

Tales of Cape Cod
Dorothy Fawcett Oral History
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Interviewer: FR – Frank Rudd
Transcriber: NCC

Frank Rudd: This tape is a property of Tales of Cape Cod, Inc. and cannot be reproduced without their written permission. Today is May 8th, 1978. We are in the home of Ms. Dorothy Fawcett of 175 3rd Avenue in West Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Ms. Fawcett was born on November 5th, 1898, making her eighty years of age. Ms. Fawcett, I understand that you were not born in the Cape?

Dorothy Fawcett: I was born in (Jamaica Plain?).

FR: Why did your parents come to the Cape?

DF: Well, probably because my grandfather had bought this tract of land (in the hills?), and they had an office on Park Street in Boston.

FR: How big a lot of land was it?

DF: About a hundred acres, and then they subdivided it into seven avenues and then cross streets. The lots were mostly forty by one hundred.

FR: Forty feet by a hundred feet?

DF: Some houses were built on those. But in 1904, the (fridge had a bad fire?). It was used as a normal part of the house. The houses were so close that in twenty minutes, the houses went like matches.

FR: All the houses burnt down?

DF: Not all, but six or eight houses.

FR: Why did your father move to the Cape?

DF: Well, business, work, (everything, library?).

FR: What did he do? Did he build a house here?

DF: No, this house was already built, the shell of it. It was just a (new?) summer – three-room summer cottage.

FR: You moved in here?

DF: (We did?).

FR: What year did your father come to the Cape?

DF: I'm not sure what year.

FR: Around 1895, in that area?

DF: Probably, yeah, yeah.

FR: What did he do for a living?

DF: Painting. Painting and decorating.

FR: On the Cape?

DF: On the Cape, most of his life.

FR: Where did your mother come from originally?

DF: London, England.

FR: Your father originally?

DF: From [inaudible], England.

FR: Both from England?

DF: They met over here.

FR: What did your mother do?

DF: She was only eighteen when she was married, but she was – I don't think she worked.

FR: How many children in your family?

DF: Three. There were three. There's only two of us now.

FR: What was your father's livelihood?

DF: Painting and decorating.

FR: Did he do anything else?

DF: No. Postmaster from 1914 to 1940. Then after that, I took over as postmaster in 1968.

FR: At what post office?

DF: West Hyannis Port. It started out as Seaside Park, but some people objected to the name without sounding like an amusement place.

FR: What was Seaside Park?

DF: Well, this was Seaside Park, this development.

FR: This area that your grandfather originally bought?

DF: Bought, yes. They called it Seaside Park. This was the water down below. It was mostly a beach area. Then they objected, kind of thought it might sound like it. It was Seaside Park, New Jersey, and Seaside Park somewhere else. They got it all mixed up. So, then they came up with changing the name. They tried it first, and they wouldn't do it. But Mr. Hughes said, "Well, the democrats did it." Sure enough, [laughter] the democrats – then they applied it again, changed it to West Hyannis Port, the original post office –

FR: I see.

DF: – in (1914, 1916?).

FR: Do you recall what pay your father got his postmaster here?

DF: Well, it was based on the sales stamps.

FR: Tell me about that.

DF: Well, you've got a certain percent of so many stamps and so many thousand stamps and then the next thousand or something like that. (I don't know just how it worked?).

FR: Do you know what he made for a week's pay?

DF: No, I don't.

FR: Can you give me a little history of the post office and how it progressed over the years?

DF: I guess, almost all the time, it was based on the sales stamps. It wasn't a salary. It was a commission.

FR: Was it open year-round?

DF: The summer office, at first, for many years, from June 1st to September 30th.

FR: Then the population grew?

DF: Then as the population grew, (it came to an end?).

FR: What class office was it and what is it now?

DF: Both. Both now. It's second.

FR: Now it is second. Well, what kind of pay would a postmaster make at a second-class post

office now?

DF: I really don't know.

FR: Do you recall what your pay was when you left in 1968?

DF: No.

FR: Tell me, Ms. Fawcett, could you give me some idea of a typical day in the early 1900s from the time you get up and so forth? What would you have for breakfast?

