Beach Road.

BR: What year was he born?

HA: Oh, gosh. I don't know.

BR: What was your mother's name?

HA: He was born around 1862 or three. My mother's name was Kate May Snow. She was born up in the old Wharf Road in South Wellfleet. My mother was younger than my dad. Not too much younger. But all during my knowledge of life, she was sickly in this way – she had these migraine headaches. Gee, she'd have a spell of them and [inaudible] oh, God, she'd have to go to bed a week or two at a time. I know of four or five times that she even went to hospital and was operated on, trying to cut them out. But they never, never could. When my young brother and I come home from the first war, both my dad and my mother were very unhappy. They didn't feel very good. My older brother's wife had passed away, and they were bringing up his two children, a boy and a girl. Underneath it all, you could see that they wanted to come home to Wellfleet. So, the uncle that my dad was named after – John Kemp – died and left little money, and that money and what little my younger brother and I chipped in, too, be bought out Al Davis's meat market here in Wellfleet and they moved home. He run the meat market for a number of years until it got so that you could go to the First National Store and buy a pound of sugar cheaper than what he could have delivered to the door from the wholesale grocers in Hyannis. So then he closed up. It was only a short while afterward that my mother passed away.

BR: Your parents lived in Boston during most of their married life.

HA: Yes. They were in Boston when I was gone. The trouble of it is I should have been born in Wellfleet. That's what they had planned on. But I came about two weeks too early. My dad was at sea when I was born. When he come ashore, of course, then he had to wait until my mother could travel and took the two of us down home. We stayed in Wellfleet until I was four years old. And then business was so damn poor in town that the young couples were moving out of town to get so they could make a living. A lot of them went to Brockton, went to work in the shoe factories. And some of them went to Plymouth in the cottage works, and others went to the city. My dad moved to the city. So, that's where we stayed until after the First [World] War when my father and mother come home.

BR: Well, tell me about your experiences in Wellfleet as a young boy, when you did visit here, about delivering milk?

HA: Well, of course, I saw that while I was here summers. One of the – is that thing going?

BR: Yes.

HA: One of the things that really interested me was at Freeman Farm – well, Taylor Farm, as they called it, but was run by Freeman. I've forgotten what his first name was. He was a great uncle of something of mine. He was a brother to my grandmother, my mother's mother. He run a farm there where it was milk, and he used to deliver milk around town. Of course, in those days, they didn't have milk bottles – used milk bottles – at all. He'd come around in a horse and – well, not a carriage, but a very light wagon. It was a step on back of it. They'd go around to their customers from house to house. On the left hand, they'd have a metal quart measure. They would rap on the door because I remember when they used to come to my grandmother's. I used to be so fascinated in the beginning. She'd say, "Well, I'll take a pint of milk," and they'd pour a pint from a gallon can they'd have into their measure when they got the pint. Then, my grandmother would hold out a pitcher, and they'd pour it into the pitcher, and she'd pay them for it. That's how all the milk in the town was delivered that way. There was no milk bottles or anything in those days.

BR: Tell me about helping your uncle with his asparagus garden. Helping your uncle wee the garden – asparagus gardens.

HA: You mean up to Eastham? Well, the only thing is I had another Uncle Joe, which was a brother to my mother. He lived up in Eastham. He [inaudible] quite a few years there. He used to run an asparagus farm on Bridge Road for Chester (Hardin?). We used to go up once in a while and visit to see him by train. When we got a little older, when it come time to weed the asparagus in the summertime, he'd send a postcard down to Wellfleet. On the noon train, on the afternoon train, they'd take us three kids and send us up to Eastham, and we'd stay up there, where we helped him weed about sixteen acres of asparagus. My young brother and I went ahead and pulled up by hand the tall weeds that we could get our hands on. My older brother and uncle would come along with the hoe and got the low stuff and in between the stalks. We'd do that two, three times during the summer. I remember the day that the President come down to

Provincetown and dedicated the Provincetown monument. Boy, what a thrill that was – what a day that was going to be. So, we wanted the day off. [inaudible] We had to work. But he did have a patch of asparagus between the house and the railroad track. The railroad track was directly in front. So, we did (condescend?) to weed that patch that day. My young brother and I, we'd work like the [inaudible], get ahead of him, then stand there watching. Well, the trains – special trains – would go down to Provincetown, unload, back – way back – and sidetrack here and there. A lot of train was loose and [inaudible]. But gee, was my young brother and I thrilled. At about that time, my uncle and my older brother catch up with us and whacked us over the rear end with a hoe. Then we'd have to hustle to beat them [inaudible] to get ahead of them again. But that was a sure thrill that day to see all those special trains whistling, brakemen yelling. It was very thrilling. Is there anything else?

BR: We were going to talk about the salt hay.

