

Tales of Cape Cod  
Orrin Fuller Oral History  
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Interviewer: MS – Unknown  
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: This tape is a property of Tales of Cape Cod, Incorporated and cannot be reproduced without their written permission. Today's date is July 12th, 1978. We are in the home of Mr. Orrin A. Fuller of 92 Phinneys Lane in Centerville, Massachusetts. Mr. Fuller was born January 6th, 1911. Are you a native of the Cape?

Orrin Fuller: Yes.

MS: When were you born?

OF: January 6th, 1911.

MS: How far back does your ancestry go?

OF: I believe it's been traced back to the Mayflower through Samuel Fuller.

MS: Do you by any chance recall your grandparents, paternal or maternal, or your great-grandparents?

OF: I remember my grandfather only.

MS: What did he do?

OF: He was a carpenter.

MS: Did he live in this area?

OF: Yes, he lived in the same house that I was born in.

MS: Where was that?

OF: Marstons Mills on 49.

MS: What did your parents do for – what did your father do for livelihood?

OF: My father was a farmer, and he drove the school barge with a pair of horses for quite a few years.

MS: Was the school barge owned by him?

OF: Yes. I presumed he had a contract with the town.

MS: What did your mother do?

OF: Just housewife and doing housework for the neighbors.

MS: Do you recall the farm in Marstons Mills?

OF: Oh, yes. Well, I worked on it until I grew up.

MS: What did you grow?

OF: All kinds of vegetables and a lot of hay, a lot of dairies, the animals through the winter.

MS: What animals did you have?

OF: Horses, cows, pigs, and chickens.

MS: Did you sell the vegetables?

OF: Not very much. They were mostly for family use.

MS: How did they store them?

OF: In our Cape Cod basement.

MS: It would last a year?

OF: Oh, yes. It'd last through to the next crop.

MS: You said your mother did what?

OF: Did a lot of canning. Things that wouldn't keep in their natural state, she canned and dried.

MS: How would you refrigerate your milk?

OF: There was a well about twenty feet deep. Because the water was so deep there, they had to dig down that much and then drive the well from there down. So, they used to lower the milk down in a bucket on a pulley. When you wanted, you'd pull up the bucket, they'd pour the milk out.

MS: Can you describe the school barge that your father drew with his team of horses?

OF: As I remember, it carried a seating capacity for about eighteen pupils. If I remember correctly, there was an aisle and two seats on each side. It wasn't glassed in. It was just curtains on the side.

MS: What would he do in the winter?

OF: In the wintertime, if there was a lot of snow, which there was most of the time in those days, he had a [inaudible]. If I remember correctly, he used to put hay in the bottom of it, and the kids all sat in the hay. I remember one time; the snow was so deep on town meeting day that he couldn't get the children to school with the power horses in the farm. Of course, the town

meeting was the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March.

MS: That's rather late to snow.

OF: Yes, but quite wonder, there was snow on the ground from December until middle of later part of March.

MS: Are you saying that the weather was more inclement when you were young than today?

OF: Oh, yes. People on the Cape now don't know what a snowstorm is.

MS: You could also have pets on the farm?

OF: Usually, always had a dog and maybe a couple of cats to keep the rats out of the farm.

MS: What kind of toys did you have?

OF: Well, there wasn't much of a variety.

MS: What would they be like?

OF: [inaudible] either through a four-horse-hitch hitched onto a wagon – I mean, they were made of iron, if I remember correctly, and wooden toys. I had a hat that I won by selling some kind of a product house to house. I forgot what it was I was selling.

MS: How many members were in your immediate family when you were young?

OF: I had one sister and one brother. My sister was 8 or 9 years older than I was. My brother was eight years younger than I.

MS: Tell me, what would a typical day be like in your home in the early 1900s? If you'd happen to have your breakfast, what would your breakfast consist of?

OF: Our breakfast was either hot cereal in the winter and cold in the summer, or bacon and eggs, cold. Of course, I always had a glass of milk. I wasn't allowed to drink coffee while I was a certain age.

MS: Did you have chores to do in the morning before school?