DF: Well, we had fruit. (We put?) cereal always. None of these prepared things, oatmeal, and cream of wheat and so forth. Then we'd have eggs, toast, coffee.

FR: Very hearty breakfast?

DF: Well, not too much.

FR: Would you have any chores in the morning?

DF: No.

FR: Then you would go to school?

DF: I went to school.

FR: How would you get to school?

DF: We were transported by barge, what we called a school barge.

FR: What was that like?

DF: Well, a horse-drawn vehicle. We always called it the barge. I suppose it was an (article name?) because we were in that beach area.

FR: How many people were in the barge?

DF: Probably [inaudible].

FR: Could you describe it to me? Was it covered?

DF: Oh, it was almost like this school bus. But now, it was horse-drawn because we didn't have windows. We had curtains on the side.

FR: How many horses?

DF: Two horses.

FR: How long would it take you to drive to school?

DF: Maybe half an hour with all the stops. We started around 8:00. We were home around half past 4:00.

FR: Where did you have your lunch?

DF: [inaudible]

FR: After you get home from school, what did you do?

DF: It was almost time for suppertime. We ate early. We ate around 5:00. Then we had homework quite a lot in the later years, homework, and that's it. Later on –

FR: What would you have for dinner at night?

DF: Well, meat, vegetables, and maybe a course dinner at night because we were out all day on sandwiches.

FR: Where did you go to high school?

DF: (Barnstable High?).

FR: How did you get there?

DF: We walked. We walked because there's no transportation when we went to high school.

FR: How far was it?

DF: Well, a good three miles each way. There was no transportation when we went to high school and Normal School because they had a bicycle. I used a bicycle when I went to high school most of the time.

FR: What would you do in inclement weather?

DF: We walked. (Obviously?), I couldn't ride very often because of bad (rain?). But we didn't miss much.

FR: What did you do after high school?

DF: Normal School. Three years in Normal School.

FR: What did you major in?

DF: No major. Just the [inaudible] courses that we were offered. It was the general course that everybody gets.

FR: What did it prepare you for?

DF: Teaching. Teaching.

FR: Did you teach after Normal School?

DF: I just taught for two years in South Dennis. Then we got (sickness?) at home. My mother and sister were there, so I didn't go after teaching.

FR: What did you do after that?

DF: Then I worked in the post office in summers to move there.

FR: Did you work in the winter?

DF: No.

FR: How long before you became a permanent employee at the post office?

DF: 1940.

FR: When did you retire?

DF: Sixty-eight. Over twenty-eight years.

FR: As postmistress of this post office, did you meet very many famous people?

DF: Well, not too many, but there were a lot of Carnegies.

FR: What Carnegie was that?

DF: Andrew Carnegie.

FR: Where did he live?

DF: I mean, here, in the brick house. I don't think it was a brick then. In the house, in Green Dunes area. It's not removed.

FR: On the waterfront?

DF: On the waterfront.

FR: Tell me about him. What kind of an individual was he?

DF: Oh, very friendly, the whole family because the help came mostly [inaudible]. I didn't see the real family much.

FR: Did you have an opportunity to talk with them?

DF: Not too much because most of the help came.

FR: Who else lived in the area, (summer?) residents?

DF: Elliot Roosevelt.

FR: Where did Elliot Roosevelt stay?

DF: I don't know exactly. Down in the Green Dunes area.

FR: Did you have the opportunity to meet him?

DF: No.

FR: What was your grammar school like? What was the school physically like?

DF: Well, it was quite new. It had only been built a few years. It was very modern for those days. [inaudible] connectivity, Normal School. There [were] three brick buildings over there in Hyannis.

FR: Well, that was about 1904.

DF: Yes. I didn't go to school until I was seven.

FR: Oh, I see.

DF: Not until I was seven.

FR: How many students in the school?

DF: I don't know how many, but there were five in each room.

FR: How many rooms were there?

DF: Three downstairs. There were double grades in some of them.

FR: Six rooms in the school?

DF: Yes.

FR: How many teachers did you have?

DF: There were six, except for the special teachers who used to come in. There was a music supervisor that came in [inaudible]. It was mostly very good teacher that time.