HA: Oh, yeah. Also, when he put in his salt hay, we'd go up and help him. He'd rake it up with a horse and rake. Then, we'd go up in the wagon, load it up, bring it in, and put it up in the loft. Well, we'd help to stow it away in the back end so he could get a good loft full of salt hay. Of course, you couldn't feed the cows salt hay because the salt would come out in the milk. But he fed the salt hay to his horse. He bedded the horse down and bedded the cow down in salt hay.

BR: Where does [inaudible]?

HA: Oh, gosh, there's a marsh between – on the Bridge Road out towards Orleans, way off to the right there. Gosh, it was acres and acres of marshland; that's where they would go. The horse out there – they had racks made that they used to strap on his feet so that the horse, if they struck a soft spot in the marsh, he'd sink. But this would keep him up. Once in a while, they'd hit a soft spot, and before they got the shoe things on, they'd have a heck of a job to get him out. [inaudible] I've seen them where they'd [inaudible] choke a horse so he'd bloat up, and then they would roll him out onto solid ground. Of course, if a horse had fallen in [inaudible] well, then they took him home and let him rest until the next day. But it was quite a chore to get the salt hay. They didn't allow us kids to go out there working because of just that one thing – we couldn't tell the difference where to look or anything. The only thing we would do is when my uncle would rake the hay all up in [inaudible], and then we'd go up and get it and cart it down and store it away in the loft or the barn.

BR: What kept your uncle from sinking into the marsh?

HA: Well, he would watch it, where he would step. He was very careful. His main job was the horse. He'd see that he'd come out alright.

BR: When he choked this horse, did he live afterward?

HA: Oh, yes. He blowed up. As soon as they could roll him out, then they'd take that off. Then, the horse would start getting his breath again.

BR: Put a thing around his neck and choked him?

HA: Yeah, and choke him.

BR: That was cruel, though, wasn't it?

HA: Well, in one sense of the word, it was, but the other sense is either that or he'd drown; he'd go down lower. That's what they tried to do to hold him before he'd get down too far. I've seen them take a heck of a job to get them horses out.

BR: What does salt hay look like?

HA: Just like regular hay. Regular hay. It looked just the same. I couldn't tell the difference, but of course, they could because it tastes [of] salt if you tasted it.

BR: Do they use that anymore?

HA: No. I don't think that they ever use it now. Never hear of it. But in those days, it was pretty hard to get real hay. Of course, you had to dig your own and all that stuff.

BR: You mentioned something about the steam trains starting fires in the woods.

HA: Oh, yeah. That happens regular.

BR: Tell me about that.

HA: Of course, in the trains that'd come down by, they were regular – we had the firebox and the fire, and the smokestack was pumping. You take, especially in the summertime – the noon train would go down through. Many a time, it'd set a fire to the woods. That's one reason you take – in between Route 6 or the railroad track and the backshore, there were very few houses except around Gull Pond there was, at one time, quite a gathering of houses and stuff. But when the steam trains come, it gradually set fires, and the wind get ahold of it, and I've seen it start way down and through and come right up through between the railroad track and the [inaudible] – not covering it all, but coming up through. From way up into Wellfleet, the wind shift, and it turned around and go back again. If there was any summer cottages in the woods, they would have gone. But of course, eventually, now, they don't have that problem. But years ago, that was a big problem, and they set plenty of fires. From Truro to Wellfleet, there's been many a real forest fire. People lived there in them houses [inaudible] were.

BR: How many houses were on Billingsgate [Island]?

HR: Twenty-two and, of course, a lighthouse. I could remember as a kid seeing the keeper down there coming up – whether he had a [inaudible] boat. He'd come up, and he'd bring the kids up to go to school here. Pick him up at night and bring them back again. That was after the houses and other families were off the island. It was gradually disappearing. Of course, it's gone altogether, that is, now. Now, the fellow that relieved my grandmother at Mayo's Beach Light was a fellow by the name of Smith. His daughter was married to Clarence Nelson of

Provincetown and Nelson Market here – used to be. He showed me one time the slip that he'd received [inaudible]. He was to relieve my grandmother. I think it was in the fall of 1891. I had the corresponding one, which showed that he was to relieve my grandmother from her [inaudible]. He relieved her and stayed about eight months at Mayo's Beach Light, and then he was transferred to Billingsgate Island Light. Well, of course, at that time, there was nobody living down there but the lighthouse [keeper]. They did have some children down there – small. They used to bring them up in the boat to school and take them back in the afternoon. But it didn't last too many years because, as I say, the island was gradually disappearing and finally went. But when there were twenty-two houses, fishermen lived down there, families and all. It was quite an island, evidently. Of course, that was before my time.

BR: Tell me about your experience in World War I.