OF: Yes. As soon as I was old enough, I helped my father. When I was old enough, I used to even milk the cows. I can remember one time when my father was sick, when I was 12 years old, I drove a pair of horses on the patten gravel on the highway, and also did all the chores.

MS: What time would you go to school?

OF: I think we used to leave around 8:00 when I was riding with my father – or 7:30 I guess.

Then when the motorized bus came into effect, we'd leave about 8:15.

MS: What was your school like?

OF: It was a two room – up to the fourth grade in one room and up to the ninth in the other room.

MS: Do you remember your teachers?

OF: I can remember my first teacher. Her name was Ms. Murdock. She was the only one we had in that room. In the other room, I remember there was a Ms. Brown, I'm not sure whether we had a man at one time. I'm not sure it –

MS: What was the discipline like?

OF: It was very strict.

MS: Did you ever get a red hand?

OF: Oh, yes. If we did anything wrong, we had a slap across the hand with a ruler. One teacher thought that wasn't quite strong enough. So, she had the school janitor make a cane about [inaudible] an inch thick, made out of hard maple, and that really hurt. But we used to put some rosin on our hand. So, it didn't hurt quite so much [laughter].

MS: I guess they didn't spare the rod.

OF: No, they did not.

MS: What would you do when you'd come home from school?

OF: Well, I was very ambitious. Clean up the barn and get the stable ready for horses when my father came home at night. I wasn't too much for playing.

MS: When did you have your heavy meal?

OF: At night.

MS: What were your weekends like, Saturday and Sunday?

OF: Well, one thing I used – I had a cousin that moved here that was about eight years older than I was. I guess I used to pester him most of the time. Then as I got older, I used to go trapping with him in the winter.

MS: What would you trap for?

OF: Muskrat and skunk.

MS: What would you do with them?

OF: My father would skin them and stretch them. Then we'd sell them for – I remember I got \$2 for the muskrat [inaudible]. Then as I grew older, I had interest in hunting rabbits, which I did for quite a while.

MS: What was Sunday like?

OF: Not much different than the other day. There was always the chores to do. I did go to Sunday school. That was about all. But Saturday night was, go to the movies because my sister used to play the piano in both movie house in [inaudible] and Osterville.

MS: They were silent pictures?

OF: Silent pictures, yes.

MS: Do you remember any of them?

OF: Not the exact names. I remember Tom Mix was very popular at that time. Luke Gibson.

MS: Did you have serials?

OF: Yes. Yes. There used to be Saturday night serials.

MS: What kind of games did you have, or did you play?

OF: I remember we used to play checkers quite a lot. As I got old enough to learn how, we used to play [inaudible] an awful lot.

MS: What was the main street in Barnstable like? Was it Barnstable or Marstons Mills?

OF: Marstons Mills. Well, there was, you can say five or six houses on that road between Marstons Mills and West Barnstable. It was the main road for the mare and passengers from the Cape Cod to West Barnstable. I can just about remember when they resurfaced the entire road for the first time after it was originally built. Of course, all of the other roads around the Marstons Mills and what we call the Plains were all there.

MS: Were there any stores?

OF: There was this general store in the center of Marstons Mills, which is still there now.

MS: What did they handle?

OF: Just staples or whatever anyone needed there – for food and so forth.

MS: Where would you get your clothing?

OF: Well, believe it or not, there used to be a woman that drove around with a horse and wagon and peddled clothes. She used to stop and stay overnight at my house sometimes. By the way, her name was (Mrs. Filstein?) who finally opened up the store in Hyannis.

MS: Do you remember any other street vendors?

OF: Well, as time went on, there was a [inaudible] truck type on that came from Alma, I believe. His name was (Melchman?).

MS: What did he sell?

OF: I think he was more on men's clothes [inaudible].

MS: What if you got sick? Did you have a local doctor?

OF: Oh, yes. There was a doctor in Marstons Mills and one in Osterville. They would –

MS: Do you remember his name?

OF: Yes. One was Dr. Higgins in Marstons Mills. His two sons became doctors after that. Dr. Kenny in Osterville. In fact, I think Dr. Kenny is the one that brought me into the world.

MS: What if you had to go to a hospital?

OF: Well, the only one was Hyannis, and we were all very fortunate no one ever had to do that.