FR: How many grades in the school?

DF: Nine. There were nine grades (in it?).

FR: How many grades in high school?

DF: Four.

FR: So, thirteen grades in total?

DF: No. [inaudible].

FR: What did you do on weekends when you were a youngster?

DF: You know, there wasn't much excitement to do. There were very few – I think we were the first ones to stay here year-round. There was practically nobody in the winter, except a few on the (main road?). [inaudible]. She was younger than I was, but that [inaudible] was. She was [inaudible]. He was a boy in a girl's room. [inaudible] to the post office.

FR: What kind of games did you play?

DF: Well, croquet mostly. There was a croquet ground in between these two houses. Mr. Hughes had a bug on croquet. There was always a game going on.

FR: What else did you have? What else did you play?

DF: Well, we used to play ball, sometimes (scrub?). [inaudible] to do.

FR: When you had a [inaudible] close, where would you get them?

DF: By mail, mostly.

FR: From home?

DF: We'd come to Macy's. I don't know if they had [inaudible] in there. I think they were. But mostly Macy's down there. [inaudible].

FR: That was Macy's in New York City?

DF: Yes.

FR: Where would you buy your shoes?

DF: Baxter Shoes Store in Hyannis.

FR: How often would your mother go shopping?

DF: She didn't have to go much because they came to the house. The man came in the morning, took your order, and then brought the groceries after that. That's from (Sunderland?). [inaudible] came for a while and then Sunderland [inaudible].

FR: Did you have any pets?

DF: Oh, yes. We always had a dog and a cat.

FR: What did you have for toys?

DF: Well, mostly dolls, I guess.

FR: Did you have games?

DF: Well, I mean, we had card games and –

FR: What were the card games like?

DF: Well, Risk. We'd play Risk. We'd get four players. Then we played another game we called – it was called Pit, I think. We used to auction things. We'd say (two, two, two?). I don't know how our parents stood it. (How I wish we had that?). If they said I'd (out?) with it, then you'd have to (cough it out?). But if you were all right, you'd say you had two twos or two threes. If you didn't have them, then you lost the score.

FR: You would gamble in one way or the other?

DF: It's sort of gamble. I don't know how my parents ever stood it because they were in the other room, but we were howling the top of our lungs.

FR: Did you have movies?

DF: You mean –

FR: Motion pictures?

DF: In town, you mean? In Hyannis or –

FR: Did you have them? Did you go to them?

DF: Not very often. I'm not going to school without having to walk again to the movies.

FR: So, you do not recall any moving pictures you saw?

DF: No.

FR: In your later years, did you go to dances?

DF: No.

FR: What about parties? Were there many parties around?

DF: Well, in the summer, we used to have parties. When the people were down, we would beach party and (long parties?) and stuff like that.

FR: As much as you did not have any stores, the nearest store was Hyannis, three miles away. Did you have traveling people, salesmen, or merchants come through the village?

DF: The merchants came from the village mostly in the summer.

FR: Tell me about them.

DF: We had the meat man, Harlow. I don't know what his first name was, but it was Harlow's Meats.

FR: Mr. Harlow. How did he sell them?

DF: Well, he'd cut it right on the head of the wagon. He'd cut whatever we wanted.

FR: Was the wagon refrigerated?

DF: I suppose that must have had ice. I don't know. Then we had the fish man used to come through. You could buy fish from him.

FR: Was that fresh fish?

DF: Oh, yes, (always?).

FR: Do you recall what it cost?

DF: I have no idea.

FR: Did you have any other salesmen?

DF: Oh, the grocery used to come in the morning.

FR: Grocery man?

DF: He'd take your order.

FR: He would take an order in the morning?

DF: Come back in the afternoon and bring you groceries.

FR: How did he deliver that?

DF: The horse and wagon.

FR: Tell me, how did you celebrate the holidays?

DF: Well, Christmas, just our own family, mostly. We had a Christmas tree and decorated it. Candies tied up with white ribbons and bows and candy canes and a few ornaments that we acquired over the years.

FR: Would you exchange presents?

DF: Yes, we all had presents.

FR: Family or did you have neighbors, too?