HA: Well, in World War I, I had a draft just the same as they did the second other war. You had to register for the draft. You had to register [on] June the fifth, 1917. I was twenty-one June the fourth, the day before. The youngest that they registered was twenty-one. So, I was just taking a [inaudible]. Anyway, I was working out there. So finally, I couldn't enlist out there because they knew me, knew my feet. So, I come to Boston and enlisted in Scollay Square. I went out to see my folks that night up to South Medford, where they lived. The next morning, I come in, and the next day, I went down to Fort Slocum and was given my physical examination, and they saw my toes. Well, they wanted to throw me out. So, I give them a hard luck story. And finally, they said, "Well, we'll keep you in the (quarters mess?)." So, that was okay with me as long as I was in something. So, I was signed up to go to Florida for training. There was a company in [inaudible] ready to go overseas. It was a special company, and it consisted of ice machinery men from York, Pennsylvania, and packing house men from Chicago, Omaha, and the West. The company was all made up and ready to go overseas, but they had forty Austrians in there. They decided they didn't want to go over there and fight against their own. So, they yanked them out and sent over to Fort Slocum for forty men to replace them. Of course, Atwood, I was the head end of the list – I went. I was one of the forty. A month from the day I was sworn in – I was two days out of [inaudible]. I'd been fully inoculated, fully equipped, fully trained, and it took us thirteen days to go across to [inaudible]. So, you can see how much I gained. But what the idea was – they went over to build a refrigerating plant. Before World War I, France didn't know what refrigeration was. There was no refrigeration. Their meat markets were all with the iron grating across the front of them to keep the meat cool. You couldn't bring an American army over there, for gosh sakes, with no meat. So, we went over there. They had sent over some American refrigerator cars, which they anticipated that they would have to ice to deliver the frozen meat up to the railheads and into Whitley. But when we got over there, we found out – got some meat – that we could ship up to the railheads or into Italy frozen beef, and it wouldn't thaw out until after it was delivered if we sent a convoy with them. So, they decided that – of course, they didn't have to ice the cars. Then, we had a capacity of turning out five hundred ton of ice every twenty-four hours. What was planned was they was going to put up ten base hospitals, and we would supply the base hospitals with ice. Then they found out that you'd need the ice to ice the refrigerator cars. So, they sent over ten small ice-making plants and attached them to each one of the base hospitals. The men went around, put them up, and then [inaudible] each place they stayed there and operated all during the war. We only had three hundred men and thirteen offices. If we had forty or fifty men in the headquarters at one time, it was out of the

ordinary. There were twenty-five, thirty-five men in at any one time because a lot of our fellows had to convoy those beef cars. You'd go up and put a towel [and] a piece of soap in one pocket, and a razor in a towel in the other pocket. You had a side arm, a .44 revolver, and no money. You'd go out, and you were on your own. You had to buy, beg, borrow, or steal something to eat along the way. But you rode the freight trains. You got into a boxcar if there was a boxcar. Every time it stopped, you hopped out and see that nobody broke into the beef car or (sidetracked?) them. That's what their favorite trick was. Seems, though, that the French station masters did that on purpose. They'd stop a train, and they'd say there was two or three cars of beef on there. They'd stop, set them on the side track, the back, hook up the rest of the train. The train would go along and leave those three cars on the side track. That's where the convoy that was with them – he would go then and get a telephone somewhere and telephone headquarters that they had sidetracked those three cars. The next train comes through, would pick them cars up and take them along. If we didn't do that, they would have laid there until they thawed out. Of the [inaudible] ton of ice we could have made, we never made a [inaudible] ice. Not even for ourselves. We used to make ice cream a lot in there. It was quite a big undertaking. The beef storage was 1250-foot long and 250-foot wide. Of course, each side, there was a hallway down through from the freezer unit to the outdoors. You went through two doors, you went from [inaudible] to fifteen below zero where you used to keep the beef. It was divided into five rooms. We could store about twelve-thirteen million pounds of beef in the quarters in there. We had a second lieutenant. His name was Hormel from the Hormel packing company – spam. Boy, what a slave-driver that guy was. He was a millionaire in his own name. He had twenty uniforms, twenty pair of shoes, twenty pair of [inaudible] overseas with him. But he would drive the devil out of us. There was heavy construction. [RECORDING PAUSED] Get any of that?

BR: Yes.

HA: Heavy construction, concrete. Now, for those engine bases in the engine room, we had to put in five blocks of cement, twenty-foot wide, twenty-foot long, and twenty-foot high. You (wheeled?) concrete by hand and filled five twenty-foot square blocks of solid concrete. Boy, that was a job and a half, believe me. They'd call down to Hormel, trying to get us to [inaudible] on the plank from the machine mixer over to where we used to dump it, down in the – what do you call it? Making the square [inaudible]. Some of the fellows were very unhappy with it, so they decided they better transfer him away from us, which they did.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/18/2024