MS: Did you have a local dentist?

OF: I can't remember. I don't think so. There used to be a dentist that came around to the school and inspected teeth. I don't remember whether he pulled teeth or not.

MS: When you were older, did you go to dances at all?

OF: Yes. As soon as I learned to dance, I couldn't stay away from them. In Marstons Mills, there was always a [inaudible]. We played [inaudible] until 10:00 and moved all the tables, swept the floor, and waxed it and then danced until 12:00.

MS: How'd you meet your wife?

OF: Well, that's a very strange way that I happened to. I went to a dance in (San Port?). It was a broom dance.

MS: You were talking about a broom dance.

OF: Yes.

MS: What's a broom dance?

OF: A broom dance is always one extra male, and he sees the girl he wants to dance with. So, he drops the broom by that girl and takes her away from the other partner. That's what I happened to do. I danced with this particular girl from North Falmouth and made a date with her and went out with her a few times. My wife was a very good friend of hers. So, my girlfriend brought my wife down to introduce her to me, and that did it.

MS: How many in your immediate family? Do you have any children?

OF: We did.

MS: You say you had one adopted child?

OF: Yes. We had one boy that we adopted when he was eleven days old. Believe me, I've never been sorry one minute from that day to this.

MS: That's great. What did you do for livelihood, Mr. Fuller?

OF: At first, I started working for my cousin's electrician's helper when I was about fourteen.

MS: Do you remember what you got for pay?

OF: I got more than the average because he always said I worked very hard. If I remember correctly, I got fifty cents an hour. I went to Coyne Electrical School in Chicago and learned as much as I could about the electrical business. I came home, and he had taken on the agency for a refrigerator. So, I went right back to the refrigerator school and did wiring and serviced refrigerators that year. Then another company crept around the agency, and I went to work for him, servicing and installing oil burners until I was married in [19]33. Then I went in for myself and did that until [19]40. Then I went back to work for my cousin as a licensed electrician. In 1944, I went in for myself as electrical contractor and retired from the business in [19]72.

MS: Do you remember the holidays when you were young? What was Christmas like?

OF: Well, when I was a young fellow, it's what they call the community Christmas at the Liberty Hall in Marstons Mills. I remember they had two big Christmas trees and a Santa Claus. I can remember my family taking a clothes basket full of presents to other people and bringing back the same basket full of presents for ourselves.

MS: What would you get for Christmas?

OF: Oh, a few toys, whatever there was, and clothes and goodies – handies and so forth.

MS: Did you have a Christmas tree?



OF: Not at home, if I remember correctly. The community one was all we had.

MS: Do you remember how it was decorated?

OF: It went up with candles because there darn sure was no electricity in Marstons Mills in those days.

MS: What was Thanksgiving like?

OF: That was a big family gathering at home. All the relatives would get together, and the Thanksgiving dinner always was chicken pie.

MS: Is that so? Do you remember the 4th of July?

OF: Yes, quite a bit. As soon as I was old enough, we used to go over to Wianno with a horse and wagon and watch the fireworks that they used to set up on the Wianno pier.

MS: Do you recall any of the other holidays?

OF: I met my wife on Memorial Day.

MS: Is that so?

OF: That was quite a holiday [laughter].

MS: What were the major industries in the area when you were a boy?

OF: I guess the main things were farming, cranberry, and oyster. There was no manufacturing of any kind.

MS: Was there a large building business?

OF: No, very, very small.

MS: How did most of the natives earn a livelihood?

OF: Of course, quite a few of them worked in roughly sections, caretakers and maintenance men and so forth, around Wianno and [inaudible] and places like that. The rest of them were cranberries and farmers and dairies. There were quite a few dairies there.

MS: Do you remember the advent of the automobile?

OF: I remember the first one my uncle had a used Model T. A minister used to come from Lowell, I think it was. He and his wife rent the room at my people's house for a week or so in the summer on a vacation. I remember I was about 8 years old, and he used to let me back the

Model T out of the barn, driving around the yard.

MS: Do you recall electricity being installed?