DF: Well, both, family, and neighbors, too.

FR: What did you have for Christmas dinner?

DF: Well, we usually had chicken because we had our own chickens. We had a nice big (ground?) of chickens. I remember in school, I used to kind of telling white lies there'd be a turkey because everybody else did. But we had our own chickens [laughter]. A little big ground, a little big as the turkey almost.

FR: Did you have a garden, too?

DF: Oh, yes. We (factorized?) everything, except sugar and flour, all our own vegetables.

FR: How would you store the vegetables?

DF: Well, the (sun was cold?). We had no heat, except stoves upstairs. But they stayed all right.

FR: They stayed through the winter?

DF: Oh, yes.

FR: What other holidays did you celebrate?

DF: Well, Thanksgiving and Christmas were almost the same, except the biggest [inaudible].

FR: They were family days?

DF: Well, we were down here, and everybody else was up in Boston. Once we all went up to my grandmother's, but it was quite a chore to take the whole family up. Went up on the train and came back.

FR: Where did you get the train?

DF: Hyannis. I think around 1922. We used that one, plus the lamps. When we got electricity, we thought we were millionaires. We could have everything [inaudible]. I guess radios involved them. So, we used to have everything after that. Plumbing.

FR: When did you get into plumbing? When did you get into plumbing?

DF: Somewhere around after the electricity. We used to have the water and (everything?).

FR: Do you recall the advent of the telephone?

DF: Yes. We had the –

FR: Do you remember what year that was?

DF: I don't know. But we had an (AG?) guy up in Hyannis. He was a druggist, but he owned the telephone company. He supplied all of us telephones [inaudible] came in. We had a phone, one of these that you had on the wall, and we cranked it up. It was in the living room, wherever you were.

FR: How many parties were on the line?

DF: Six or eight. We even had one from the hospital. My mother was always getting the kick out of it. This is (OD Level?). We never met her, but she was always on the phone when we wanted to use it. It was OD Level. Dad said that the poles weren't as big as they are now. They were, you know, up high enough, so [inaudible]. But they had to put five or six poles down here. Dad said that Mr. Guy used to wait until some of the truck drivers came along. Somebody said, "Come on boys, come on boys, give us a hand and get the pole up." I don't know if the pole was dug or what, but dad always pulled out Mr. Guy.

FR: How far would the phones carry the messages?

DF: Well, I guess you could call out because we finally had to give it up because they were coming in and charging the calls, and we were paying for them. So, they wouldn't know how much the call was at that time until they got the bill.

FR: Was that the post office?

DF: No. Here, at home. Dad said he wasn't about to pay the telephone bill because [inaudible] use the telephone. That would be a nuisance. So, then we gave it up for a while. We had no phone.

FR: What happened with the local phone company?

DF: Well, when the other one came in, I guess it just froze it up. I don't –

FR: Was that New England Telephone?

DF: New England Telephone [inaudible]. But he must have gone to (Oxfordville?) because the OD Level was up in Oxfordville and then Hyannis and Sunderland, all that area.

FR: If you get ill, how would you receive medical care?

DF: We had a local phone and we could get the doctor any time. They'd always come, all the doctors, when (they were?) on call.

FR: How would he get there?

DF: Well, (horse-and-buggy?) in the early days and then cows when they were available.

FR: How long would it take him with a (horse-and-buggy?)?

DF: Well, not too long. Maybe about half an hour or more.

FR: How did you get medicine?

DF: We get it from him. He would supply the medicine.

FR: Did he have office hours?

DF: Oh, yes. They'd have office hours in the afternoon and evening. But they were out on calls in the morning.

FR: Did they work a long day?

DF: Yes. Dr. Kinney used to be out early in the morning. All of them had office hours early in the morning, then he was gone all day and then office hours at night.

FR: That would be seven days a week?

DF: I don't know about Sunday. But those days they were available, we could always get a doctor. There was no problem at all.

FR: If you had a dental problem, what would you go?

DF: Hyannis. [inaudible] dentist.

FR: You have to walk there?

DF: Oh, yes. So, we had a cow.

FR: That was three miles.

DF: Yes.

FR: You mentioned to me that you had seen a fire. You told me how it was fought by the firemen. Can you tell that to us?

DF: Well, we were on our way to post office. We used to walk across the dike, as we called it, to the shortcut because (that was deep?) in the road. When we got to the Chalmers cottages, there were three of them [inaudible]. One of them was on fire. We went to the nearest neighbor and used their phone to call the fire brigade or whatever they called it. They ran all the way up from Hyannis. They put them in hoses and apparatus that they had. I suppose they hooked up to the farm.

FR: How far away was Hyannis?

DF: Well, two, two and a half miles from there.

FR: How long did it take them to get there?

DF: I don't know. It didn't take long. Twenty minutes, probably.

FR: Did they save the homes?

DF: Well, the others they did.

FR: They were able to save the rest that did not catch fire?

DF: No, no.

FR: Did they bring tanks with them?

DF: I don't remember that. But they had seemed to have – they were running and holding some kind of thing as they came along.

FR: Where did they get the water?

DF: From the ponds, the ponds nearby.

FR: Do you recall prohibition?

DF: Well, I didn't get involved too much, but I do know that –

FR: You did not do any bootleg?

DF: No, I didn't do any bootleg either [laughter]. But it was buried. They wanted to get rid of it, but they were afraid they'd be caught with it. They put it down this little cesspool that had just been built and never been used.

FR: That was in the neighborhood?

DF: Right over here, this next house.

FR: Next door?

DF: Next house. The poor old man was – he didn't want to say no, he let them do it, but he was petrified because he never touched [inaudible]. He promised his mother he'd never take a drink. He never did. So, they got a kick out of him. He was nervous that it was taken out again. I found some buried up in the (boots here?).

FR: Why would they bury it?

DF: To conceal it, so they wouldn't be caught with (it on them?) because they were bootlegging.

FR: Were they selling it?

DF: Apparently.

FR: Do you remember any homes that used to have people in that they would sell a drink to?

DF: No. I don't know.

FR: Do you recall World War I?

DF: Partly. We made mittens and helmets and crocheted helmets. They were hats or (something?), and mufflers. We made [inaudible] wood carved [inaudible].

FR: But do you recall anything your parents did to help the war effort?

DF: Other than buy E bonds.

FR: What were E bonds?

DF: Well, they were paid \$25. Mostly, they were \$25 E bonds.

FR: Were they interest-bearing?

DF: Yes, maturity [inaudible]. I don't know. But we paid less than that, but they were \$25 maturity, I think.

FR: I see. Do you remember the celebration they had? Was there a celebration after the end of World War I?

DF: Well, when the war was over, we headed to school. They gave us the rest of the day off. I went home. But after that, they had a celebration. We [inaudible] prayed and stand up.

FR: Could you give me an idea of what was on Main Street in Hyannis when you were in high school?

DF: On the right-hand side going east – most of the stores were on the right-hand side. There was L.P. Wilson. There was Walter Davis (arriving?). Well, most of the newspapers and magazines. I think there was a flea market next, but I don't know who ran it. Then there was (Liggett's?). Then there was a millinery store in that corner.

FR: Was there a school?

DF: Well, the school was off Main Street. It was an army school. The school was a high school, and then the famous school on (Horsham Street?).

FR: Where was the town hall?

DF: (We have?) now, but a wooden building. [inaudible] building as it is now. It was a library.

FR: Was there a bank?

DF: Yes, we had a bank, Hyannis National Bank. I think it was a national bank.

FR: Did you have a library?

DF: Yes, it was a library where it is now.

FR: Can you think of anything else?

DF: Then the next was O'Neill's.

FR: What was in O'Neill's?

DF: O'Neill's Grocery Store. They catered mostly to summer people [inaudible].

FR: Excuse me, I did not hear that.

DF: It was a (Hallet?) store between there and the Baptist Church.

FR: What kind of a store was that?

DF: A grocery store.

FR: I want to thank you, Ms. Fawcett, for the time and for the very interesting conversation.

DF: Well, I am very happy to do it. I hope I've covered things, got the dates right and so forth.

FR: Thank you again.

[end of transcript]