OF: Yes. It didn't get to Marstons Mills until in the twenties. In fact, I helped work on most of the houses in Marstons Mills and wired my parents' house myself and my cousin. It was a two-family house. My cousin lived on one side and we in the other. He and I wired the house together. The reason they got it down by our house was when the Marstons Mills airport originally started, they were the ones that got the power company to run the lines down there, and it happened real fast to our house.

MS: Did they charge for installation?

OF: No.

MS: Did you have meters?

OF: Yes, we had meters.

MS: Do you recall the advent of the telephone?

OF: No, I think that came before my time.

MS: What about indoor plumbing?

OF: My folks were sort of old fashioned. We never had it at our house.

MS: Tell me a couple of stories that your parents told you. Would you repeat those, please?

OF: Yes. My grandfather fought in the Civil War and was very badly wounded. So much so that the man came along and was going to pick him up and bury him. A friend of his happened to be there from the same village and swore there was a sign of life left. So, he saved the man, and eventually, my grandfather arrived home and had no ill effects from his wounds. Speaking of the Civil War, it was supposed to be a heron run from Hamlins Pond in Marstons Mills on Route 149, all through the woods down past the present town dump, and I believe through the salt water. But it never was finished for some reason. The reason that they dug it was to give the returning veterans some way of making a living. I presume it was a town or a state project. So, it all was dug by hand and with a pair of horses in the Sand School.

MS: Speaking of wars, do you remember World War I?

OF: I just about remember of it. Quite a lot of talk about it. I remember a friend of my father's that was going to make sure that if he got hold of the Kaiser, he was going to hang him up and skin him one inch every day. I do remember the big [inaudible] that they had in the center of Marstons Mills to celebrate the armistice.

MS: Do you recall Prohibition?

OF: Yes, very well.

MS: I understand there was a lot of activity on the Cape.

OF: There was a great deal of activity in the Cape. I can remember one particular place where I was working in a home that had almost just been completed. I had to work in the garage, and I crawled in over hundreds of cases of wet bags that had just been hauled out of the water that were full of whiskey. Working around in different houses, you would always find – especially, around the water, you had the saltwater anywhere. A great many houses you went into to work on an oil burner, you'd find a sack or a half a sack of whiskey in their basement. I can remember one time; I fell this on myself. I went to service an oil burner. I'd been before, so, I knew what was in the basement. So, I just put my tools I needed in my pocket and left my tool kit empty and took it with me. So, it's needless to say what I came out with and stood in the kitchen and talked to the man about his oil burner afraid the cover would break.

[laughter]

MS: These cases of liquor, were there some people dealing in liquor?

OF: Well, the [inaudible], yes, he was a real high-class bootlegger. But the others were just goofing around the water and was lucky enough to – when they were fishing or something – hook onto the sack. Because they used to – the Coast Guard or anyone was chasing these boats, they'd throw it overboard, and somebody else would come along and pick it up. I remember one other story where a fellow that I knew was a hijacker. They were thought very, very little of. This liquor man woke up with his head and his neck on the railroad track in West Barnstable. He came through soon enough to get off the track before the train came along. Then of course, there was the incident in Hyannis in Centerville, where one man was shot, and one man was badly wounded because he got caught trying to hijack liquor out of a garage.

MS: Do you recall the depression?

OF: Very, very much so, yes. In fact, when we came back from our honeymoon, my company I was working for failed up, and I had no job. But I got by, by servicing oil burners and refrigerators on my own.

MS: Was there much poverty on the Cape?

OF: I don't think as much as there was around the cities. Because, well, most times, there was still a lot of people that raised their own things. They didn't expect or need or want all the luxuries that we all do today. As far as the Cape is concerned, I still love it as much as I ever did, being born and brought up here. People used to say, "Well, what do you do in the winter?" There was always plenty to do in the winter depending on what you were interested in. But in the old days, there was ice skating on the ponds most of the winter or sliding. There were more dances, nice dances, dance hall, and nice music that we used to go to. I'm not too enthused about

the Cape growing so fast. It really is growing faster, I think, than it should have. Although, it's nice to have so many people. It gives a lot of people work. There's still very good – well, both salt and freshwater fishing.

MS: Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Fuller.

OF: You're welcome.

[end of transcript]